

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2011

**Lifeline**

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**'Idol' wrap: A good night for all?**



How did the *Idol* judges respond to complaints that their reluctance to criticize contributed to Pia Toscano's early ouster last week? They got even nicer Wednesday. Lauren Alaina was "amazing," Paul McDonald "killed it," Stefano Langone had his "best vocal," and Scotty McCreery was "damn good." Randy Jackson compared Casey Abrams to Charles Mingus, and Jacob Lusk gave Jennifer Lopez chills against her will. Perhaps only James Durbin's cover of Sammy Hagar's *Heavy Metal* (with its cameo from guitarist Zakk Wylde) deserved its accolades. Haley Reinhart got hammered a bit for Blondie's *Call Me*; surely *Idol* viewers can't send home six women in a row. Can they? *Can they?* Find out tonight (8 ET/PT, Fox).

**Penn & Teller returning to TV**

Penn & Teller will be back on TV in a new show that puts the audience in the hot seat. The Las Vegas duo will serve up a new game of "Guess the Lie" in each episode of *Secrets of the Universe*, which will premiere on the Discovery Channel in the fall. Each show in the six-part series includes up to 10 outrageous stories that will include one fabrication, and it will be up to the audience to decide which is a lie.

**Zeta-Jones sought mental treatment**

After helping her husband, Michael Douglas, battle throat cancer, Catherine Zeta-Jones, 41, sought treatment in a mental health facility, said a statement from her representative, Cece Yorke. "After dealing with the stress of the past year, Catherine made the decision to check into a mental health facility for a brief stay to treat her Bipolar II Disorder. She's feeling great and looking forward to starting work this week on her two upcoming films."

**Adele's '21' is back at No. 1**

British soul singer Adele's *21* returns to the top of *Billboard's* album chart this week, selling 88,000 copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan. It's the first 2011 album to reach the 1 million sales mark. Britney Spears' *Femme Fatale* sold 75,000 copies, falling to No. 2 in its second week of release. The only newcomers to the top 10: Hollywood Undead's *American Tragedy* (No. 4, 66,000) and Asking Alexandria's *Reckless & Relentless* (No. 9, 31,000).

By Cindy Clark with staff and wire reports  
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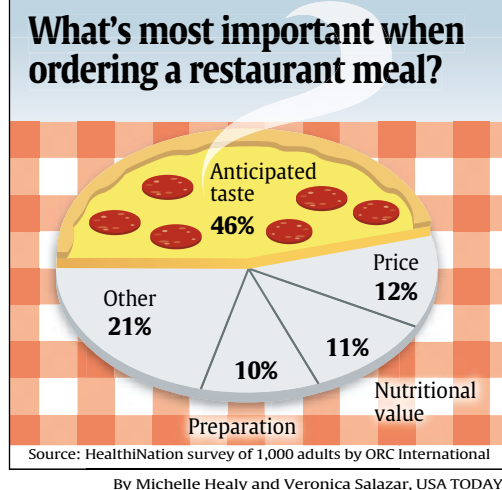
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**CRAVEN SCREAMIN'**  
REMINISCIN', 5D

Neve Campbell in *Scream 4* by Dimension Films



**DIRTY HANDS, HAPPY KIDS**



NATURE IS GOOD FOR THEM, 4D

By Sandy Huffaker Jr. for USA TODAY

**REDFORD AND 'FORGOTTEN' HISTORY**

Was widow Mary Surratt a 'Conspirator' in the Lincoln plot?

**COVER STORY**



By Claudette Barius, The American Film Company  
**On the set:** Director Robert Redford, right, talks with James McAvoy, center, and an unidentified extra.

By Maria Puente  
USA TODAY

One would think, after 150 years and untold books, movies, exhibits and documentaries, that Americans would know everything there is to know about the assassination of President Lincoln.

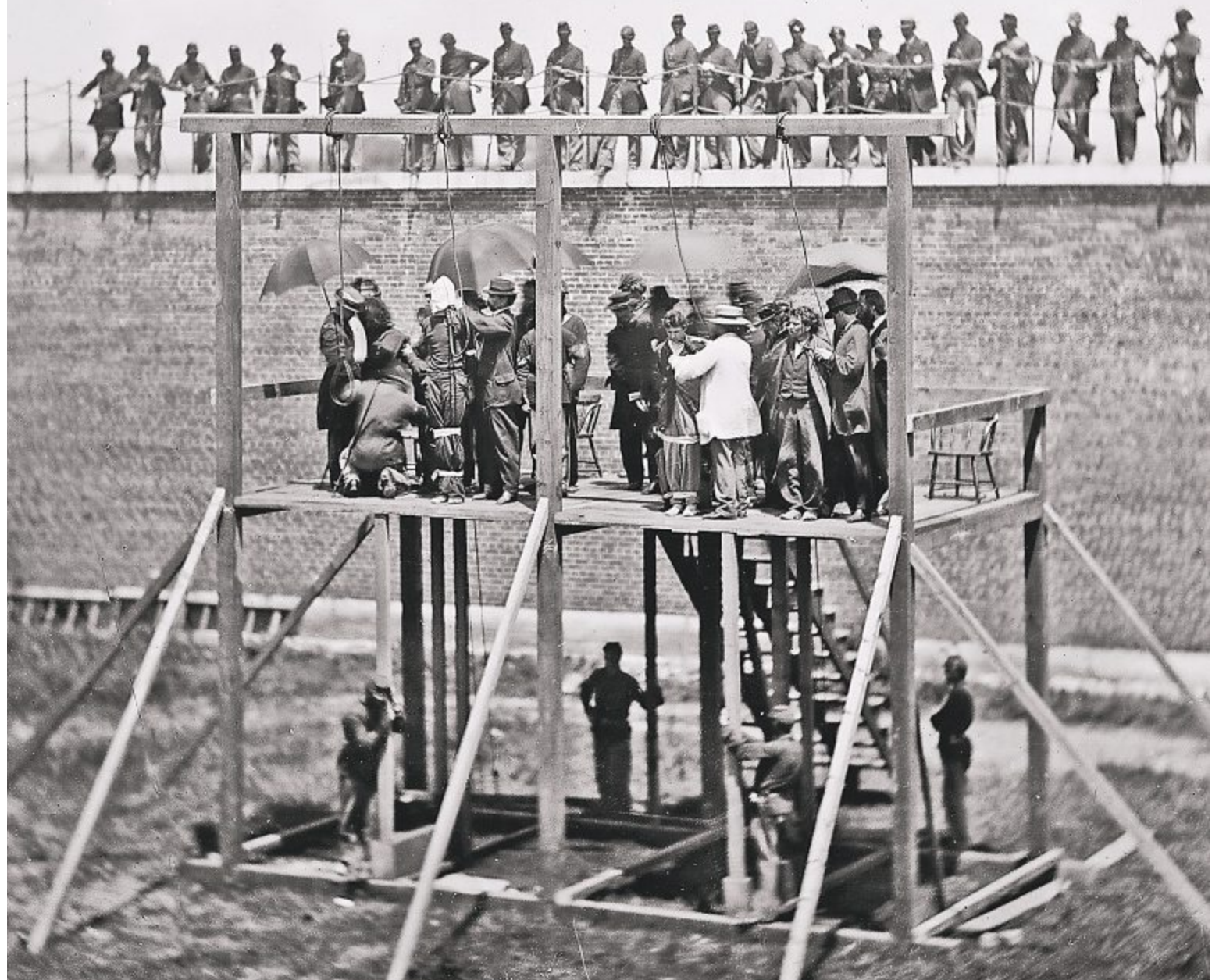
But odds are most don't know the story that director Robert Redford tells in his new film, *The Conspirator*, opening Friday.

The conspirator of the title is not the assassin, actor and Confederate loyalist John Wilkes Booth: The conspirator is Mary Surratt (Robin Wright), the lone woman tried by the military tribunal for the murder and the first woman executed by the United States.

"I'm attracted to the little-known story beneath the story you think you know," says Redford, 74. "What's fascinating is it's a story nobody knows about, that's tied to an event that everyone knows about. But you can boil it down to a story about a mother's love and sacrifice for her son."

*The Conspirator* arrives on the 146th anniversary of the assassination.

Please see COVER STORY next page ▶



By Alexander Gardner, Library of Congress, via AP

**Four nooses:** Condemned conspirators Mary Surratt, Lewis Payne, David Herold and George Atzerodt are prepared for hanging on July 7, 1865.

**'Game of Thrones' fantasy gets 'the HBO spin'**

Series blends love, greed, power, sex

By Bill Keveney  
USA TODAY

*Game of Thrones* is no children's fantasy.

HBO's adult-themed *Thrones* (Sunday, 9 ET/PT), a series based on the work of best-selling author George R.R. Martin, takes viewers into the treacherous, violent seven kingdoms of Westeros, where King Robert Baratheon tries to hold power while facing threats near and far.

The 10 episodes, which mark HBO's first venture into fantasy, follow Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, the first of a seven-book series he's still writing called *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

HBO has "a history of taking genres and redefining them. There's never been a Western before like *Deadwood*. There's never been a gangster film like *The Sopranos* or a cop show like *The Wire*," says Martin, who is a co-executive producer and writer on the project. "I'm pleased they chose my fantasy to put the HBO spin on it."

*Thrones*, which goes light on magic, mixes palace intrigue with personal stories of love, greed, power and sex.

Martin acknowledges the influence of *Lord of the Rings* author J.R.R. Tolkien but says he also likes historical drama. "I wanted (to) take some of the wonder and magic you get from the best fantasy, but also gritty realism you get in good historical fiction," says the author, whose fifth Song book, *A Dance With Dragons*, comes out July 12. (*Thrones* is No. 41 on USA TODAY's Best-Selling Books list.)

*Thrones'* intricate plot plays out on multiple tracks: the king (Mark Addy) trying to protect the Iron Throne; a new alliance posing a potential threat; and a foreboding sense of danger coming from wild lands north of a 700-foot-high ice wall.

Sean Bean, a *Rings* alumnus who plays the king's righthand man, Ned Stark, marvels at Martin's "incredible collection of stories and ideas. It just twists from one place to another. It's very clever how he created this world that's very believable, strangely."

Lena Headey, who plays Robert's queen, Cersei, likes the rough-edged nature of *Thrones*, "the fact that it's the fantasy genre but done with real



By Nick Briggs, HBO

**George R.R. Martin:** Author says he's pleased with 10-episode series.

emotion and real issues, no glam, big, over-the-top acting — sort of like street drama within that epic drama."

Executive producers David Benioff and D.B. Weiss acknowledge the complexity of the stories and the characters' connections, and they hope their

interpretation will appeal both to Martin's zealous following and those who are unfamiliar with his work.

"I think one of the reasons fans become so devoted to these books is because of the complexity," Weiss says. "If you allow yourself to get swept up in this world, you're going to figure it out pretty quickly."

Emilia Clarke, whose character's marriage forges the alliance that could challenge King Robert, found herself immersed in Martin's story. "My copy of the first book is tattered, it's torn. It's got so many notes in it," she says. "When you look at all the plotlines by themselves, you think they could just be individual films. How on earth is anyone going to merge and weave it together? But George did, and HBO did as well."

Martin, who once worked in series TV (*Beauty and the Beast*), wrote the Song books not expecting any screen adaptation. But HBO and Benioff and Weiss felt the drama could translate. "He populated his world with characters who seemed eminently human," Benioff says. "They're driven by sexual attraction and ambition and fear, as opposed to (being in) some cosmic battle between good and evil."

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