



**BOWLED OVER:** Patrick Mcnee was suave star of *The Avengers*, inset right

# Let's meet up in the year 1995 ... just wear a suit!



**BRITPOP BATTLE:** Blur, Oasis, and Pulp played at the famed Barrowland



By Paul Carnahan

IT'S 1995. The Berlin Wall has crumbled, Apartheid is a thing of the past, and a young Labour politician called Tony Blair is already posing a serious threat to John Major's ailing Tory government.

Meanwhile, with grunge on the way out, British groups are on the ascendant. Britpop is the word on everyone's lips, thanks to Blur, Oasis, Pulp and legions of other stick-thin pop hopefuls.

From this distance, it almost looks like a golden age – which makes it doubly odd to realise that, at the time, many of Cool Britannia's foremost participants were, at the time, looking back to another golden age – the Swinging Sixties.

This idea was the spark for my new novel, the Britpop-flavoured romantic comedy *End Of A Century*, set in 1995 and featuring young solicitor Des McMenemy, who finds his rose-tinted view of the 1960s challenged after buying a dazzlingly blue vintage suit and meeting the equally dazzling medical student Poppy Akinyi.

Keen to impress Poppy, Des sets out on a mission to track down his suit's original owner and return a mysterious love note found in one of its pockets.

While the book contains its fair share of '90s nostalgia – ciggies in the pub, swapping phone numbers on pieces of paper, communal phones out in the hallway – it ponders the notion of a 'golden age', with Des slowly learning to savour his present instead of hankering for a past that might not have been quite so golden for everyone who was there at the time... It's funny. It's sweet. It's – hopefully –

## One former Scottish Express man whisks us back to the summer of 30 years ago for his latest novel, which has a nod to the '60s too ...



charming. More than anything, it's the book I wanted to write after my first novel, *How Soon Is Now?*

Coming straight from a big, complex, sometimes dark story (*How Soon Is Now?* is the tale of a troubled ex-journalist who, recruited by an eccentric band of time travellers, discovers he can travel back to relive any part of his painful past), I was ready for some sunshine.

So if *How Soon Is Now?* is a story of autumn, in setting and in themes, *End Of A Century* is a story of summertime and young love.

There are a few subtle sprinkles of magic hidden away in the story, but the main elements of the fantastical in *End Of A Century* are a London in which people are almost uniformly pleasant and helpful and a Glasgow which is sunny all summer long...

The basic story for the book came quickly and easily, with the story outline plotted in a single morning.

It helped, of course, that I was able to lean on some personal experience to feed into Des's story. Like Des, I had a small

collection of 1960s suits in the 1990s. Also like Des, I had a near-inflexible Saturday routine involving a circuit of record shops and second-hand stores. Glaswegians of a certain age will sigh, for instance, at the memory of the long-gone Virginia Galleries on Virginia Street, pictured left, with its multi-floored panoply of vintage boutiques and movie memorabilia dealers.

**M**Y OWN favourite vintage find wasn't blue, like Des's, but green. I called it my 'Steed suit', after the dapper hero of 1960s TV hit *The Avengers* (played by the magnificent Patrick Macnee) and wore it until it became the ultimate betrayal of becoming just a little too snug.

Thinking about that suit, and who might have owned it before I found it in an odd little shop in Glasgow's Gallowgate, was the germ of the idea for the book, and setting the story in 1995 seemed like a nicely commercial 'hook' on which to hang Des's tale, thanks to the looming 30th anniversary of the Battle of Britpop this year, in which Blur took on Oasis with the August 1995 release of rival singles *Country House* and *Roll With It*. And where else could Des's mission to

track down his suit's elusive original owner take him than to Camden, the very heart of the Britpop explosion? Back in '95, it seemed like pretty much anyone could get on the cover of the *NME* or *Melody Maker* with the right haircut and enough time spent in *The Good Mixer*, the Britpop elite's Camden boozier of choice.

I went to the Mixer myself at around that time, and Des's experience in the book echoes my own – shift *The Good Mixer* a few hundred miles north, change the accents, and the hippest pub in Britain could've been more or less any old geezers' hangout in Glasgow's east end.

That's the thing about mythologising anything – a musical scene, a moment in history, a pub, whatever. Real life tends to be less rosy than the myth, but almost always a lot more interesting if you dig into the details.

This is one of the big themes of *End Of A Century* – magic is everywhere, if you stop to take a look.

Spend too much time looking over your shoulder at someone else's golden age, and you might just miss your own.

Paul's novels *End Of A Century* and *How Soon Is Now?* are available in hardback, paperback and on Kindle from Amazon now. You can also find out more about his work at [paulcarnahan.com](http://paulcarnahan.com)



## FINDING MY WAY INTO FICTION

AFTER a brief spell, aged six, where I wanted to be a zookeeper, I always knew I wanted to be a writer, explains Paul.

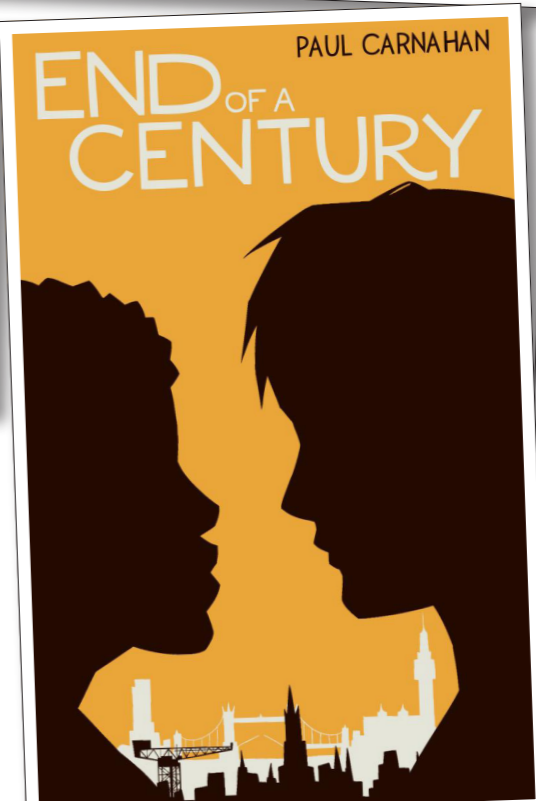
Banishing thoughts of mucking out elephants, I opted for the no-less-messy world of journalism, leading to several decades in local and national newspapers, latterly as deputy night editor of the Scottish Daily Express – easily one of the most fun and fulfilling jobs of my career.

Eventually, the time came to jump ship

from the Express and write those books I'd always told myself I'd write.

How *Soon Is Now?* was my first full novel. Buoyed by the positive response upon its release last June, I forged plans for even more books. After *End Of A Century* there's a return to the world of *How Soon...?*, a genre-mashing sci-fi adventure, an absolutely ludicrous take on a much-loved genre and ... so much more.

Watch this space!



BOOKMARK THEM: *End Of A Century* and Paul's 2024 novel *How Soon Is Now?* are out now