



show of the week

The Wizards of Aus

SBS Two, Tue-Thu, January 19-21, 8.30pm

Originally penned as a series of 12-minute webisodes, *The Wizards of Aus* is the work of talented 24-year-old Melbourne filmmaker Michael Shanks, who is already a well-known name in certain geeky circles online, where he goes under the moniker timtimfed. Screen Australia, which provided most of the funding for this three-parter, discovered Shanks on YouTube, where he has built a following for creating video content, largely

parodies of video games (his most popular, which attracted more than 12 million views, was a parody, *Star Wars: Episode VII Trailer - George Lucas' Special Edition*).

The Wizards of Aus is Shanks' longest production to date, but the scope clearly hasn't daunted him or dampened his fondness for often pointedly B-grade visual effects, even if in the confines of a comedy science-fiction parody, nobody is going to criticise the nuances of your demon-exploding scenes.

Shanks co-wrote (with Nicholas Issell), directed and stars in *The Wizards of Aus*, as Jack the Wizard. After a cheeky *Game of Thrones*-style title sequence using the Melbourne Metro train map, the first episode opens with an epic battle scene featuring goblins and dragons. Jack, weary of the never-ending battles with various supernatural forces in his own Magical Realm, decides to migrate to the Human Realm, specifically, Melbourne "because the rents are cheap".

We then see Jack being interviewed on a right-wing talk show, *The Wright Perspective*, hosted by none other than Guy Pearce (clearly enjoying a role unlike any he's inhabited before),

challenging Jack on using his magic in the human realm and not speaking "Australian instead of abracadabra-dingdong". Jack is on the show defending himself after he did a big sneeze and accidentally transformed Flinders Street Station into a giant fish monster.

But Jack is trying to assimilate and live magic-free, even though one of his arch-enemies from the Magic Realm has moved in next door and has no qualms about turning innocent passers-by into dog-human hybrids or blowing up passing cars. Jack ends up the figurehead for wizard immigration, and the series becomes what surely must be the first fantasy spoof to tackle political issues, while still delivering genuine laughs (and, yes, some geeky undergraduate ones as well) and some great sight gags.

Shanks has also attracted some heavyweight cast members. As well as Pearce (who Shanks had worked with before - he directed the video clip to Pearce's debut single Storm), Mark Mitchell plays an anti-wizard-immigration senator, Bruce Spence is Jack's rather obnoxious and long-dead father, and Samuel Johnson (or at least, his voice) is a mildly depressed, bullied shark.

Not every gag hits the mark, but it's great fun and easily the most amusing locally produced fantasy-spoof, socio-political allegory on Australia's immigration you're likely to see. If you love this first episode, the entire series will be available on SBS On Demand as soon as it finishes airing.

Kylie Northover