

That Nerd Show



WEEKLY NEWS



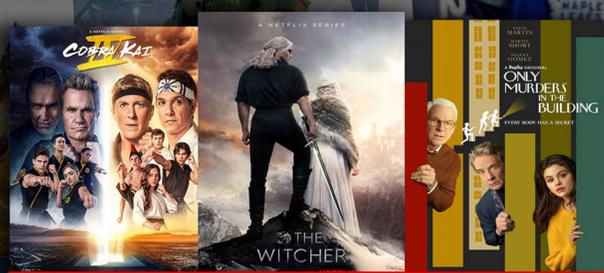
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FILM / TV NEWS, STORIES, INTERVIEWS, THE NERD OPINION MUSIC NEWS, REVIEWS, GAMING, COMICS, COSPLAY & SCIENCE NEWS



Top 10 Movies of 2021



Top 10 Shows of 2021

2021

A YEAR IN REVIEW



Top 10 GAMES of 2021

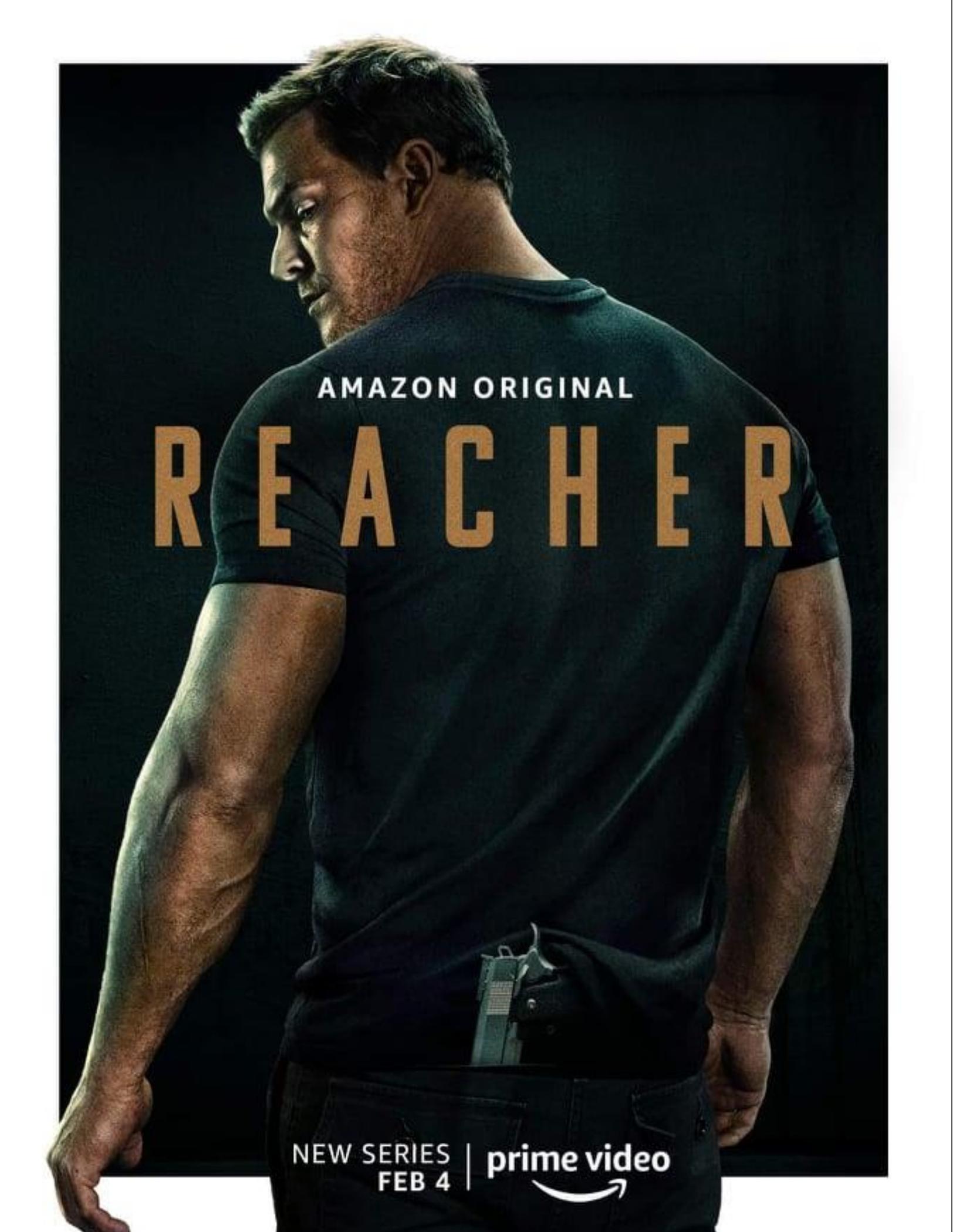


REVIEW



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That Nerd Show's TOP 10 Movies of 2021



#1 Spiderman: No Way Home

By Chloe James

I know. It's incredibly basic to say that I love Spider-Man. I mean most of us do right? Or at least anyone who has any interest in the superhero genre, and tolerates Marvel, can probably admit Spiderman is in their top 10 heroes list. What's not to love? He's smart, humble, kind (yet very sassy to his enemies), with powers just strong enough to make for cool fights, but not strong enough to render him OP and boring. Embarrassing and TMI, my first exposure to Spider-Man was not through a comic, cartoon, or even the 2002 Tobey Maguire film. It was from the free game that came with our families first PC (I'll remind you I'm a fairly older Millennial), the *Spider-Man Cartoon Maker*. This game was like a whole new level of creativity for a kid who'd only played MS paint. You could animate dozens of characters against any background of your choosing, add sound affects, and even record your creations! Needless to say, when the 2002 *Spider-Man* did come out, it instantly became my favorite superhero film. I still maintain that this film set the modern standard for what to expect from this genre.

Twenty years, two reboots, two actors, four MCU phases, and a few giant corporate acquisitions later, we've come to this point. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* might seem like just the third entry of the MCU Spideverse, but anyone keeping up with what happened in the last one knows that this isn't going to be any ordinary, villain of the week fair. After Mysterio exposes Peter Parker's (Tom Holland) identity as Spiderman to the world while simultaneously framing him for his death, things get...messy. As you could imagine, mass media attention combined with unforgiving cancel culture has made life a living hell for not only Peter, but his girlfriend MJ (Zendaya), aunt May (Marisa Tomei), and ever loyal best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon). Seeing no other way to fix his life, Peter turns to his local wizard acquaintance, Dr. Strange

(Benedict Cumberbatch) to magic his way out of his troubles. Unfortunately, the spell Strange conjures to try to make everyone forget that Peter is Spider-Man goes a bit wrong (totally Peter's fault) and now some familiar faces from other Spider-Man universes begin to appear.

Well...not sure how much more I can talk about besides that. Disney has basically threatened a painful death upon anyone (including the loose lipped Tom Holland) who spoils this film before release. I'll just be very careful and remember exactly everything that's in the trailer—and be really vague about my opinions about everything else that isn't. I can definitely say, a lot of franchise entries are hyped up from their studios, but this one hands down deserves every bit of hype that's been building up about it. *No Way Home* is everything little kid and adult me ever wanted in a Spider-Man movie, and then so much more.

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First off, I'm actually surprised on how well balanced everything feels. We have a great deal of focus on Peter and his friends, yet somehow a surprisingly great amount of focus and development from everyone else who showed up on the way. (Again, not going into specifics.) I just felt an incredible amount of closure was achieved in a short amount of time—closure in many cases, I've been wanting for years. As is the case when multiverses collide, we're also treated with some very interesting dynamics between cross dimensional characters that we've never seen interact (but have always wanted to!) I'm sure many super fans will have a differing opinion, but I felt very little opportunity was wasted when it came to how these interactions went down.

From his first appearance, Tom Holland has been my favorite Spider-man. He's just everything I look for in a Peter Parker. And while I think Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield had wonderful qualities in their own rights for the roll, Holland strikes a perfect balance between the two. Holland has always shown great performances within the MCU films, this one really tested his abilities, and I think he's really achieved something amazing this time around. As for Zendaya, I guess it only took her being in almost everything lately for me to finally admit, I do

enjoy her, especially as the ever sardonic MJ. Ok, he's in the trailer, so I'm aloud to talk about this: Alfred Molina is back as Doc Ock and I'm literally screaming with joy about it. He was one of my favorite villains from any of the Spider-man franchises, and I'm happy to say, my opinion hasn't changed.



Visually, well it certainly better be as stunning as it was, having one of the largest film budgets to date. Of course everything was beautiful. Can you expect anything less from an MCU film, especially one guaranteed to be popular? As to be expected, anything heavily involving Dr. Strange will not only be stunning but very trippy to view as well. I continue to really love the way magic looks in this universe, and this is coming from a fantasy nerd.

There's so, so much more I want to say about *No Way Home*. But at this point, it's going to get too specific, and I ain't no filthy spoiler. I think the one thing I resent about this movie, is it gave me almost too much of everything I wanted. It's *too good*. It spoon fed me fan service I thought I would never get, and I ate it up and asked for more. But now...what are they going to do after this one? How are they going to top it? I just hope we won't be too disappointed with future Spider-Man films in the years to come. At least *No Way Home* exceeded all of my expectations, as well as finally gotten me proper hyped for what's to come in Phase 4 of the MCU.





2 Dune: Part 1 Review by Julie Jones

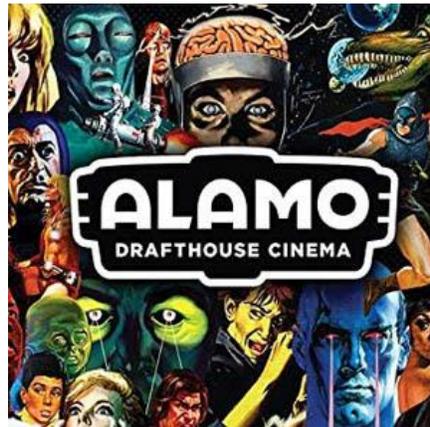
While there aren't a lot of films I get excited about anymore, I know that I'm not alone in my excitement for a new Dune. There were a lot of attempts to bring the books to the big screen, but only a few are worth mentioning. Of course, this leaves the question of whether the film is worth the time and anticipation. If you have never read the book, Dune is a film that is set in a universe that shows us different planets, each with a Duke to oversee them. There are different families that rule under an Emperor and wielders of magic in different forms that guide and assist in the path they take to achieve their goals. Of course, you can't have a system like this without politics and families that thrive for gain. We follow Paul while he is groomed to be the next Duke and learn more about the politics of the empire they serve. This film is based on a series of books, but has also been made into a number of films previously. Some of which have gained a cult following and others that have failed miserably.

While there is a lot left to be desired in the film, I think this is because it is laying the groundwork for what comes next. As we have seen in Dune movies before, what happens before Paul joins the Fremen is mostly what you need to know about the outside world and the problems within it. So, while I think that the film is a tad lackluster, I understand why and that doesn't mean for Part 1, it's all that bad. I also understand that it's the fan in me that wants to see the rest of it and can't wait to see how it is portrayed.

The acting in this film is pretty good. I thought Timothee Chalamet did a good job as Paul and Rebecca Ferguson gave Lady Jessica a strong adaptation. While I usually love Oscar Isaac, I thought he fell a little flat. I couldn't stand Zendaya, though I have never had high expectations of her as an actress. She tends to take moody and brooding to a caricature and it is pretty distracting. This film is no different. I understood

that she was meant to be standoffish, but she was less of a guarded strong woman and more of a sulking teenager who didn't get a car for her birthday. Maybe she'll be better in Part 2 where we get to see more of her character. I did love Jason Momoa as Duncan Idaho and Josh Brolin as Gurney Halleck, but Jason's lack of facial hair was incredibly distracting. Fair warning ladies, if you think Jason Momoa is hot. Dave Bautista might have the look of Glossu Rabban, but his acting was distracting as well. He's been better in other films.

The film direction was good, even though there was nothing new or innovative. I thought the style was strong and seamless, supporting the dialogue and storyline with good structure. The cinematography, again nothing new, was wonderful. There were so many artistic frames that I wasn't sure how they chose the poster or why there weren't more stills showcasing it. The aesthetics were perfect from a modern interpretation that isn't overdone. So many times we see sci-fi movies that exhibit aesthetic theory that almost seems over the top. This was a much sleeker and efficient interpretation and I thought it was perfect for a movie like this. The story isn't anything new, it is the same as previous films and the book is to thank for that. I did think that there were some parts that weren't in previous versions that were ok, but nothing that derived or added to the story. But I will have to watch the older versions and rewatch this one before I can decide how I feel about it.



Overall, I thought it was good. It wasn't amazing, but it wasn't meant to be. It is the first part and this is where we learn, not where the magic happens. It is a good representation from what I can remember of the books, but I am not the huge fan some are. While it wasn't horrible, I do expect it will get better, and can't wait to see the next one! I give it an eight overall, but am expecting the next will be higher than that. It is definitely worth seeing, whether you think you will like it or not. Whether you see it now or wait to watch it before the next one, is another matter. I say watch it now and watch it again before the

next! Remember that the more we support movies like this, the more of them we will get!



3 Shang-Chi: The Legend of the Ten Rings Review By Marcus Blake

As we enter into Phase 4 of the Marvel universe new characters will be introduced. And now it's time for Shang Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings. He is a Marvel character with great martial arts abilities who was introduced into the comics while working with the Avengers and trying to stop the Ten Ring terrorist organization. Now, as you can imagine, Marvel has taken a few liberties with this character and added a little bit more mysticism than what he had in the comic books. But the basic elements of this character are all there. He is the son of a man who wants to destroy world peace at all cost and is sometimes referred to as The Mandarin and yes, this is a bit of a spoiler alert, we actually get to meet the real Mandarin, unlike the one we saw in Iron Man 3. But Shang Chi is another character that will be working with the Avengers and this is a perfect time to introduce him. I want to say first that this is a fantastic movie, I enjoyed it very much, and I do consider it one of the better Marvel movies. Origin story movies in the Marvel universe tend to be better, although, that is not always the case as we have seen with Wolverine: Origins and I think we can all admit that Captain Marvel was kind of "blah."

However, for Shang Chi, this is a great origin story that's filled with lots of action, heart, and the right amount of comedy thanks to Awkwafina playing the best friend or sidekick if you will. But the real praise has to go to actor Simu Liu in a lot of ways played in almost perfect Shang Chi. If you are not familiar with his work, then I encourage you to check out Kim's Convenience Store where he plays the older brother. This is his "big break" and he does a marvelous job. In fact, the Asian cast was damn near perfect. I admit that I didn't

think much of this movie going in and maybe part of that was not having known that much about the character, but I'm glad that it surprised me at every turn especially with its connection to Doctor Strange and the Multiverse. As always, each individual movie perfectly connects to something larger and this is no different.

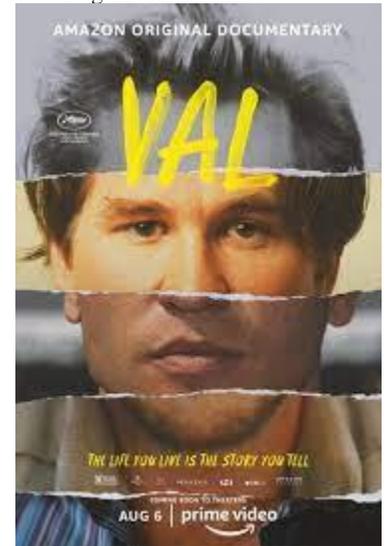
It's an almost perfect movie and we'll get to why it's not exactly perfect a little bit later, but here's what makes this movie great and worth seeing in the theater. First, the action is Non-Stop and it's some of the best martial arts choreography that we've seen especially for a superhero movie. The cast is great not only for the lead actors but Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, who played the father to Michelle Yeoh who is great in anything she does. I admit, she is still one of my favorite Bond girls. I don't think Asian actors get enough credit when it comes to English roles, but there has been an abundance of great Asian actors that have graced the silver screen and it's nice to have them more and more in superhero movies. Awkwafina is always a delight on the big screen and she has perfect chemistry with Simu Liu. If you have a great cast, then almost you're guaranteed to have a good movie. There's a lot of nods to not only the original storyline of shame she but how this is all connected to the other Marvel movies. Spoiler alert: they got to Ben Kingsley make an appearance again as Trevor or the fake Mandarin. He was a delight. I felt like the pacing and everything about this movie was damn near perfect. It did a good job of setting up the character's origin story and how the main character has to face off against his evil father to save the village that his mother was from while basically following his own hero's path. There are some slow moments for dramatic effect with the characters and the issues they're wrestling with, especially their past and the choices they must make in order to save the world. But as slow as these scenes are, they do work well and don't disrupt the pacing. Overall, this is a great film with the right amount of action and comedy that will

make fans who are not familiar with Shang Chi fall in love with the character. It's a very enjoyable movie and while I still can't say it's the best Marvel movie, I'm sorry Winter soldier and Logan will take that spot, I can definitely throw this into the top 10, especially for how great this particular origin story is. And the little welcome scene during the credits, introducing them to, "spoiler," what Bruce Banner refers to as the "circus" is adorable.

Now here's what doesn't make the movie perfect. Ancient mysticism is one thing, but it needs to be explained so that the audience fully understands. I don't think they did that well enough, except when creating some ancient enemy that wants to destroy the world. Boring! Tell me more about this enemy and what they really want to do. Where do they come from? What is the enemy's origins? You can't give an audience a little mystery and then have some flying creature come out of a mountainside and say he wants to destroy the world. We need more than that. It's true that the crux of this story is not about battling ancient monsters, but the son having to stop the father to save the world and so that the sins of the father are not thrust upon him. Typical hero's path where you must slay your enemy to become the hero and in this case, you're on father. Is it a little too Luke Skywalker defeating Darth Vader, maybe, but it's those kinds of stories that have the most heart and are the ones that we can relate to the most. I just feel like they didn't do enough explanation of what the ultimate evil is and then gave it some carbon copy motivation of wanting to destroy the world. We've seen that, what's original about this? Maybe there are some scenes that help better explain what the ultimate evil really is, which didn't get put into the final cut. But as beautifully as Michelle Yeoh's character explains the purpose of the village and its history, we still don't know much about this ultimate evil and you can't gloss over that fact with great action scenes. Yes, fantastic action scenes, but as an audience, we need more than heroes and monsters battling each other. Maybe, it doesn't really take away from the film, but it's the one thing keeping it from being perfect. Then again, as all Marvel films connect to other films and to a larger picture, maybe those answers will be explained in the obvious Avengers movie that will be coming out in phase 4!

Really, I'm just nitpicking as a storyteller. It's still very much an enjoyable movie and needs to be seen, especially on the big screen. I don't think Disney premium access would do it justice. If this is the first true superhero movie that we get to see coming back from the pandemic then Shang Chi and the legend of the Ten Rings it's perfect for that. The movie will keep you on the edge of your seat. The cast will keep you entertained and laughing. If you're a fan of Marvel movies or just superhero movies in general, you will not be disappointed and it's about time that a great Asian cast gets to shine in a Marvel movie! For me, it's almost perfect and left me wanting more. It is certainly, one of the best martial arts movies I've

seen in a long time. So, I definitely recommend going to see this movie in the theater, it's worth every penny of a full-price movie ticket and introduces these new characters, wonderfully, to the Marvel universe. Plus, there's plenty of Easter eggs connected to the other Marvel movies that will make your inner nerd child jump up and down. It's easily a 9 out of 10 for me and I can't wait to see it again!



4 Val Review by Alex Moore

Going back to my childhood days, which I like to revisit often, there were certain movies that made a lasting impression. There was the unpopular (and controversial) sequel to "The Wizard of Oz," for example, and then the film adaptation of a musical all about singing plants from outer space. I rented them with the help of my mother and rewatched them over and over and over again. Not longer after, there was another. It was produced by a director who took the cinema world by storm in the late '70s and early '80s. At the heart of this movie was a handsome, charismatic and humorous method actor. His name is Val Kilmer.

Over the years, I have come to love and appreciate Kilmer's style and dedication to his roles, namely in the 1980s and '90s. It started, for me, with "Willow" and continued on with films such as "Tombstone," "Batman Forever" and "The Saint." He continued on throughout the 2000s, but, for some reason, I did not keep up the way that I did before. By the time the 2010s had arrived, Val was working on a one-man show, disguised as Mark Twain, so that he could fund a bigger project about the same character. Alas, tragedy struck soon after and he is still waiting for the right opportunity...

What I have often said about the film genre of documentaries is that they can usually be divided into two, distinct categories: those with an open-

ended purpose where everything is gathered as it comes, and those with a pre-determined purpose, where everything is already set and is simply presented to the viewers. However, in the case of “Val,” we have something of a hybrid. You see, Kilmer’s affinity for filming himself and those around him was already set to be cut and spliced together, so to speak, but then there are the scenes taking place now as a cancer-recovering Val travels around the country (and abroad) with friends and family while somebody else is filming him. Perhaps the most special and important detail is the decision for narration. We SEE whom it is, early on, but we do NOT know who that is until the very end of the film and it is a grand revelation.

The old footage tends to go in a biographical order. It begins with Kilmer’s childhood, a time when he and his two brothers often made movies together at their family’s home in California. It was charming to watch, as almost none of us have ever seen any of this before. It immediately reminded me of another documentary from some 20 years ago, entitled “American Movie.” The key difference is that Mark Borchardt’s dream has yet to ever, truly be realized and Val Kilmer’s is still unfolding.



As you watch present-day Val relive some of his fond memories of college at Juilliard, you will then see his past life unfold and learn all about his difficult beginnings. As Kilmer summed it up, they were difficult times, but promoted much growth. Slowly but surely, Val found his way to the top, not only stealing scenes, routinely, as a formidable supporting actor, but also as a daring lead. Along the way, he was married and had several children, he went through some challenging film productions and a painful divorce and he interacted with lots of very interesting people and places all over the world. What a life Val Kilmer has had!

With all that said, it is comforting to know that Val has not lost his sense of optimism. He is still pushing forward, despite all of his difficulties as of late. He believes that it is not just himself that lives

this life, but all of us, together, with the help of God. He believes deeply in that he will one day be healed and I found that to be inspiring, but that is not all...“Val” came along at a time when I was personally dealing with some hard times. The hard times are not over, yet, either. Sooner or later, we all have times of self-reflection, and those moneys can be scary and depressing. As I watched Val Kilmer traverse through the present and the past and look forward to the future, I found myself thinking about my own past and present a future. It is not over until it is over, so we all might as well make the most of it. I think that Mr. Kilmer would nod his head if he heard me say that right now.

You do not have to be a fan of the titular character to enjoy this documentary, but it probably makes the experience more fun. It also makes it harder to watch, at times, too. Hearing Val struggle to speak is not easy, but we can easily see that he is struggling and so it is okay. He is not seeking our sympathy. In fact, he wants us to empathize, instead. There was a moment when I was able to connect with an emotion on y end as he was experiencing it on his end. This is the mark of a great film. “Val” might be lacking in some details that I was curious to hear more about, but aside from that, it was just about as good as anyone could hope for. Take my word for it and then see it for yourself. You will not be disappointed.



#5 Free Guy

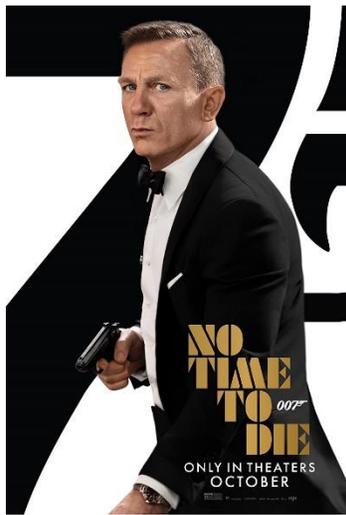
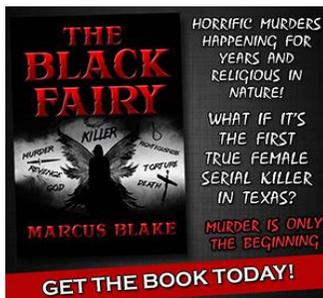
Review by Marcus Blake

The best thing that I can say about the movie Free Guy is, it’s Ryan Reynolds at his best. It’s almost as if this movie was perfectly made for his talents. Ryan Reynolds is the funny action hero that always keeps us in stitches, it’s why he was

the perfect choice to play Deadpool and why he’s the perfect choice to play an NPC inside an action-oriented open world video game that takes on a life of its own! If there was an Oscar category for the best comedic action hero, Ryan Reynolds would win at hands down! As a nerd who plays video games, did I like this movie? F@#k yeah! It was everything I expected it to be. It may not have been absolutely perfect, but it kept me laughing and I was truly entertained. It’s the kind of movie that I would watch with Ryan Reynolds to get me ready for the next Deadpool movie. But even though this is a perfect film for the comedic talents of Ryan Reynolds at the heart of this movie is really a gamer’s love story. That’s not to say that this is some kind of romcom masquerading as a gaming movie, not at all! But it is a movie about gamers finding love within their own love of creating a fantastic Video Game world. For nerds, it’s the kind of romantic story we like because we’re always looking for people that like the same things we do, whether it be gaming or comic books or certain kinds of films. So, what makes this movie good and worth seeing! If you get past the love story, it’s just a funny movie about NPC players finding their own identity within a system. Isn’t that kind of a metaphor for life. It’s Ryan Reynolds doing what he does best and keeping us laughing while killing bad guys! But the movie is also a critique on the video game industry in itself, the difference between creating some popular mind-numbing game like Fortnite versus gamers coming together and creating something truly wonderful in an open world system, plus the struggle of those gamers against greedy corporate types who don’t care about creativity as long as they’re making money.

I think in a lot of ways this movie captures the essence of those type of people perfectly. It’s the kind of people we rail against that run big gaming studios and put out shit year after year because they know they’re going to make money, you know, like whatever version of Call of Duty that’ll never be as good as it used to be 10 years ago or the latest version of Madden which didn’t really make any updates from the year before except rosters and a new schedule. But instead of taking the direction that the movie Tron did 40 years ago where you have a truly evil villain that doesn’t smile, you can’t help but laugh at Taika Waititi’s portrayal of some phony gaming guru who’s all about the bottom line. In fact, he almost steals this movie just as much as Ryan Reynolds. Free Guy, almost feels like the sister movie too Ready Player One with tons of gaming and nerd references and great cameos that will keep you entertained for almost 2 hours. And while both of these people light up the screen, the other actor who truly makes this a wonderful film is Jodi Comer from Killing Eve, who is the perfect gamer girl that nerds have seen in their dreams. You know the kind of girl that is nerdy, but hot, and loves to play video games with you! Yes, unfortunately, that’s kind of rare! She adds her quirky sense of humor

that we all love from Killing Eve and elevates this movie even more beyond it just being a comedic vehicle for Ryan Reynolds. I think she is perfect casting. Now, as much as I love the film and will certainly watch it again, it isn't perfect. Because it's a video game movie set in an active open world, there's a lot going on and you don't always have time to catch your breath. It's true that the action is necessary because it is a video game movie, but sometimes we just need to take a moment and catch our breath to enjoy what's really going on in the movie. Free Guy does that to a point with some of the scenes where the main characters are talking, but even that gets a bit repetitive at times, especially when the Ryan Reynolds NPC player is having to live out the same scene over and over. However, these are minor complaints. Free Guy is not a drama... It's a comedic action movie for gamers so in that regard the movie knows exactly what it's supposed to be. It's a fun nerdy movie that will entertain you and definitely a good one to go to the theater to see. If you like Ryan Reynolds and a Deadpool movie, then you will certainly like him in this kind of movie because I feel like in a lot of ways his character is what Deadpool would be if he were an NPC player in a video game, funny, snarky, and full of action that will keep you entertained. Video game movies are always hard to make, but unlike other video game movies where the story is based on the story of an original video game, this one works because it knows what it is as a film and isn't trying to be anything else. It doesn't need to have some big social message, although I feel like the movie does take aim at certain kinds of video games that while they may be popular, they're absolute shit! At the end of the day and in a logical world shouldn't be popular video games. The cameos are good and as I've said before trying to figure out the actor's identity will be just as fun as watching the movie. So, my overall assessment of Ryan Reynolds' Free Guy is at its core just pure unadulterated entertainment with a bit of a gamer's fantasy when it comes to love and that's okay! It's entertaining and worth the price of a movie ticket. It will keep you laughing and as for a Ryan Reynolds movie, it's a good filler until we get Deadpool 3! Free Guy knocks it out of the park in a lot of ways, but more importantly, it's just a lot of fun to watch and it doesn't need to be anything else. It's the perfect kind of entertainment, especially if you're a nerd!



6 No Time to Die

Review by Alex Moore

We all began somewhere, did we not? For some who are close to me, but a few years older, it started significantly sooner. For example, when I once asked my uncle what his first James Bond experience on the big screen was, he told me that it was 1983's "Octopussy." Despite the two of us being just six years apart in age, it was not 1989's "A Licence to Kill" that I saw first. Rather, some eight years later, it came to me in the form of "Tomorrow Never Dies." Certainly, there are specific moments from that movie which stand out, but overall, it was not bad a horrible first time, nor was "Octopussy" for others, I am sure.

However, I did not really begin to devote significant energy to the 007 films until the mid-2000s. I was an undergrad in college and I was looking for new experiences with the time extra time I had to kill. No, it did not begin with 2006's "Casino Royale (CR)," but I eventually made my way to it and from that point, there was no turning back. I had, indeed, become a full-fledged fan of the franchise.

While the Daniel Craig era started out with a bang and something of a reboot, it continued onward with the uninspired "Quantum of Solace (QOS)" and shot back upward with "Skyfall." "Spectre" was not the same, steep decline as "QOS" was to "CR," but it was still a bit of a drop off. So, after years of delay, where would that leave us? The 25th entry is called "No Time to Die (NTTD)" and if you think that you have seen enough of a departure from the James Bond predecessors, get ready to rethink that, completely...

The opening segment goes about how you would expect any Bond film to start, although the first couple of Craig's movies did not start in the traditional fashion. Still, for this one, there was a slightly different variation: no blood dropping

down over the gun barrel. This introductory sequence might be the lengthiest in the whole franchise, as well. It contained a couple of references to former 007 stories, most notably "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," but also "For Your Eyes Only." Those two movies had a link, as well, so it kind of makes sense. Above all else, we are reintroduced to the romance between James Bond and Madeleine Swann, played again by Lea Seydoux ("Oh Mercy!"). The new adversarial muscle, Primo, played by Dali Benssalah, also makes an appearance. Trust me, he gets quite annoying and goes out satisfactorily. Insert a famous James Bond one-liner.

One thing that makes "NTTD" unique is its level of backstory for characters not named James Bond. Madeleine has a history that makes her who she is in the present day and it includes a deep, dark secret that not even 007 knows about, right off. It helps to tie her persona along with that of Bond. In other words, they are "two of a kind;" they "move as one." Yes, that was a reference to another James Bond film.

Beyond all this, the backstory connects our new arch-villain; the classic, brainy villain, that is, Lyutsifer Safin, played by Rami Malek ("The Little Things"). If you like the classic villains of the 007 franchise, then he will suffice, but some might consider his performance bland. I did not, however. His dramatic delivery worked within the framework of the character he was trying to convey, in my view.



Pretty much all of the people you became familiar with in "Skyfall" and "Spectre" have returned to reprise their respective roles, including: Ben Whishaw ("Surge") as Q, Naomie Harris ("Venom: Let There Be Carnage") as Eve Moneypenny, Christoph Waltz ("Rifkin's Festival") as Ernst Stavro Blofeld and Ralph Fiennes ("Doolittle") as M. Returning for the first time since "QOS" is Jeffrey Wright ("The Goldfinch") as Fenix Lighter. I might add that Jeffrey Wright has set a new record for personal

appearances playing this character. I think it is well-deserved, to be perfectly honest.

Probably the most interesting new character, at least for the side of the team of protagonists, is the new 00 agent, named Nomi, who is played by Lashana Lynch (“Captain Marvel”). I enjoyed her performance because there was no major maneuver to point out that she is anything other than just whom she is in the role. That adds confidence to the character, which is just what the character should be. She got to drive a very cool car and I badly want those shades she was sporting while in that car, I do not mind saying.

Allow me to compare and contrast this era closer to the previous one, “Die Another Day (DAD).” This is a far superior film, simply put. Both movies made a special attempt to make references and pay homage to other films within the franchise, but this execution did not feel forced. The story had much greater depth without taking itself too seriously. When “DAD” was released, it felt as though the franchise had run out of ideas, which is probably why we got a total reboot a few years later. The grittier nature of Craig’s delivery, so reminiscent of that of Timothy Dalton is still preferential, but be aware that in the next rendition, we will likely get something campier and lighter. That might not be a bad thing. Sean Connery and Roger Moore did fine with that, after all.

Who knows when we will get the 26th installment? Lord knows we’ve had a slow and drag-it-out pace for several years now. I was not into the fandom back when the movies were churning out nearly every other year, but I can imagine that it would make a good fan feel very spoiled. Frankly, I am grateful that James Bond still lives on in our present day and is still slated to continue. Dare I say, I do not want things to change too dramatically, but even if they do, I will likely never lose interest in the character or the films, on the whole. I will always come back for more and I would expect that my fellow fans will, too. “No Time to Die” puts a very definitive marker on the backside of the Daniel Craig era. It was a good era and the future variants will have extremely large shoes to fill. I am ready to see that flesh out...



7 Last Night in SoHo Review by Chloe James

Coming out of the theaters from seeing Last Night In Soho last November, I was certain: this was Edgar Wright’s greatest film to date. Quite a bold statement, so know, coming from a cinefile and long established fangirl of the director such as myself. Yet there I was, certain as anything that this was not only his best film, but my vote for 2021’s best movie of the year. One exhausting holiday season later, and I’m slightly doubting myself. Was I just caught in the high of seeing a much anticipated (and a bit delayed in release due to COVID-19) film by one of my favorite directors? Sometimes seeing the “newest” of anything can have that blinding effect in one’s judgment as emotions are high, memories are fresh, and that popcorn and candy are hitting your bloodstream juuust right to kick off those happy brain juices. Last Night In Soho follows Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie), a young fashion student, and ardent enthusiasts for anything from the 1960’s era. Eloise additionally is “gifted” in another way: she can see things other people can’t, including visions of the past, and even a few ghosts. When she is given the opportunity to study fashion in the posh Soho neighborhood in London, Eloise begins to see vivid visions of the past in her new flat. At first, she’s absolutely enchanted by them, as the visions center around Sandie (Anya-Taylor Joy) a beautiful aspiring singer Pershing her stardom in the 1960s. However, Eloise eventually learns that Sandie’s life, as well as the entire era she once idolized, were far less glamorous than they originally seemed.

What was it about this film that made me immediately latch on to it so? Visually, it was absolutely stunning. Everything from the lighting, the juxtaposition of the past and present, meaningful framing, and even the brightly bold color palette had a positively dizzying effect on the senses. It’s not only beautiful to look at, but practically a sensory overload, giving a sense of

confusion and uneasiness. Perhaps in a happier film, this may have been detrimental, but for this film’s intended mood, it’s perfect.

Not only are the visuals a lot to take in, but the sounds in this film are every bit as important. Musical cues are one of the driving factors of the story here, as we’re treated (very loudly I might add) to veritable “best of” the music of the 1960’s. Perhaps it’s my bias showing, because like Eloise, I’ve always worshiped music from this era. Using music in this way is no new trick for Wright, however, as several of his films notably do the same (Scott Pilgrim Vs The World and Baby Driver being the most glaring examples.) Is using great music to flavor your movie just a cheap way of making it seem like it’s good? Song selection per scene is still extremely important, yet no easy task. Also, editing the timing of the music to match the “beats” of your scene can take an expert eye and ear.

Is it perhaps the horror element that draws me to this film? Again, Wright is no stranger to the genre, as both psychological and supernatural horror elements are heavy in his “Cornetto Trilogy” films. But unlike the horror in those, the disturbing parts in Last Night in Soho are taken 100% seriously — and by the end I was really feeling them. I think here is where some could find criticism with this film. Wright lingers almost overly long on the more unsettling elements of the movie, perhaps to the point where some would feel like he is overselling it. This is one move I find very different for the director, as I would often describe Wright’s preferred directing style as ADHD in the best way possible. Maybe I wouldn’t like it for everything, but I appreciated Wright taking the extra time with some scenes in this one to really drive in the point. It’s extremely important that by the end we experience and empathize with what Eloise is going through.

I think in the end, I’m still going to maintain that Last Night in Soho is still the best Edgar Wright film to date, but also concede that part of it may be due to personal taste. While he’s great at writing strong female characters, this is his first film truly from a “female” perspective. I hate to bring in feminism or even harder to discuss topics into this, but this film really does a brilliant job of illustrating how scary it can be to be a woman in a world of hidden predatory men. I’m not saying women should all feel scared about this, but most of us have felt this kind of scared at some point and it’s absolutely valid. Something else I relate far too much about this is my idolization of the past (something I address nearly every time I review a period piece.) Eloise learns that no time period was ideal, even if superficial things like music and fashion are better. Much like the main character, I get stuck pining a time and place that isn’t my own, and my present tends to suffer for it. Whether or not Last Night in Soho is the best Edgar Wright film is purely objective, of course. But nevertheless, it’s undeniably another great entry in his repertoire of wildly entertaining films.

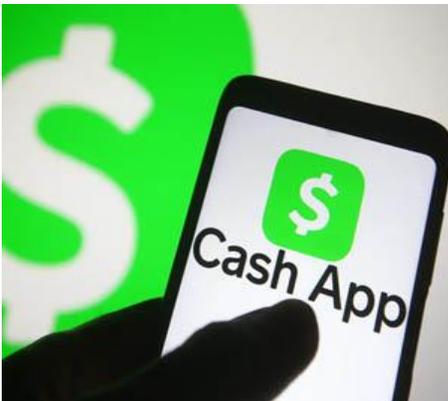
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8 The Last Duel Review by Alex Moore

It has been awhile since I looked forward to an upcoming feature film at the movie theater. One reason for that is the fact that I rarely take a peek at any movie before I am about to see it. While that might sound like a strange thing to do, when you are routinely seeing films primarily for the sake of writing a review, it does not matter nearly as much to know what you are about to see... aside from the title, so that you can check in at the proper table. However, I am not always able to see the movie in advance. When this occurs, seeing that film the old-fashioned way is where it is at. I just happened to be watching the latest 007 movie when I saw a slew of upcoming attractions. One, which really stood out, was the latest offering from world-renowned filmmaker, Ridley Scott. If you are not familiar with any of his work, please change that, if you can.



Scott has dabbled in a number of different types of movies, including: Science Fiction, Horror, Action and Drama, even Dark Comedy, but perhaps a sub-genre that has been overlooked, somewhat, amidst his film credentials, is that of true stories based on books. "The Last Duel" is the latest such example and it seemed perfect for a director like Scott before it was even conceived. The process has been an arduous one, beginning with the announcement of the movie adaptation of Eric Jager's book, back in 2015, and a stalled completion, dating back to 2019. The time for release is finally here, but is it worth the wait?...

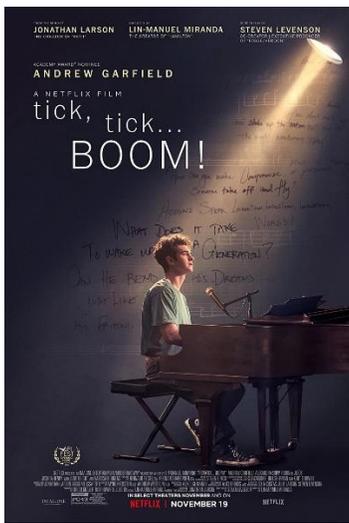
The story begins in 1386, in the famed and legendary city of Paris, France, though we will only be here for a short time, throughout the film. Two men are about to begin a duel, but not just any duel; it is a duel to the death and they used to be not just good friends, but brothers in battle. So what happened between them? On the one hand, we have Matt Damon ("Ford v Ferrari") as Sir Jean de Carrouges; a knight. On the other hand, there is Adam Driver ("Annette") as Jacques Le Gris, a fellow squire. Just nine years prior, they served together in the Caroline War. Count Pierre d'Alencon, played by Ben Affleck ("The Way Back"), is connected to the two of them, but they have very different relationships. Carrouges does not see eye-to-eye with the Count, but Gris is quite chummy with him and that goes a very long ways, as you will discover, on down the road. What it seems to come down to for Gris, in connection with Carrouges, is the loyalty between friends versus the rule of law, at least in the beginning.

A few years later, Carrouges encounters a young lady of great distinction, albeit her ties are to a man that he also does not care for. Nevertheless, he becomes, at the very least, infatuated with Marguerite, played by Jodie Comer ("Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker"), and soon, the two are wed, by the Catholic Church. You will notice the great attention to detail carried out in the ceremonies. This becomes an important piece of the equation some time later in the story.

Where things become dicey is a combination of things. One man takes land as an inheritance and the other feels that land was to belong to him. Then, an unspeakable act takes place between one man and the wife of the other and, now, it is her word against his and the times are not kind to women, to say the least. So, when the dust settles, only one man shall remain standing, so to speak... or one man may fall, as well as his wife, as a result. Just try and figure out who the real hero is, in the end. It is not as simple as it might seem.

Beyond the great technical aspects of this film (the set designs, costumes and artistic direction, among other notable qualities) is the way in which the story is told. Instead of trying to tell each, prominent character's story in a linear fashion, the accounts are all told separately, so that we can see what the truth is, based on perspectives and intentions. Although, by the third chapter, everything starts to feel a bit repetitive, it begins in a distinctly different manner and it is vital to the whole film. Look for it within the title sequence, please, and take mental notes of the slight differences within the characters' expressions and words and emotions, for they all are key to the story, altogether.

"The Last Duel" has provided us with an important subject to (keep) exploring. It occurred at a time when so much was different, compared to the world around us today, yet some things have not changed nearly as much as we may think. You might even notice yourself making assumptions before you have seen the whole story and realize why that can be such a critical mistake. In that fashion, this is a learning experience, which mostly unfolds without being too preachy or overly contentious, though it is not perfect, either. How much does that impact the overall experience? To me, not enough to discourage the movie from anyone who might be intrigued to view it. I did not feel offended or attacked. Rather, I felt enlightened, to a degree. If we do not see a certain amount of positive attention awarded to this movie as the year draws to a close, I will gladly and openly reconsider my initial thoughts, but for now, I rank this film as a very good effort and execution, elevated to greatness by the importance of the topics and themes. At the very least, it is well-crafted by a master of moviemaking and a phenomenal cast. That much cannot be denied or altered, as far as I am concerned.



9 Tick, Tick...BOOM

Review by Danielle Butler

Come theater kids, drama queens, dancers, and sing-along song fans... This movie is for you. The story of the composer Jonathan Larson is told with passion and tragedy. This film unfolds what led up to the popular musical *RENT*. Before *RENT* there was *tick tick BOOM*. This film, Lin Manuel Miranda's big directorial debut the big screen adaptation of Jonathan Larson's autobiographical musical *tick tick BOOM* focuses on the man "boy genius" Jonathan Larson. Not only is this a musical about the making of a musical, but this is also a story of a man comes to develop his breakthrough musical.

The musical production *RENT*, one of the longest running and widely celebrated musicals was set to release on off-Broadway on January 25, 1996. The same day (SPOILER ALERT for those not familiar Larson's story) Jon passed away at the age of 35 from an aortic dissection after being misdiagnosed with the flu. The film focuses on Jonathan's life in the weeks leading up to his 30's birthday. The story has an incredible way of showing the personal and real inspirations for Jonathan Larson's work. He was a composer/ playwright working in a diner and trying to make it big. Larson, (played by Andrew Garfield), was extremely focused on creating musicals. Watching the adorable Andrew Garfield sing, dance, and compose music as Larson had was beyond enjoyable. I particularly enjoyed the split scene between the fight with his girlfriend Susan (played by the beautiful Alexandra Shipp) and sing of the song *Therapy* about the fight (scene with Vanessa Hudgens and Andrew Garfield.) I enjoyed the songs, *Why, Louder Than Words, and 30/90*. The singing and dancing was enamoring and left me in aw from all the fantastic harmonies. The lyrics encapsulates the struggles, strong friendships/relationships, aging, and hurdles of being relevant as creative. It's especially funny, to see the scenes of Jonathan incapable of deciding between two words and mulling over it for hours. I

also giggled at the 90s looks like Vanessa Hudgens big 90s hair. The most comical and heartfelt moments of this film were carried by the personal struggles and life outlook Larson had during his quest to get this work on Broadway. Writers, actors, and composers will likely deeply appreciate seeing all it takes to accomplish your creative aspirations and the funny, gurling, and painful ways life gets in the way.

The opening song about turning 30 is relevant to how terrified my generation is of turning 30. Perhaps older generations felt the same. The fear of turning 30 is real; however, the fear of not achieving a dream is the driving force of the film's plot. Not only can artists/creatives relate, but anyone who has asked themselves how are am I going to fulfill my dreams realistically struggles with the same notion. This passionate portray of a man working to leave an impactful musical in the world of theatre arts is something we all can admire.



The musical production *RENT*, one of the longest running and widely celebrated musicals was set to release on off-Broadway on January 25, 1996. Which was (SPOILER ALERT for those not familiar Larson's story) the same day Jon passed away at the age of 35 from an aortic dissection after being misdiagnosed with the flu. The film focuses on the life of Jonathan in the weeks leading up to his 30's birthday. Not only does the film address how Jonathan dedicated his time to his passion for theatre/composing; it also reaffirmed Jon's question, what am I doing with his life? The resounding theme of the film highlighted Jonathan making the most out of life and emphasizing this in his songs. Jonathan tackled serious and timely topics such as poverty, gentrification, addiction, LGBTQ rights, and the AIDs crisis. Issue's people face even while working as a server in a diner.

I love the filmography and progression of the plot as actors sing and dance through various scenes. There are so many well-known actors/ Broadway stars in this film including: Joanna P. Alder, Laura Benanti, Richard Kind, Judy Kuhn, Judith Light, and Bradley Whitford to name a few. Cast and crew did a great job portraying the 90s and tackling the issues as well as the costumes and scenery... New York City in this film was delightful to see as it was such a different time then. The monologues are

super relatable in terms of tapping into the human dilemmas in everyday life. The diner scene poking fun at how annoying people from the prospective of customer service person.

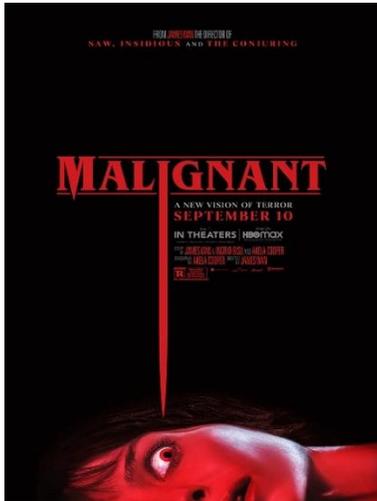
As a creative myself, I think they did a great job with the dichotomy of struggling to make a living and in this case living paycheck to paycheck as well as living as a "starving artist" trying to fulfill your dream. The film showed how John lived and breathed his passion project. For audience members who are creatives, it is not surprising that John is obsessively writing and rewriting his musical in hopes his work will develop into a sustainable career path that puts food on the table.

In addition to girlfriend Susan (Alexandra Shipp), a few notate characters in this film were: Karessa (Hudgens) sang as lead vocalists in Larson's *tick tock BOOM*. Michael, Larson's best friend (played by Robin de Jesus) was a big support and influenced Larson's work. Michael a former actor took a different route than his friend Jon and worked at a big ad agency and making a lot of money. As a former advertising person, I must say, I understand this was set 30 years ago but am I to believe it only takes a few years at ad agency to get a corner office? The idea of *tick tock BOOM* is time is fleeting. Jon alludes to the clock ticking in his head and the urgency he felt to get his work done. The irony of his sudden death is tragic and is more emphasis to his message to go after your dreams. The success of *tick tock BOOM* inspired Jonathan to create more musicals. Composer Stephen Sondheim was referenced several times by Jonathan (Garfield) one of the professionals critiquing John's musical name *Superbia*. During the film Jonathan spent time calling all Broadway legends to promote his musical and invite them to the opening of *Superbia* in hopes they come. There are subtle hints of foreshadowing in this movie that are tied to issues of its time. I am waiting for the other shoe to drop. "Write what you know," advice given to Jonathan after his first musical does not get the reviews and acknowledgment he was hoping. Rosa Stevens Jon's classic NY agent invites all the well-known



producers and they like the musical enough to give Larsen call backs and want to see more of his work. He realizes that they didn't understand his

musical and felt it was too artsy now he is worried, but he'll never amount to anything in their eyes that isn't industry standards. The lead up about Michael was beautiful. True stories don't always have happy endings but sometimes the silver lining is a musical with lasting impact that illuminates everything in its wake. Hats off to Andrew Garfield for his captivating performance. It's such a shame Jonathan did not live to see his musical achieve such success. He has not only left his mark in the world of musical theatre world but changed the trajectory of what a musical can be.



10 Malignant Review by Alex Moore

The twists and turns of the genres. Horror is, quite possibly, cinema in its eldest form. Think about all the Black & White movies you recall the most fondly. The odds are, many of them involved monsters of some kind, right? We simply cannot escape our history with the genre. It has been with us and it lays will be, in some way or another. One of my greatest and most memorable theatrical experiences was back in 1999, when I saw "The Sixth Sense." At the time, it was still a modest success, but soon after, it was a mega hit. Since then, the standards have changed, though many horror films still gravitate toward the '80s fad of more guts and gore, such as the "Saw" franchise. You can take your pick, but sooner later, the two styles shall meet and then you will have a new era of horror... has it happened already? I wonder...I, myself, have long been drawn to the genre, in all kinds of forms. I grew up on the Freddy films and eventually made my way to the B column every Friday night at the VHS rental stores. As I grew older, I reverted back to the Freddy era, but

replaced him with Jason and so on and so on... OK, maybe I have come full circle with the likes of "The Sixth Sense" and "The Conjuring," but how and why? The answer might be in the form of the latest to grace the screen, big or small or some place in between: "Malignant." Directed by James Wan ("Mortal Kombat," "Spiral: From the Book of Saw," "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It"), it would stand to reason why I mentioned "the two shall meet." He is heavily involved in the goriest modern franchise of the 21st century AND the most supernatural. So, think of "Malignant" as something of a hybrid of the two and be aware of the use of symbolism that tends to go hand-in-hand with horror and has for so many years. We start with a very crimson-shaded and graphic scenario within the walls of a hospital facility. It might be some time in the early 1990s. There is a figure, unseen, but volatile in nature. He seems to go by the name "Gabriel," so keep that in mind. The details absolutely matter. Years later, a woman wrestles with the urge to have a baby, despite several miscarriages, and a seemingly unstable husband. Things become physical, quite suddenly, and this woman, Madison Lake, played by Annabelle Wallis ("The Silencing"), injures herself in the process. As she sleeps that night, a mysterious intruder scares she and her husband (and the audience). She sits with her back toward the couple and says nothing, but uses dart-like moves and deals out destruction all around her. Someone in the house does not survive the ordeal. It was around this time that I realized the story takes place in Seattle and, therefore, has a dreary look to it, which seems to really fit the narrative of the story. Maddy recovers in a hospital and talks with cops about what happened, but there is something important she is keeping from them: she saw it happen in a dream, only to wake up and discover that it had really occurred. Her sister, Sydney Lake, played by Maddie Hasson ("We Summon the Darkness") tries to lend support, but Maddy is shutting her out, as well. Madison has more secrets, apparently.

At this point, I found myself thinking that Wallis reminds me of Jennifer Lawrence. I mean, like, Lawrence could have played this part. It is a compliment, albeit one that sounds like it is backhanded. It is not, I promise. So, basically, there is something lurking around that seems to have some connection to Maddy. Their actions and thoughts seem to line up, but why and how? Is Madison dealing with some strange form of schizophrenia? Is there some underlying illness that stemmed from her injury at the beginning of the movie? Well, let me clear this up: even if you

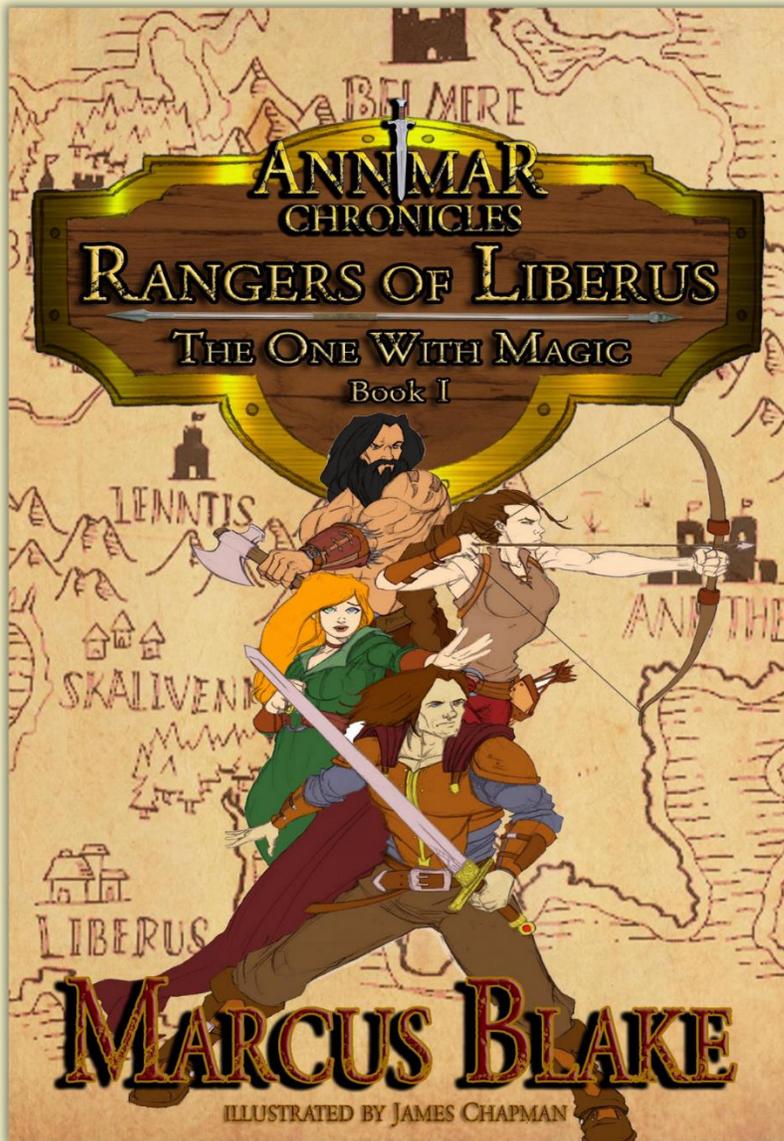
might be on to something, I can assure you that you are not.

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There is a lot more to this character and her background as the story unfolds and that is where things begin to get a lot more interesting. At first, I thought I was watching a basic horror flick with a few, decent jump scares and some expected atmospheric experiences, but the further along the story went, the less I cared about what I saw in the beginning and the more I was connected to what was still ahead and it did not disappoint. For a moment, I thought I was seeing a live-action version of "Beyond Two Souls." If you know the game, you will see what I mean once you watch the whole movie unfold. By the way, that game had a somewhat disturbing story to it, too, as does this one, but believe me, it is totally worth it. You will forget about how slow the story seemed to be moving along at the start and might even find yourself wanting to rewatch the whole thing to see what you may have missed the first time around. Yes, it is that kind of film.

Regrettably, I do not watch as many new horror films as I would like to and I have lost my faith in the cinematic world, to some extent, but "Malignant" is a very solid movie, not just for the horror genre, but as an overall film, as well. I was thoroughly entertained by the end of the story and I could not wait to talk about it. Is it as good as the original "The Conjuring" from a decade ago? No, but is it potentially the best horror film I have seen since then? Yes, in my opinion, it is. I recommend watching it if you can deal with the gory sequences, which are almost comical, at times. Gabriel is a modern favorite of mine now, just for the record.

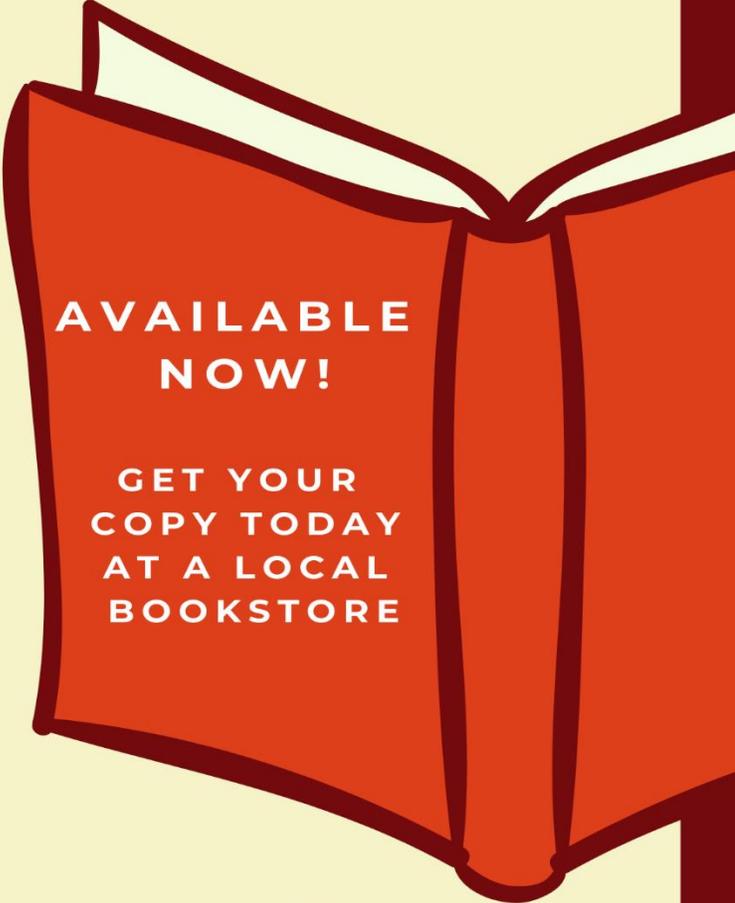
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THAT NERD SHOW'S TOP 10 TV/STREAMING SHOWS OF 2021



#1 The Witcher: Season 2 By Marcus Blake

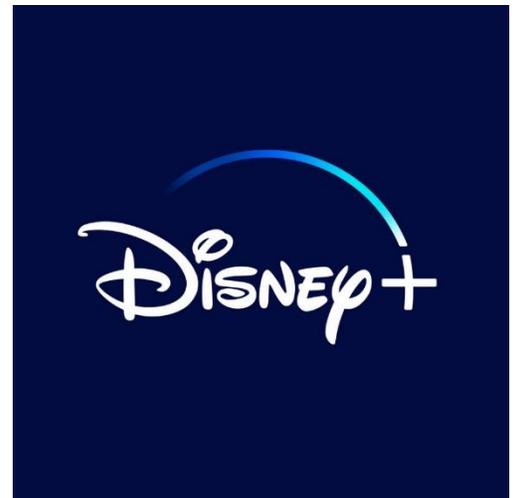
The Witcher is back! Season 2 is here and I'm just going to go ahead and tell you, it's absolutely amazing! If you are a fan of The Witcher books and the video games, then you are in for a real treat because season 2 finally connects all of the characters to one another. As you saw at the end of season 1, Geralt meets Ciri. Season 2 is about him training her and while she is one her way to fulfilling her destiny. I honestly don't really have any complaints about season 2. It's everything I expected with how the character's stories are progressing. The performances are fantastic. Of course, it helps that Henry Cavill who loves the video games is playing The Witcher and knows all the little details to perfectly portray Geralt. Plus, season 2 will lead us into the Wild Hunt storyline which if you played the video games is probably the best storyline of The Witcher series. Season 2 starts off with Geralt taking Ciri to the Witcher's home. That is where he begins to train her and help her harness her power. Unlike the first season where you have a lot of interaction between all of

the characters, season 2 is about their separate journeys after the great battle at the end of season 1. Yennefer is without her magic and it seems everybody is looking for Ciri because of her power. I can't really tell you anything more without spoiling season 2. But it's season 2 where we see Ciri starting to fulfill her destiny and if you know the story, you know what direction that they're heading in, which if you're like me, you can't wait for future seasons of this series.

As I said before the performances are amazing. I've always thought Henry Cavill is the perfect actor to play Geralt. And we get to see more of Freya Allen as Ciri, we got glimpses of her character in the first season, but this is the season we get to see her more of main character. Nothing against Freya Allen's performance in season 1, it's just there wasn't much to her character compared to this season. The action scenes were wonderful, we get to see more slaying of monsters and great fight scenes. There's definitely a lot more action in season 2, but more importantly we get to dive more into the mythology of The Witcher which is more important. As a fan of the video games, I felt like I was finally catching up to the games that I've played with season 2 and when I was done not only did it make me really yearn for season 3, but I wanted to go back and play the games. Anya Chalotra was great as Yennefer and it was more interesting to see her character deal with situations while not having the use of magic. Although, her character is not always the most trusting of characters and can be quite devious at times, I found myself hating her intentions this season, but loving her character more and more by the end. So everything that we love about The Witcher from action, to drama, to great character development was right there in season 2 and we got to see more of it as the story unfolds especially diving into the story of the elves.

I won't say the season 2 is perfect, I do have a few complaints. It does start out kind of slow but that is to be expected when you are telling a story where all of your characters are on their own separate journeys. However, the action more than makes up for it. And sometimes the pacing can't be slower when you are focusing more on care to

development and really trying to tell their individual stories so it's only really a minor complaint. I did miss the fact that all of our characters don't really come together until the end. The last three episodes is where most of the action really picks up so if you're one of those that finds a little slow going, trust me the payoff is worth it. Let's just say that a certain witch will make an appearance and that's as much of a spoiler I can give you. My biggest complaint is the season was too short and I will have to wait another year for season 3. So, the only fault that I can find with season, it is a little slow in the beginning, but it does pay off by the end, with the bigger character developments compared to season 1. And, we finally get to see Kaer Northern, the headquarters for the Witcher's guild, which definitely makes season 2 better. So the first season was great at setting up the story of The Witcher and how he is connected to Ciri, season 2 allows you to dive more into the mythology so all the minor issues aside, it doesn't affect the story.



Yes, season 2 of The Witcher is fantastic and should be watched immediately. I won't give it a perfect grade, but it's easily a 9 for me and I can't wait to start it over. The producers did a great job of diving more into the overall story that will lead

to the Wild Hunt storyline and Ciri's destiny. You start to see her character come into her own and be the warrior that she will become. Season 2 is no short of great action and really does expand upon the story of The Witcher that we have seen from the books and the video games. And as I've said before, Henry cavill's just perfect for this character. It's a shame that the storyline had to diverge, and you didn't get to see more of Yennefer and Geralt, but that's what season 3 is for. If you loved the first season, then season 2 is even better and will not disappoint. It's almost perfect and they do a great job of telling this part of The Witcher story in eight episodes. But I also have to say that any true Witcher story is not as good unless you have more of Jaskier... Unfortunately, he wasn't in every episode, so we'll see what happens in season 3 for his character. But in the meantime, start watching the new season today, trust me, it's worth watching even if you stay up till 4:00 in the morning to finish it. And now, I must be going because it's time to start watching the season2 over again.



2 WandaVision

By Beth Currier

If you started watching *WandaVision*, you might be asking yourself, "what the hell am I watching?" Honestly, it takes a few episodes before everything really starts to unfold, but it's worth the wait because once it gets going you will be on one exciting ride in the Marvel Universe. *WandaVision* is a show that delves deeper into the Scarlett Witch and her grief due to the aftermath of *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*. The Scarlett Witch is a character that I have always wanted the Marvel Universe to take a closer look at. She is so incredibly powerful and her journey has never been kind to her. Wanda

Maximoff has had to watch her parents and brother die on different occasions. It's not surprising that having to first kill Vision and then have to watch him be murdered by Thanos would be damaging to the psyche. You take all that grief and trauma and mix it with one of the most powerful beings, you're going to get something powerful and worth watching.

SPOILERS AHEAD: From the ending of the first episode, the viewer knows someone else is watching Wanda's sitcom world. At the end of the third episode, it is revealed that Wanda's magical area is surrounded by government agencies. Starting with the fourth episode, the viewer now gets to see what is happening outside Wanda's world as well as inside. You get to see Wanda's powers on a completely other level than they've shown in the Marvel films. You also get the creation of Monica Rambeau's superpowers, which weren't explained in much detail, hopefully she'll be coming and we'll get to see more of her character arc. It's Marvel so it's a safe bet that is their way of setting up her origin story and give us a sample of her character's story in Phase 4.

While most of the viewers' questions are answered by the season finale, the beginning of the show leaves you clawing for answers at the end of first couple of episodes. Wanda and Vision begin as a combination of *I Dream of Jeannie* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, a great homage to the era of 1960s television. Throughout the season each era of sitcom television, from the 60's to present day, is celebrated. The production team did an absolutely incredible job creating the different worlds generated by Wanda's grief. From the cast switching between several acting styles to the costumes and scenery, Disney spared no expense putting this production together.

Darcy Lewis turned out to be one of the best characters and one of my favorites too. Her commentary was what everyone watching was probably thinking and she added an excellent amount of comedic relief. Darcy hasn't been around since *Thor: The Dark World* and she has spent her time getting a doctorate in astrophysics, which means she is now super smart as well as hilarious. She is also a vital key to this story because she is the one that finds the Westview broadcast of Wanda's world. She also helps Monica and Jimmy take down Hayward, which was such a satisfying moment.

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I spent a lot of the show hoping that they weren't really making Wanda the villain so the reveal of Agatha was amazing. Hayward was always a little sketchy. It was no surprise when he turned out to be selfish and evil, but he was also small potatoes. The Agatha reveal put a whole other layer on every interaction that had happened and is a huge reason why a re-watch is a must. For instance, in the moments where Wanda would look at Vision or Fake Pietro and see their dead faces, was that Wanda's subconscious effecting her magic or was it Agatha having a little bit of sadistic fun? Agatha is a definitely a major player of this story and seeing it all again with that information will put a completely new perspective on everything. Fun fact: This show is the first time in the current MCU that anyone has actually called Wanda Maximoff by the name Scarlett Witch. All that to say that *WandaVision* is to Marvel Universe what *The Mandalorian* is to the Star Wars Universe, a brilliant piece of writing and cinematography that leaves you wanting 1,000 more episodes because it is that good.

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3 Wheel of Time: Season 1

By Allison Costa

So often when a beloved book series is turned into a television series or a movie there is a lot of disappointment. Thankfully that is not the case this time!! Robert Jordan poured his heart and soul into the massive series “The Wheel of Time”, and even though he passed away before its completion he left extensive notes for Brandon Sanderson to finish this epic tale. Did you know that there are 2782 characters with specific names and background stories in this series?? Turning this book series into a streaming series is a massive undertaking!

I have been really pleased with the casting, the story-telling, and the extensive efforts in costumes, scenery and videography. It has been several years since I finished the series so perhaps the fact that there has been some time since I read the books and they aren't as fresh in my mind has made me less judgmental and critical, but I am really enjoying this series. I especially love the casting of Moiraine, one of the main Aes Sedai characters played by Rosamund Pike. For those who have not read the books but are huge fantasy fans or love magic and other world story-telling I would still think the series was very intriguing and enjoyable even if they may not understand all of the language and background at first. It's obviously much easier to follow if you are familiar with the books. But overall I am very excited to see where this series is headed in season 2 and hopefully season 3. Fantasy fans worldwide should be pleased at this classic brought to life on the screen.



4 Loki

By Marcus Blake

A show about Marvel's favorite trickster... Yes please! With all the shows that came to Disney + from the Marvel universe, I feel like Loki was the most anticipated because it answers the question, did he really die in The Infinity war movies. Well, this is Marvel with all of its multiverses so of course not and I'm glad that we get another Loki story because it was very anti-climatic the way he died or sort of died. Tom Hiddleston has been perfect as Loki in all the Marvel movies. In fact you still my favorite villain from the first Avengers movie, but with the Loki series we actually got to see a bit of a softer side to his character. He was more sympathetic. The story places Loki among the Time Divergents or TVA who helped keep the flow of time moving correctly. Yes, I know it sounds a lot like Doctor Who and to be a bit confusing, but we get to see many different versions of Loki in this series. All of the Marvel series on Disney + this past year have been good, but I feel like Loki was the best because he's always been a more interesting character. We always like to root for the bad guys so it's easy to kind of root for him even though all he does is bring chaos to everything. the Loki series gave us another glimpse of his character while adding even more interesting characters in the Marvel universe like Owen Wilson's “Mobius” or Sophia De Martino's, “Sylvie.” Maybe the series was a bit of a swan song for a character that we have grown to love and hate for over a decade, but the series was entertaining. Tom Hiddleston was at his best with the character of Loki and it didn't disappoint. If nothing else, it didn't disappoint because we got to see so many different

versions of Loki that all it did was leave us fans wanting more from the Loki Universe!



#5 Hawkeye

By Chloe James

If it's any Avenger that's underrated in my opinion, it's Hawkeye. “But he doesn't even have superpowers, and his main weapons are just lame trick arrows”, you may scoff. You may say that now, but I'll bet many of you guys chose to be a stealth archer class and still took down whole dragons in *Skyrim*. If you guys don't already know, archers are cool, and always have been. Look at Robin Hood, Katniss Everdeen, Legolas (you can't deny his body count), and Merida. And Hawkeye is every bit as bad-ass (if not more so) than all of them. It's just difficult to stand out when you're put next to some of the most powerful fighters in the universe, battling the most overpowered villains. Forgive me if I seem a bit defensive over him, but I've been defending Hawkeye since the first *Avengers*. I'm just happy he finally get's his own spotlight, albeit in the form of a series, not a film. But the way the other MCU shows have been going on Disney+ so far, that's almost a better thing.

The aforementioned series begins with our hero Clint Barton, aka “Hawkeye”, (Jeremy Renner) spending some much needed quality time on Christmas holiday in New York City with his kids. Ok, it actually begins in 2012, when the other main protagonist Kate Bishop (Hailee Steinfeld) witnesses Hawkeye being a badass in the epic final battle of the first *Avengers* film. From that event, Kate's life is forever shaped from her hero worship, as she dedicated herself into the study of fencing, martial arts, lock picking, and most of all—archery. Skip back to present day in which Kate has become an incredibly skilled young

woman...with not much of an outlet put her hero skills to the test. That soon changes when comes across Ronin's (also aka, Hawkeye when he was going through some dark times) suit, and attracts some very bad attention from some local gangsters. Thankfully her hero Clint just happens to be in town to help her clean up the mess.



As complicated as I'm making the plot sound, this is arguably the easiest watch so far in the MCU Disney+ series line up. While that definitely doesn't make it the "best" one by any means, I found myself much more willing to binge this one. Hawkeye just had a much more straightforward story telling style than the others, combined with pretty even pacing, charming dialogue, and just the right balance of funny and heavy moments. Hailee Steinfeld is no rookie to acting, and I'm really thankful for her being cast as Kate Bishop. Hailee was excellent at portraying Kate as cocky, yet unsure, strong, yet innocent. I'm also actually pretty excited that they brought in Kate Bishop to the MCU in general, as her character (debuting in 2005) is a relative newcomer as far as comics are concerned. The series would not been nearly as good if not for her fun dynamic with Jeremy Renner. Watching these two bicker the entire time made it feel like they were already three MCU movies into their career together. As far as Renner's individual performance goes, we can really see and appreciate the evolution in character between Clint Barton's first MCU introduction and now.

While all of the episodes are pretty consistent and solid with no real stand outs, if I had to pick a personal favorite, it would probably be Episode 2, "Hide and Seek." While it was by no means the best in terms of action in the series, it was just so funny that I actually had to pause and rewind a couple of times...not something I was expecting to happen from this series. The later the episodes go, the better the action scenes got, and lovers of archery heroes and trick arrows like me are definitely in for a treat.

Depending on what time of year you watch it, *Hawkeye*, has either a major perk or flaw; and that is it's at its core a Christmas story, dare I say more than people think *Die Hard* is. Not only does it take place during Christmas, but the holiday drives much of the plot of the series, as Clint's main goal is to finish cleaning up Kate's mess in time to spend Christmas with his family. The show also was brimming with subtle homages to many other classic Christmas films and tropes. Anyone watching as it first aired saw it all throughout December, right as that Christmas season hype is getting real. Was that why it was so easy for me to watch?

I just wanted a Christmas show? I really hope that's not the case. The real test will be to watch it anytime not during the holiday season and see if it's just as effective. My theory is the more "Christmassy" a media is, the more you only want to watch it around Christmas time...it just feels wrong any other time of year. While I can't say for sure, I think *Hawkeye* can still be enjoyed even after the holiday season. And if you haven't caught it yet, I recommend you do so. Not only is it a fun, easy to digest watch, but also throws some curveballs that may prove to be pretty important in future MCU installations. Then again, who am I kidding? Everything MCU we've seen so far on Disney+ is setting up for something big. I'm just thankful that my man Hawkeye finally got some of his own spotlight.



6 The Falcon and the Winter Soldier

By Chloe James

Alright fellow nerds, the second Disney+ entry into the MCU is officially done. While WandaVision came out of left-field for many with its unique narrative and surprising twists (much to our delight), *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* gets things back to formula with the MCU action we all know and love. Six months after the events of *Avengers: Endgame*, Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie) hands over the Captain America shield to the Smithsonian Museum, while the rest of the world is suffering from the societal and economic repercussions of The Blip. Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan) is trying to make amends for his actions as the Winter Soldier. A new anti-patriotism group is raising up, The Flag Smashers, led by Karli Morgenthau (Erin Kellyman), who has come in contact with a new recreation of the super soldier serum. This causes the Falcon and Winter Soldier to work together and with old acquaintances like Sharon Carter (Emily VanCamp) and old enemies like Helmut Zemo (Daniel Brühl), while the United States government counteracts by introducing John Walker (Wyatt Russell) as our new Captain America.

The MCU continued their reputation of giving individuals chances. This time, we got the writer and first time showrunner Malcolm Spellman (*Empire*, *Hip Hop Uncovered*) and singular directorial duties to veteran director Kari Skogland (*The Walking Dead*, *The Handmaid's Tale*). The reason why I included Kari Skogland there is because while she has directed some very impressive works, mostly she's only directed one or two episodes of said shows. Disney gave her the entirety of *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* to direct and mold to her vision. Henry Jackson is back as composer (*Captain American: The Winter*

Soldier, Captain America: Civil War) while P.J. Dillon (Game of Thrones, Vikings) serves as cinematographer. I can definitely say that while WandaVision felt like a television show (and rightfully so, as it was a loving homage to tv in general) The Falcon and the Winter Soldier somehow didn't. Not that that's a compliment or complaint. Something about the pacing of this series just didn't feel as episodic as your average Marvel (or otherwise) superhero show. And this is coming from someone who didn't binge it. This show just has this very limbo quality of not quite a show, and not quite a long movie. Again, it's not a major complaint, but they attempted to throw in quite a lot of subplot for such a short series. And you know what? Most of it worked. While I enjoy some well written subplots and side character arcs, too many in too condensed amounts of time can be exhausting, if not annoying. What's more frustrating in a show than the main plot being delayed for 5 different points of diversion, only to have many of those subplots never even go anywhere? But as much as the pacing of The Falcon and the Winter Soldier felt different to me, they somehow managed to address and resolve quite a few issues in the time they were given. I actually did find myself caring about Sam's sister and their struggles to save the family fishing boat, Bucky's interactions with people in his goal for self atonement, and even what Sharon Carter has been doing in this time. I can even say my favorite moment was in episode 5, "Truth", in which Sam and Bucky stop bickering for once and work together to fix Sam's boat. I would like to give a special shout-out to Wyatt Russell in his portrayal of John Walker. It's rare that I encounter a character I want to punch in the face that badly, but also kind of feel really bad for as well. It would have been easy for anyone to go full jerkass with this character and make him completely hateable, but Russell managed to add just enough vulnerability and conflict in his performance to where I only 85% dislike him. Hey that's quite generous given the absolute prat John Walker is written to be.

Another thing about this series that may throw people off is the amount of social commentary it contains. Yes, I'll admit much of the social commentary in the media is forced, irrelevant, and cringey (see my review of The Craft: Legacy.) But in this story, it was absolutely necessary. And also yes, the moral lessons of this story were not delivered subtly. For once, I'm glad they weren't. It would have been willfully ignorant to gloss over the internal struggles of Sam, a black American, as he wonders how the nation can accept anything other than a white, blue-eyed, blonde haired Captain America. I'll save most of my sermon as the show does a much better job conveying this point, but I absolutely love it's driving message: even if you are a sympathetic person, you'll never fully be able to understand someone else's struggles –because you aren't them.

While it didn't fully immerse me as much as WandaVision, The Falcon and the Winter Soldier is a very satisfying second entry into Disney+'s MCU lineup. The one thing it did even better than WandaVision was renew my interest in a post Avengers: Endgame MCU world, hyping me up for the next generation of Avengers and the new challenges that await them.



#7 Cobra Kai: Season 4 by Alex Moore

Where does one draw the line? When does a show finally surpass another show or, even, a connected film franchise? I was in junior high when I began to really watch 'Seinfeld' on a weekly basis. I looked forward to it every week and became convinced that there had never been a sitcom quite like it before (or since). 20 plus years after it went off the air, 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' has left it in the dust, in terms of its longevity, if nothing else, and it is as shocking as it is damning

to acknowledge that. What can I say? Life is full of surprises, even in the world of the big screen and television.

Having said all that, 'Cobra Kai,' a spinoff of "The Karate Kid" franchise, is now set to equal its connected movie cohort, in terms of numbers, if you are counting individual seasons and individual movies, one to one... No, I am NOT including the dreaded reboot from 2010. As some of you know by now, that film, originally, had nothing to do with "The Karate Kid" and was merely restructured as such to cash in on the brand name. Of course, if any of the characters from that movie happen to walk into a future episode of 'Cobra Kai,' I will gladly eat my words with great humility. As always, the new season of 'Cobra Kai' has 10 new installments ready to go and you will easily be able to binge watch them all in a single evening, as the length ranges from around half an hour to 45 minutes per episode. Expectations remain pretty high at this point and that is a testament to the quality of the show up until now, but will that change? Let us find out...

We begin with "Let's Begin." An over-the-shoulder vantage point of a long-haired man at the piano gets a phone call from an old friend. He answers, but does not speak. Meanwhile, Miyagi Do Karate and Eagle Fang Karate are trying to teach together, but are having mixed results. As per usual, Daniel LaRusso (played by Ralph Macchio) and Johnny Lawrence (played by William Zabka) are clashing, figuratively and literally, as are their respective students. With LaRusso, there are the likes of Samantha LaRusso (played by Mary Mouser) and Demetri (played by Gianni DeCenzo); with Lawrence, there are the likes of Miguel Diaz (played by Xolo Mariduena) and Eli "Hawk" Moskowitz (played by Jacob Bertrand), but could there be some shuffling along the way? A revelation reveals who the man of mystery on the piano is and he still knows how to showcase his martial arts skills. It is none other than Terry Silver, played by Thomas Ian Griffith ("Dolly Parton's Christmas on the Square"). John Kreese (played by Martin Kove) has sought him out, yet again, to finish a job that they started years and years ago, but will he be persuaded? Episode 1 is a nice start, but where does it lead?

Episode 2 is entitled "First Learn Stand" and Episode 3 is "Then Learn Fly." I think it is safe to say that these two go together. Amanda LaRusso (played by Courtney Henggeler) pays an unexpected visit to Tory Nichols (played by Peyton List). By now, Tory's role has expanded greatly and even though she is still very rough around the edges, she has garnered plenty of sympathy, in my view, and it is well-deserved, too. Amanda may have stepped over the line as a caring parent for her daughter, Sam, and now the "us versus them" scenario has expanded, as well. I cannot help but feel sorry for Tory as I see her shifting from one tough job to the next, all in the name of providing for her family at home. One thing I had never really noticed before, concerning

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Kreese, is that he often wears all black. Could he secretly be a Johnny Cash fan? Another observation I was having: there is too much exposition going on here, perhaps... Lawrence and LaRusso attempt to learn from each other, but one is clearly trolling the other one. Try and guess which one, if you dare... The sudden development of Kenny (played by Dallas Dupree Young) shows some potential, but it came a bit out of left field, if I may use a baseball analogy here for the son of a baseball player. The continuation of this "mini story" reveals each character seemingly trying to resist their other urges, especially for those of Robby Keene (played by Tanner Buchanan), who has elected to take Kenny under his wing as he tries to turn his outcomes around at school by joining Cobra Kai, but will it work out in a positive way? Lawrence showcases some silly, outlandish teaching tactics that suspend belief a little bit, but then he practices what he preaches as he makes a big move on Miguel's mother, Carmen Diaz (played by Vanessa Rubio). At the conclusion, Terry pulls the hairs back like we have only seen it before and it has become crystal clear that he will soon be on his way to rejoining his old friend at their dojo.

If I were to handpick my personal favorite episode from the new season, it would have to be Episode 4, "Bicephaly." What does that word mean, you ask? Well, I had to look it up, myself. It is defined as "the condition of having two heads." That almost sounds like a creature of Greek or Roman mythology. However, I believe it relates to one particular character here: Miguel. You see, he is at the crux of confusion as he tries to navigate through the teachings of Miyagi Do and Eagle Fang. There is a great, teachable moment when he is first learning to drive, with LaRusso. He saw one way to do things with Lawrence, but now sees there is another way and it seems to be safer. Not only that, the music is different. If you do not know the connection between Peter Cetera and "The Karate Kid" franchise, then the joke about him is only funny on paper, but if you ARE familiar, it is extremely clever from a more contextual point-of-view, as well.

Elsewhere, tension is growing between Tory and Sam and Amanda is caught right in the middle of it. "What is a mother to do?" This episode is full of misdirection and muddled roles between the sides of good and evil and even though hard lines have been blurred, I did not find the confusion to be a problem. Rather, I saw it as a great plot development. I guess there are more two-headed examples here, after all. If you do not know who to root for, do not worry. I think that may have been by design. I hope you like moral ambiguity.

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By the time Episode 5, "Match Point," rolls around, the new season of 'Cobra Kai' has found a nice groove. Every so often, I hear lines that are, verbatim, taken right from the original film franchise. The context changes, at times, but if you are a true fan, you ought to catch most of them. What I find strange AND humorous in this particular story are the references to the "Rocky" franchise, which shared the same director as "The Karate Kid" franchise. You will hear music from one movie that is then used for a montage that is eerily similar to something from another film, but it is all connected and you will see something like this later on in the season, too. I have probably mentioned that Hawk is one of my favorite characters within the series. His story arc has led him to going from Cobra Kai to Eagle Fang and, possibly, to Miyagi Do. His identity is changing, too, though, and sometimes that can be a painful transition. You will see for yourself. At some point, LaRusso and Lawrence are literally at each other's throats, again, and the finish is, again, greatly reminiscent of "Rocky." The key difference is that there is no true hero at the end of it and, hopefully, both sides realize their own futility. Moving on...

As the second half of the season unwinds, the progress regarding the new karate tournament becomes a major focal point. "Kicks Get Chicks" seems like an obvious title, but just wait, there is more to it than you might think. With the new regulations added to the 51st All-Valley, girls are now a much more important staple than before. So, which of the three dojos has the greatest need? Well, the process of changing that is what really shines in this episode. I even heard a movie reference that I never believed I would ever hear, period, let alone in a show like 'Cobra Kai.' Lawrence continues to generate great comedy just by being down with the times when it comes to communication and language. However, the most surprising development is that between Sam and Tory. Amanda is trying to help Tory and it is encroaching on Sam's space, big time. IN another development, Demetri screeches at Hawk to get his mind back on martial arts training and it would seem that he cannot resist joining his third different dojo. I believe that makes him the most

versatile of the entire bunch, which is impressive. What can I say? "It looks like everyone's doing something new..."

"Minefields" zeroes in on the volatile relationship between Cobra Kai newcomer, Kenny, who seems to be home alone a lot and likes to game on PC in his spare time, and Anthony, Daniel LaRusso's son. Surprisingly, it is Anthony who is the bully and Kenny who is the perpetually retreating victim, but that is all about to change. Kenny has been getting special training from Robby and now he is ready to turn things upside-down and he does, almost too well. The truth is finally out on Anthony and his parent are shocked and chagrined. Over at Eagle Fang Karate, Devon Lee (played by Oona O'Brien) becomes the first girl to join the crew and she makes her impact felt almost immediately. It was her power as a speaker that caught Seinsei Lawrence's attention, but now it is her similar interests in action films and kicking butt against all the boys, too. Was it necessary though? I wonder. Now, over at Cobra Kai, there is a rift between Kreese and Silver. There has likely always been a battle for the top spot of leadership between these two, but now Kreese is really trying to exert his position on Terry and it would seem that it is only a matter of time before Mr. Silver fights back, so to speak, but will he?

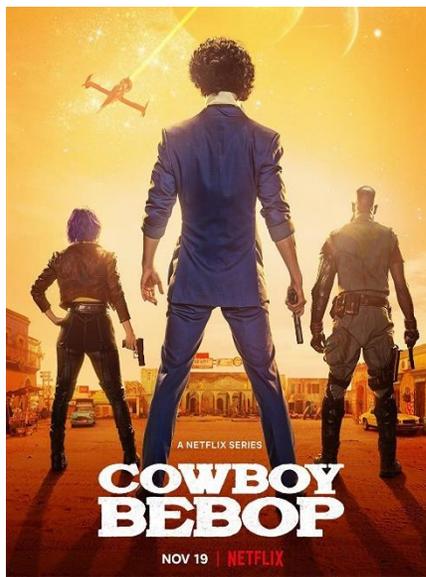
Hey, look who is back for Episode 8, "Party Time!" It is the elusive Raymond "Stingray!" Yes, he reprised by the one and only Paul Walter Hauser. He has paid his debt to society since the big fight during the finale of Season 2 and he wants to remain a Cobra Kai student. However, Kreese does not want him back. Meanwhile, the annual prom has arrived and it did not get much fanfare until now. Everyone has a date, with the biggest attractions coming Sam and Miguel and Robby and Tory. Well, everyone except Hawk. How can this be? While Daniel and his wife are acting out and dealing with their issues with their son, their daughter is acting out against Tory and although it led to some interesting choreography at Stingray's house, she was left "all wet." It closes with Big Bang, involving Terry and Stingray. Who knows why it occurred? Perhaps we will find out...

Much like a couple of episodes from before, the final two here go together: "The Fall" and "The Rise." What befuddled me was that there seemed to be no closure for what transpired at the end of Episode 8. It was as if all was forgotten and now it is time for the finale. Like the films before it, suspension of reality has to be expected to some degree, but how far is too much? The team introductions, stylish and vibrant, are so cheesy that it is hard not to like them and the cameo appearance of Carrie Underwood was a nice and welcomed surprise. The concept of the song entry was good, but execution? Well, not so much, for me. Speaking of execution, the four best fighters, as expected, emerge, mainly from Miyagi Do and Cobra Kai. Too bad for able Fang... and what we saw at the very end of "Party Time" did circle

back and it was a nice payoff. As much as I was enjoying the material, I thought that some of the behavior from the kids was inconsistent, even for them. Somehow, it all added up to some good role switches and a decent summation when all the points had been counted (and deducted in some cases). What I appreciated the most, from a personal standpoint, was what occurred between Johnny and his son, Robby. Forgiveness is a hard thing to earn and practice, at times, but it is ALWAYS worth it. Was I surprised by some of the details in the end? Yes, but I was also slightly disappointed by some details that I was looking for and did NOT see, too.

I find myself going back and forth about my total thoughts on Season 4. In a way, it was just as strong as the previous season, but in a way, it was not. I really liked the direction and the depth of some of the characters that I had not seen before. Their development was important and I was happy with the way a lot of that turned out. However, the power of dramatic payoffs and intense outcomes was sorely lacking. Maybe some of the apparent cuts from story to story between the episodes was what hurt it. Perhaps the series has become too crowded with stories and characters, as well.

Overall, I still liked this season, but I cannot rate it as high as Season 3. I think I said something similar after watching Season 3, come to think of it. None of 'Cobra Kai' has been bad, but the flow needs to be less chaotic and a bit more linear, going forward, if things are going to improve, in my view. Still, I think that the dedicated fans will still be happy enough to keep watching and that is what really matters the most.



#8 Cowboy Bebop: Season 1

by Chloe James

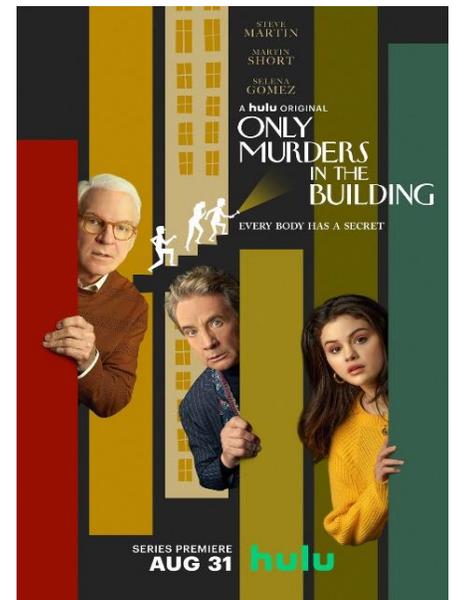
When adapting an animated show into live action, you have to follow an extremely delicate plan. You have to be faithful to the original to a point while also bringing something new and unexpected to the table, all while maintaining the overall feel of the original. Where there are few examples of this actually working, there have been no successful examples stemming from an anime.... Until now.

Cowboy Bebop follows the bounty hunting duo, Spike Spiegel (John Cho) and Jet Black (Mustafa Shakir), as they go flying around the solar system trying to scrounge up some much needed Woolongs and, in Spike's case, some meat for his bell peppers and noodles. In their adventures, they run into some problematic encounters with the Syndicate, including Vicious (Alex Hassell) and his girlfriend Julia (Elena Satine) who also used to be romantically entangled with Spike. They also make new friends in another hired gun Faye Valentine (Daniella Pineda) and the everyone's favorite data dog, the corgi known as Ein. The show was developed by André Nemeč (Life on Mars, October Road) and was largely written by Christopher Yost (Thor: Ragnarok, The Mandalorian). The directorial duties were split by Alex Garcia Lopez (The Witcher, Daredevil) and Michael Katleman (The Fix, Reverie, Smallville).

Cowboy Bebop is an anime that I watch on a fairly regular basis, but when they announced the live action show was actually happening, I stopped my annual to bi-annual binges. I knew I had to watch the live action and I knew that if I had watched the original recently, I'd compare the two a little too much. I was cautiously optimistic to put it lightly. As we got closer and closer to release and they kept showing new images from the show,

I got more and more excited. I have to say it doesn't disappoint, for the most part. The anime was lightning in a bottle. To expect them to recreate that magic is unrealistic. It's a fool's errand. Characters had to be combined. Story had to be changed or created exclusively for the show. But it never stops feeling like Cowboy Bebop, even with its changes.

Ever since the cast list was first announced, the one thing I kept seeing on the internet was complaining about John Cho's age. Yes, Spike Spiegel in the anime is 27 and John Cho is 49, but not once while watching the show did I think that he was too old to play the part. He had the complete physicality expected of Spike. Daniella Pineda as Faye Valentine was another person that was complained about because of her outfit, but she is the embodiment of Faye Valentine in my eyes. The person that really blew me away was Mustafa Shakir. There are moments that you can just close your eyes and listen to him speak and just see the anime. I got chills a couple times when he yelled "SPIKE!" While I certainly anticipate some of the major plot and character changes will piss off the more "purist" fans of the series, I can honestly say for myself Cowboy Bebop is one of the most faithful in spirit (and enjoyable to watch) live action animes I've seen yet.



#9 Only Murders in the Building

By Allison Costa

Having a prolific career in Hollywood truly makes you a legend. When we hear the names of Steve Martin and Martin Short, we both know that these men are not only comedic geniuses but also that they have been able to keep their careers live for decades by being smart in their role choices

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and their personal lives. The new show on Hulu, "Only Murders in the Building" is one of the cleverest new comedy dramas available right now. It's an interesting choice to have Selena Gomez play a main character alongside these Hollywood greats but somehow their chemistry just works! Even though most people might think it kind of creepy for a woman in her late 20's to befriend men in their 70's and have them be her "sleuth" partners, somehow it is totally believable for this fantastical cast.

The storytelling, comedic dialogue and far-fetched plot ideas only lend to the reality of this dynamic trio. In contrast to a lot of the 45minute-1hr dramas available, these episodes are short and succinct and action-packed! They are a great mix of background story, comedy, drama, and poignant moments. The show is both funny and dramatic and sad all at once. Each of the main characters has their own origin story and the flashbacks and slow reveals are one of the best parts about the show. The wacky and diverse characters in the Arconia (the apartment building that is the setting of the show), epitomize people of New York and their vast quirkiness and diversity. If you only have time to watch one new show this fall season, this should be your show! It has a little bit of everything for everyone. It would be a perfect 10 for me except for all of the swearing. I know the "F" word is typical for most New Yorkers, but I know all

still don't love the language. Everything else is Amazing!



#10 Ted Lasso: Season 2 By Marcus Blake

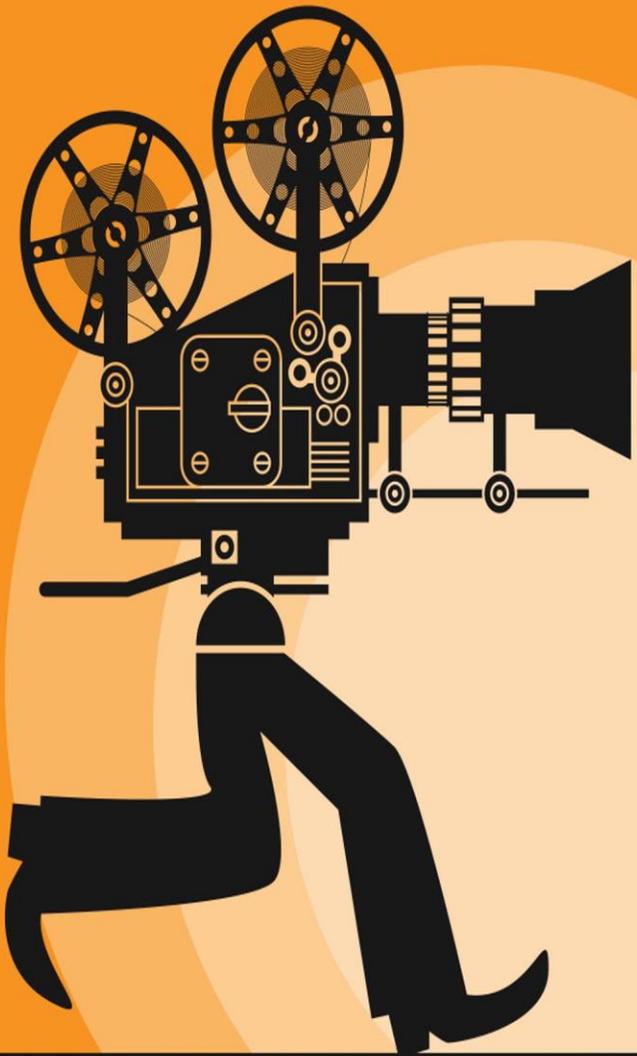
Ted Lasso is one of those feel-good comedies I think completely surprised everybody by being as good as it is. Based off a funny or Die skit where an American football coach takes over a Premier League soccer team, this quickly turned into an inspirational sports story where a coach who thinks "outside the box" can make a team better and more importantly the players, better men. If you really look at the story of Ted Lasso, true coaching is not about coaching the sport, but about coaching players and how a coach makes them better people. It is a universal theme across all sports. I knew halfway through the first season that this was going to be a great show and one that everybody should watch. It's funny, it's heartfelt, it's about rooting for a little guy to succeed, and more importantly, if I can borrow from the overall theme of the show, it's about "believing" in the impossible. Of course, in the first season Ted Lasso is way out of his depth trying to coach a Premier League soccer team and it shows when the team relegated. Season 2 is all about how to overcome that disappointment to get back to the big leagues so to speak. Now season 2 wasn't quite as good as the first season, but it allowed us as an audience to get to

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Film and

TV



What's Happening This Week...



WOODSBORO

THE KILLER IS ON THIS POSTER

SCREAM

IN THEATRES AND  **Dolby Cinema**
JANUARY 14

SPYGLASS
MEDIA GROUP

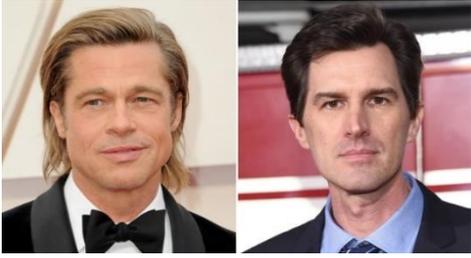
R
STRONG BLOOD
VIOLENCE, LANGUAGE
THROUGHOUT AND SOME
SEXUAL REFERENCES

#ScreamMovie
@ScreamMovies

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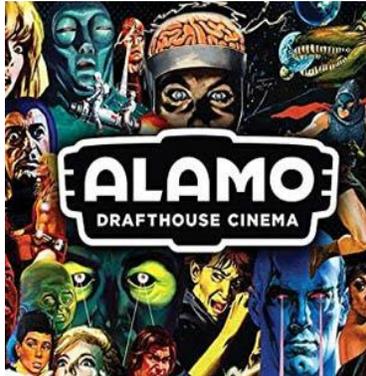


Apple In Homestretch On Brad Pitt Formula One Racing Film With 'Top Gun: Maverick's Joseph Kosinski, Jerry Bruckheimer, Ehren Kruger!



Apple is in exclusive negotiations and will close the first big film package of the new year. That's the highly competitive race to acquire an untitled pitch package that will have **Brad Pitt** playing a racer who comes out of retirement to mentor a younger driver and take his final stab at glory on the track as the younger driver's teammate. *Top Gun: Maverick* director **Joseph Kosinski** will helm, and **Ehren Kruger** is writing the script. *Top Gun's* **Jerry Bruckheimer** is producing alongside Plan B. For Pitt, this marks the second movie package megadeal in the past few months, after Apple **acquired an untitled film** that *Spider-Man* director Jon Watts will direct, with Pitt and George Clooney starring as two lone wolf "fixers" assigned to the same job. On the racing film, sources said the package was in the \$130 million-\$140 million range, before above-the-line

compensation. That puts it in line with several big package deals made last year, the kind that seem perfectly suited to streamers that need content but are still getting up to speed on the development front. The appeal is the star power of Pitt, who won a Supporting Actor Oscar for *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, and there is high anticipation on the Kosinski-directed *Top Gun: Maverick*, which Paramount releases in May.



Deadline has been **chasing the prospect of an Apple deal** since early last month, shortly after the package was taken to the market last weekend and had six major suitors all over it. Those were

Paramount, MGM, Sony and Universal, as well as Netflix and Amazon. Pitt and Kosinski once tried to make a racing movie together called *Go Like Hell*, where he would have played Carroll Shelby in a film vehicle constructed to be *The Right Stuff* on the race track. A version of Shelby's story was told in *Ford V Ferrari*, with Matt Damon playing Shelby and Christian Bale playing Brit driver Ken Miles. Pitt and Kosinski are repped by CAA, which handled the auction. Pitt also is repped by Brillstein Entertainment Partners. *Reported by Deadline.com*

A graphic for "FREE ADVERTISING" with a QR code, social media icons, and the phone number 469-708-9954. The text includes "REACH OVER 12 MILLION CUSTOMERS" and "ASK ME HOW - Scan Code, Text Me, or Call".

Chris Evans To Play Gene Kelly In Untitled Pic Written By John Logan; Rian Johnson Among Producers

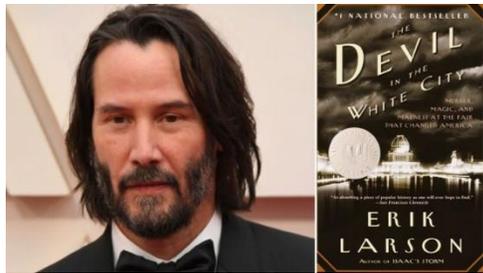


The new year has only just begun, and another high-profile project has hit the market. We are hearing **Chris Evans** is rumored to play **Gene Kelly** in an untitled film, which is based on an

original idea conceived by Evans. The film is about a 12-year-old boy who works on the MGM Lot in 1952 and begins to create an imagined friendship with the legendary movie star Kelly while working on his next film. No studio is attached yet. In addition to starring in the film, Evans also will produce the project alongside Mark Kassen. **Rian Johnson's** and Ram Bergman's T-Street Productions is set to produce alongside three-time Academy Award nominee **John Logan**, who also will write the script. The film marks a reunion for Johnson, Bergman and MCU star Evans, who all worked together on the smash hit *Knives Out*.



Keanu Reeves In Talks To Star In Hulu's Series Adaptation Of 'The Devil In The White City' From Martin Scorsese, Leonardo DiCaprio, Todd Field & Sam Shaw



fair grounds – a palace built to seduce, torture and mutilate young women. The story takes the viewer on a tour of murder, romance and mystery in the gilded age.



The project would mark Reeves' first major U.S. TV role. It marks a significant step forward for the adaptation, which has been in

various stages of development since Leonardo DiCaprio bought the film rights to the book in 2010 and previously set it up as a feature at Paramount with Martin Scorsese to direct. In 2019, Hulu announced that it was developing the project as a big-budget series with DiCaprio and Scorsese exec producing alongside Rick Yorn, Sam Shaw, Jennifer Davisson and Stacey Sher. Todd Field is set to direct the first two episodes of the limited series. Paramount TV Studios is producing alongside ABC Signature and Appian Way. Last year, Stacey Sher told Deadline that *CastleRock* and *Manhattan* creator Sam Shaw was working on the adaptation. It comes as *The Matrix Resurrections* was released at the end of last year. Reeves, whose *Bill & Ted Face The Music* was released in 2020, is also starring in *John Wick: Chapter 4*, which is due for release in 2023 and is voicing a character in *DC League of Super-Pets*. Reported by [Deadline.com](#)

Keanu Reeves is in talks to head to the World's Fair in 1893. Deadline understands that *The Matrix* star is in negotiations to star in Hulu's series adaptation of *The Devil In The White City*, the big-budget take on Erik Larson's 2003 book. *The Devil in the White City* tells the true story of two men, an architect and a serial killer, whose fates were forever linked by The Chicago World's Fair of 1893. It follows Daniel H. Burnham, a brilliant and fastidious architect racing to make his mark on the world and Henry H. Holmes, a handsome and cunning doctor who fashioned his own pharmaceutical "Murder Castle" on

'Space Force' Gets Season 2 Premiere Date On Netflix



dedicated, Mark uproots his family and moves to a remote base in Colorado, where he and a colorful team of scientists and "Spacemen" are tasked by the White House with getting American boots on the moon (again) in a hurry and achieving total space dominance. The seven-episode Season 2 picks up with General Naird and his underdog team having to prove their worth to a new administration while dealing with interpersonal challenges. Will the group come together or fall apart under the pressure? *Space Force* is only human after all. Along with Carell, returning series regulars include John Malkovich, Ben Schwartz, Tawny Newsome, Diana Silvers, Jimmy O. Yang and Don Lake. Season 2 also comes with some creative changes. As previously announced, Norm Hiscock (*Parks & Recreation*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*) has joined Daniels as co-showrunner and production has moved from Los Angeles to Vancouver. Daniels and Hiscock executive

produce with Carell, Howard Klein, Brent Forrester and Ken Kwapis.

Netflix has set a winter premiere date for the return of [Steve Carell](#) and [Greg Daniels](#)' series *Space Force*. Season 2 of the workplace comedy will debut February 18 on the streaming network. Co-created by Carell and Daniels and starring Carell, the series centers on four-star general Mark R. Naird (Carell), a decorated pilot with dreams of running the Air Force, who's thrown for a loop when he finds himself tapped to lead the newly formed sixth branch of the U.S. Armed Forces: *Space Force*. Skeptical but



JANUARY MOVIE REVIEWS



SCREAM (2022) REVIEW BY MARCUS BLAKE

Another Scream movie, sure why not! It's been 25 years since the first one and in a lot of ways the Scream franchise has come full circle. The best way I can describe this movie is that it feels like a 25-year high school reunion where the first hour is exciting and you want to catch up, but then it starts to feel way too familiar, like you've seen this movie before and can't wait for it to end. And then you realize that nothing beats the original! Now I'm not saying this movie is bad, but it feels very familiar. I was a senior in high school when the first one came out and it does very much feel like a high school reunion for me, but as much as I like some aspects of Scream 5, the first one was better and always will be. It's hard to recapture the magic of the first film that started it all. But if there is one thing that this film has going for it, it at least knows what it is and makes fun of reboots, sequels that come too late, or what they affectionately called "re-quals"... sequels that go back to the beginning.

Now I will refrain from spoilers, although, I just dropped a hint about the overall plot. As you can guess, the movie starts out the same way, someone gets a phone call and someone gets stabbed. However, what makes this film a little bit different is it's about bringing the characters to wear it all began and how the characters are connected to original victims. The plot twist with the main character and who she's connected to is

pretty interesting, so I have to praise at least some original thought in the story. I do commend the young cast. Everybody was great and there is somewhat of a connection to them the same way as you might have a connection to the original cast 25 years ago. Also, there is a great deal of humor within this film so that it doesn't take itself so seriously because like I said before Scream 5 knows what kind of film it is. Having Neve Campbell and Courtney Cox come back is obviously cool because it is like a reunion with our two favorite characters. The one performance I praise the most is that of David Arquette. To me he had the most standout performance because he was a blend of the typical goofy character that we've always remembered from the Scream movies to the hardened police officer who's willing to step up and help the younger generation. He's now the fatherly gunslinger type character that steps up to do the right thing and is willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. As I said, this is truly a movie that goes back to the beginning with a story even to the point that the third act plays out in the original house and that's pretty cool.

Unfortunately, I can't say that the movie is a good movie because it feels way too familiar and as I look back 25 years ago when I watched the original, I already saw this movie 25 years ago. Well, I recognize that there's a certain originality of a younger generation connecting to legacy characters and the fact that this movie can make fun of itself it still doesn't make it a very original movie that's worth seeing. I remember being shocked at the original film, but I haven't been shocked again. In a day and age where Hollywood writes stories of a younger generation connecting to a movie franchises' original characters, I guess it's only right that we would do this in the Scream franchise. But if this is the fifth movie that talks about rules on how to survive a slasher movie, then why has nobody learned anything by the 5th film. The characters are stupid enough to get themselves trapped to where the killer can get them. They never use the buddy system when going from place to place. And for some reason nobody takes it seriously that a love interest might be the killer. No, I'm not spoiling anything for you! But we have a franchise that spells out the rules within the film and yet nobody follows them over and over and over. That's not good entertainment. If this was more of a mockumentary or some horror comedy spoof of the film, I could appreciate the movie more. I actually appreciate the Wayans Brothers doing the "Scary Movie" spoof films because in a lot of ways they're more truthful and realistic. Sadly, there isn't anything

new to this movie haven't seen in the rest of the Scream movies. If you're going to take your story back to the original house where it all began then you know what would be original, if you made it like hey Amityville house movie where it's the house that makes the killers do it. Yes, that plot may be stupid, but it would be original! The young cast in this movie are good and they're entertaining, but Scream 5 is just a recycled version of the original film.



I won't say that this is the worst Scream film, that's the third one in the franchise. This one is somewhere in the middle, but again not nearly as good as the original one that came out 1996. There are some funny moments and it's good this movie can make fun of its own story and the other films, but it isn't enough to make it a good movie. Honestly, it shouldn't have been made, but at the same time it's nice to bring the Scream franchise full circle because if you're finally going to end the franchise then going back to the beginning is a good story even if you've seen it all before. It's definitely not the worst movie I've ever seen. It definitely isn't the worst horror movie I've ever seen, but if I want to go back and watch a Scream movie then I would stick with the original, the one film where Wes Craven was truly at his best in this genre. It's not worth seeing in the theaters, wait and rent it at Redbox or watch it on the streaming service if you feel like going back and watching all of the Scream movies. In fact, they should have done what I did with the last Halloween movie, put it on a streaming channel the same day it comes out in theaters so you don't waste any money on kind of a terrible film. But I will end this review with a compliment... Seeing

Sidney Prescott and Gail Weathers with guns ready to take down the killer as if there's some kind of La Femme Nikita Duo, well, that was awesome!

Final Grade: 5 / 10 (Average)



MIX TAPE REVIEW BY DANIELLE BUTLER

This is a feel-good movie set in 1999 in Spokane, WA where twelve-year-old girl, Beverly, lives with her grandma after her teenage parents were killed in a car accident when she was only two years old. Beverly (played by Gemma Brooke Allen) is a good kid, but she doesn't have friends. Her desire to know her parents heightens when she finds a mixtape her parents made that set her on a journey to discover of music and answers about who her parents were. This is a coming-of-age story with plenty of tween angst. The movie covers all the bumps and buries that come along with middle school/ Junior High. It also provides a window in the desire many kids who had parents die when they were young feel. Which is to know if their parents not only love them but like the person they are/ are becoming.

To find out the songs on her parent's her movie Beverly gets help from the snarky sarcastic record store manager named Anti who provides mixtapes even though he only sells vinyls and records. Who knew knight and shining armorer

could be a dude in a record store? Anti also explains to Bev she needs to listen to the songs in order because it is a "message from the maker." "I have to listen to it in order. It's like mix tape law. And if there really is a message, then I need to listen to it the way my parents made it."

Bev's quest to find out more about her parents is spearheaded by a mixtape but quickly gains momentum when she befriends the girl across the street, Ellen played by Audrey Hsiesh, as a trusty sidekick and later the 'scary-punk girl' in her English class, Nicky (played Olga Petsa.) The three girls set off to help Bev uncover more songs and pieces together more of her parent's lives.

If you love 80's rock and roll you will appreciate the musicality, blast-from-the-past notes and lyrics that inspired generations to come. Gemma Brooke Allen brings Beverly Moody to life as a sweet, adorable, as we see her evolution to a playful, slightly rebellious, strong-willed young girl who continues to push her grandma to see her in a different light (other than a goodie-two-shoes.) Gail played by Julie Bowen, Bev's young grandma, is a postal woman who is saving up for Beverly to attend college and is worried about Y2K and the internet collapsing. As a child of the 90s, I can honestly say I don't remember this. Gail (Bowen) reveals throughout the movie more without so much as saying that she loves not only her granddaughter but Beverly's mom as well.

The movie discusses Beverly's family's generations of babies having babies referring to Bev's mom and grandma. There are themes of friendships, how music shapes and transforms you, mothers and daughters, and how change doesn't always have to be scary. I would give this movie an 8. Although it is predictable and at times cheesy, it is an easy watch and the enjoyable light-hearted content and has a sweet message of the love of a parent for their child and visa versa.

Final Grade: 8 / 10 (Good)



MUNICH THE EDGE OF THE WAR REVIEW BY MARCUS BLAKE

What makes a great historical drama? I think it's when you can watch a story and learn something new. And that's what I did when I watched Munich: The Edge of War. Of course, as a history major in college, I knew the story about the peace deal that British prime minister Neville Chamberlain tried to make with Adolf Hitler shortly before World War II started. What I had forgotten were his reasons why and how in the end it was about buying time, so that England could prepare for the war they knew was eventually coming because even then, world leaders knew that Hitler couldn't be trusted. The new movie that comes to Netflix details that story and all the behind-the-scenes espionage that allowed world leaders to find out Hitler's true plan. Some historical dramas fall flat because sometimes documentaries tell a better story, but I didn't feel that way when I came to this film. I was intrigued all the way up to the very end. The story is about the undersecretaries in England and in Germany who did all the hard work to broker the peace deal between England and Germany in 1938. But the film is also an old-school Cold War espionage story with the undersecretaries passing on classified information, especially on the German side to get the truth out about what Hitler was really planning. The film stars George McKay and Jeremy Irons. Jeremy Irons is brilliant as Neville Chamberlain and gives him a much more

sympathetic story than what history tends to remember about a man who appeased the Germans. The film allows us to see a prime minister who knew what was really going on and basically laid out his own bluff to buy England time to prepare for war. Jeremy Irons is great in anything he does and I feel like he was perfect as Neville Chamberlain. But it's really George McKay, who plays an undersecretary by the name of Hugh Legat that shines as well as Jannis Niewohner who plays the German undersecretary Paul Von Hartmann. He is really the unsung hero of this story betraying his government to get out classified information about Germany's true intentions at the risk of his own life. What I loved most about this film is I was on the edge of my seat all the way until the very end to see if this classified information would get to the British. Yes, we know the history.



We know what happened with England at the beginning of World War II and how ill-prepared the country was as a country, even to the point that Neville Chamberlain plays the perfect scapegoat to why England favored appeasement over going to war with Germany. But really, the heart of this story is the spy thriller aspect of the film that will keep an audience watching until the very end. Because history doesn't tell us every little detail on what happened and it's this kind of film that will give us more of an insight to what happened behind the scenes at the very beginning of World War II. It's not a perfect film. One would expect to see more action if the film has an espionage feel to it and as much as I love George McKay as an actor, he was great in 1917, his character who seems very unsure of himself is annoying at times. He doesn't appear to have any kind of a backbone and is an easy pushover, but that's also how the character is supposed to be played. George McKay does a great job at this. Jannis Niewohner has the more stand-out performance, but I do feel at times he overacts in his scenes. It's true that these are minor critiques, but overall, the film is entertaining and will keep you watching until the

end. The other critique I have is that some of the characters are underused. Jessica Brown Findlay is a brilliant actress and audiences will know her from Downton Abbey. I'm glad that she's in this film, but has very little to do of playing George McKay's wife. The purpose of having a brilliant actress in a film is not just have one or two scenes with them, but to fully use their talents because if you're only going to get one or two scenes with an actress then you use a virtual unknown in the role. Never underutilize your talent in a film. That will always be a huge mistake.

Overall "Munich: The Edge of War" is a good film for Netflix. Netflix has a lot of entertaining films that may never get the right audience if it were in the theater, but I feel like this is a great one for the streaming service that, although, may not be a perfect film for the theater, it's one that everybody should check out. It has a great historical setting and makes for a great period piece while keeping audiences entertained with its spy thriller aspect. The performances are good, especially that of Jeremy Irons, who plays Neville Chamberlain. And the film does a great job to give us a different perspective of History that we may not have gotten from the history books about this particular time at the beginning of World War II. So, if you're looking for a good film on Netflix one afternoon, then I highly recommend it.

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)



**HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA:
TRANSFORMANIA
REVIEW BY AULORA COSTA**

Hotel Transylvania 4 is a Family fun movie with comedy to spare! If you're looking for a fun movie night, well, you found it! Everybody knows "Hotel Transylvania", A vampire built a hotel for monsters, and to protect his daughter. Then Johnny comes along, and ruins Drac's life. "Hotel Transylvania 4" is about Drac finally learning to accept Johnny as a part of the family. Drac does make a lot of mistakes in this one though, and poor Johnny does everything he can to impress Drac, and make him happy, including turning into a monster. That's the basic plot for this latest film in the Hotel Transylvania franchise. I liked the film, but it's clear that I's not as good as the first couple of Hotel Transylvania films. Drac's new wife Erika also makes some awesome appearances in this amazing movie, which is cool. She's funny and certainly adds to the comedy in the film. The performances are great as usual, but these films have always had a good voice from cast, starting with Adam Sandler. I may not remember Adam Sandler from Saturday Night Live like my mother does, but I know he's always been known for his various impersonations and never disappoints with them. Adam Sandler delivers a standout performance in this film, but should you expect anything less. Selena Gomez was great as Mavis and I loved Kathryn Hahn as Erika Van Helsing. The one thing I didn't like about this film is you will want to pay attention closely, because the climax goes kind of fast. Mavis also gets roped into this crazy adventure, and her monster friends are in for a surprise. On top of all that, the incredible count Dracula retires and gives the hotel to Mavis and Johnny.

It's a funny film and one worth checking out, but to be honest, there are some scenes that are simply lazy writing on the director's part. It's almost like they were just phoning in the story because it's the 4th movie in the franchise. And, like I mentioned before, there isn't really a climax, which is a problem for any film. I know that sequels are not as good as the first film. It's hard to capture the same magic if the first film is great. Well, maybe the Toy Story Franchise is the one exception because all those films are great and never disappoint. But the filmmakers could have done better with the 4th Hotel Transylvania movie. Perhaps if the film had been longer and they hadn't cut it down to like 90 minutes or so then the story would have been better. However, it's still a good film and a good one to watch with the whole family. You can find "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania" on prime video for free if you're a prime member. So, if you're feeling bored and want a laugh, watch "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania" and get ready to be amazed! It's 7 for me.

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)



HOME TEAM REVIEW BY MARCUS BLAKE

At least once a year, you're bound to find one Adam Sandler made movie on Netflix or at least a movie made by his production company. So, for 2022 we start out with the Adam Sandler produced film, *Home Team* starring Kevin James. It's the story about New Orleans Saints football coach Sean Payton and the year he coached is 12-year-old son's football team because he was suspended from coaching in the NFL. Not having a strong relationship with his son who lived in Texas at the time, Sean Payton shows up one day and by accident becomes an assistant football coach for his son's Peewee football team that his son played on. They're not very good and Sean Payton helps make them a contender, that's the basic story. You can look at it as a form of *The Sandlot* and the *Bad*

News Bears, but for football. It's your typical feel-good football movie where kids are supposed to learn important life lessons. Yes, it's kind of predictable, but does that mean it's not worth watching on Netflix?

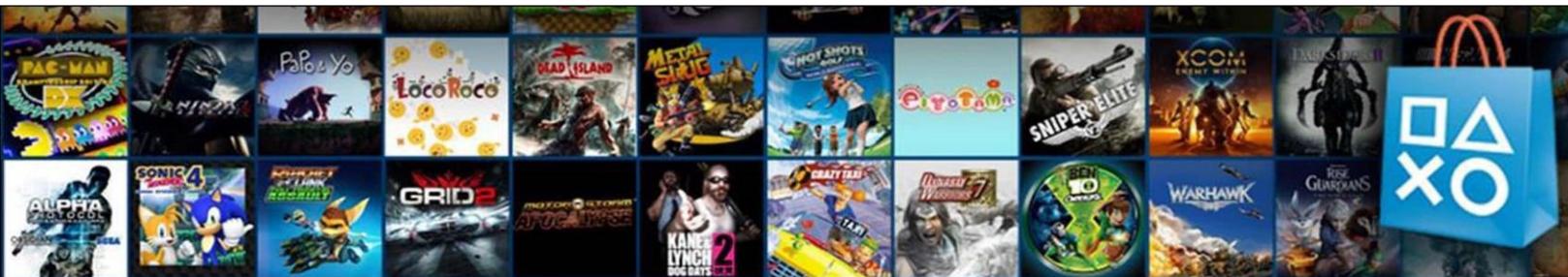
The answer to that question is yes! It's a good movie for Netflix, it's not a movie you would necessarily pay full price movie tickets to go see in the theater, maybe you would pay to see a matinee, but this film is entertaining and if you like the typical Adam Sandler crowd of actors from Kevin James to Rob Schneider and you'll enjoy this film for what it is. I'm not going to tell you that it's the greatest sports movie in the world. It certainly isn't *Hoosiers* or *Rudy*. There have definitely been better football movies, and yes, there's a certain level of predictability with this film that you pretty much know how it's going to end, even if you don't know the story of how Sean Payton coached his son's football team. But it's definitely a cute film to watch and Kevin James does a really great job as Sean Payton even if it's not the typical comedic world that you would normally see Kevin James in. I think I enjoyed Rob Schneider a lot more as the vegan/ hippie stepdad! But Taylor Lautner also shines as the head football coach. I enjoyed this film. I almost felt like I was watching *The Mighty Ducks*, but for football. And what it mostly has going for it is a great football story made into a family-friendly movie. The kids were good in the film too.

However, it's not perfect. You know what's going to happen. This film has all the same tropes that you find in any sports film dealing with underdogs especially if they're kids. Predictability can be the death of any film and I think it makes it even worse for sports movies. We watch sports movies because we want to be inspired. We know what's going to happen in *Rudy*, we watch it anyway because we always root for the underdog. But in a lot of ways, you may feel that you've

already seen this kind of movie before. The other thing that I have to criticize is as much as I like Kevin James in this movie and I know he's basically playing the stoic Sean Payton, what makes him funny wasn't always there in the film and like any great comedian, we expect certain things from them in a movie. It just wasn't always there. The movie also felt a little too short like we really didn't get to see that much of the season, just highlights and you almost need a Friday Nights TV feel to it where you really get to explore a season with a team. Yes, it's hard to do that when you're making a movie, but they could have also spent an extra 15 to 20 minutes showing some of the various games. I know the championship game at the end of the movie is the most important one for the team, but the best part of the story is how they got there. This movie could have benefited from an extra 15 to 20 minutes.

Overall, it's a cute movie for Netflix, but you'll be glad you didn't pay money to see it in the theaters. It's certainly a good one to watch with the whole family, especially if you love football and the kids in the film really do shine. Also, the cameos by other NFL coaches add something extra to this film even if they're not great actors. It may not be the best sports film you've ever seen and it doesn't have to be, but it's a good one for the streaming service and it's a really fun film in the Adam Sandler catalog of films on Netflix. If you're looking for something to watch on Netflix with the family one afternoon or when football season is finally done, *Home Team* is a good choice. There's a lot to like about this film even if you feel like you've seen the story before.

Final Grade: 6 / 10 (Adequate)



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GAMING NEWS



HORIZON

II

FORBIDDEN WEST™

THAT NERD SHOW'S TOP 10 GAMES OF 2021



I. RESIDENT EVIL: VILLAGE (GAME OF THE YEAR)

The Resident Evil franchise is one of the most storied video game franchises in

history. There's no denying it's impact on the gaming world. While not every game in the franchise has been stellar, the horror survival aspects of the game have always been met with great fanfare even to the point that the remakes of Resident Evil 2 and 3 over the last few years have been well received. They even ended up in our top 10 Gaming list the years those games came out. So, it should be no surprise that the best game of 2021 is Resident Evil Village, a direct sequel to Resident Evil 7 Biohazard which had a lot of critical acclaim and was one of our favorite games in 2017. Fans were happy when the developers went back to their horror roots in 2017 and this year's game was even better. It is a creepy, gothic, and suspenseful masterpiece that put gamers into an old-style village that's perfect for a horror survival setting which continued the story of Ethan Winters and one of the most beloved characters in the franchise, Chris

Redfield as Ethan must find his kidnapped daughter Rosemary while completing puzzles and finding his way around in a terrifying village with mutant creatures. For fans of Resident Evil who craved the horror survival aspects of this gaming franchise, Village is one of the best games in the series. It is our game of the year because it has an intense and well-crafted story with fantastic gameplay. It may not have been a great year for games, but there is no doubt that this is one of the best video games in the past 10 years and continues the legacy of the Resident Evil franchise.



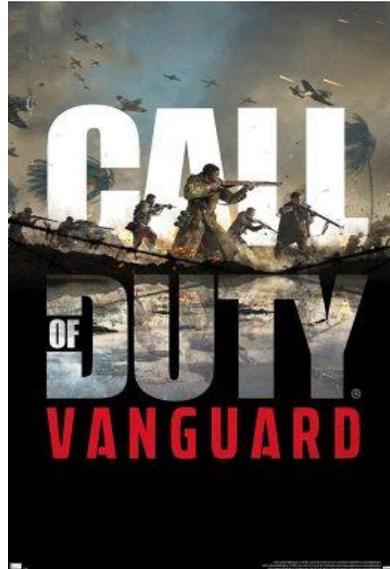


2. HALO: INFINITE (SHOOTER OF THE YEAR)

Halo is another storied gaming franchise as the flagship exclusive of the Xbox Console. On the 20th anniversary of the first Xbox console and Halo 1, we have the sixth title in the franchise with Halo Infinite. Maybe not the best game of the series, but Halo infinite was truly built for the next generation Xbox console and its glorious. Even better it was a “day one” release on the Xbox Game Pass. The game had a great feel to it, fantastic gameplay and it brought Halo back to its roots with the Master Chief making fans feel reminiscent of the first Halo Game through the different landscapes and terrain have you had to play through during the campaign.



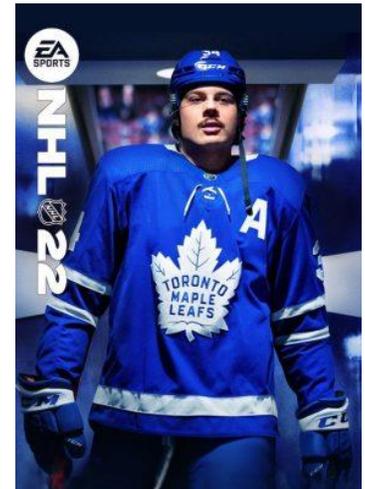
Like most video games it got delayed during the pandemic, we wondered if this game would be worth playing, but Xbox delivered a hit as usual. The multiplayer may be less than desired by fans, but the campaign is worth playing and it reminds gamers why Halo is still one of the greatest first-person shooter franchises in gaming history. That’s why it turned out to be our “Shooter of the Year.” After all you can never go wrong with Halo and the Master Chief.



3. CALL OF DUTY: VANGUARD

We have always had our problems with the Call of Duty franchise since the Modern Warfare trilogy. It seemed that Activision was focus on what made Call of Duty great again. They finally returned to the World War II setting in 2017 and it was a great game compared to what we had played in years past, but Call of Duty Vanguard brought fans of the franchise a world war II story that had never been played before by putting us back into a setting had always made the franchise great. We didn’t exactly have a lot of high hopes for this game, but we’re completely surprised how great the campaign is as a special forces unit compromising of soldiers from different countries who hunt down the remaining Nazis that are trying to escape the end of the war only to tease us with their future plans for the rise of the Fourth Reich. Plus, this could give us a proper Cold War series

as the characters who were introduced in this game hunt down Nazis hiding after World War II. The game brought fans back to familiar warfronts in Europe, Russia, Africa, and the Pacific. It felt reminiscent of Call of Duty 2 which is considered the greatest Call of duty game. Vanguard made fans remember why we love the Call of Duty franchise to begin with. And the zombie mode wasn’t too bad either. Vanguard proved that Call of Duty is always at its best when it sticks with a campaign in a historical war setting. It turned out to be one of the best games of the year with tremendous replay value. That’s something we can’t about the last few Call of Duty Games.



4. NHL 22 (SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR)

For the first time ever, NHL finally won our Sports Game of the Year. In almost 30 years we have gotten the best and most realistic hockey game ever by EA. It was the last of their sports franchise to go to the frostbite engine, but the mass improvements on the realistic gameplay made this year’s version of NHL a lot more fun to play and sometimes more infuriating, which is a good thing because you shouldn’t let the video game do everything for you. It was also the first version of NHL truly made for the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X... It looks incredibly realistic and for fans of hockey games, it

will be the best hockey game you've ever played. It's as perfect as you can get with a hockey game. It took a while for this game to catch up to Madden and FIFA when it comes to Great franchise modes, but it was worth it. Plus, it's the one sports game that had the most improvements this year whereas everything else was virtually playing the same version as the year before.



5. ANIMAL CROSSINGS: "NEW HORIZONS" HAPPY HOME PARADISE

Animal Crossings is one of the best Nintendo games created. I truly great game made for the Nintendo switch. Is it any wonder that even the DLC of Animal Crossing New Horizons, would end up in our top 10 video games of the year. Happy Home Paradise is a great addition for fans of this series it is certainly worth the purchase. Sometimes the DLC of a story franchise ends up being better than most of the games created every year. This game is a must-have for the Nintendo switch.



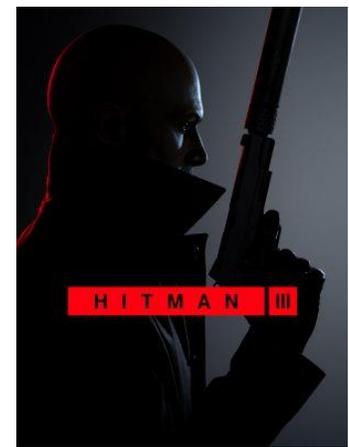
6. MASS EFFECT: LENDENDAY EDITION

Normally we don't talk that much about remastered versions of great games. and they generally don't end up in our top 10 games of the year, but the Mass Effect franchise is different. The Legendary Edition which contains a remastered HD version of the first three Mass Effect games is glorious and a must have for the next generation of consoles. Gameplay with enhanced graphics are far superior and if you love the first three Mass Effect games then you should definitely have this among your collection because it will certainly make you want to go back and play those first three games. It is truly one of the best game releases of 2021.



7. FORZA HORIZON 5

Another sequel to a storied Xbox franchise, we got Forza Horizon5 released this year which was also another "day one" release on Xbox's Game Pass. Forza Horizon 5 was developed for the new Xbox and you can certainly see the improvements made in this game from Forza Horizon 4. This game took racing fans to the streets of Mexico as well as the jungles for off-road racing. Everything you love about the Forza games was put into this one. The driving is smooth, and the look is fantastic in 4K or 8k. It's one of the best games to play on the Xbox Series X.



8. HITMAN 3

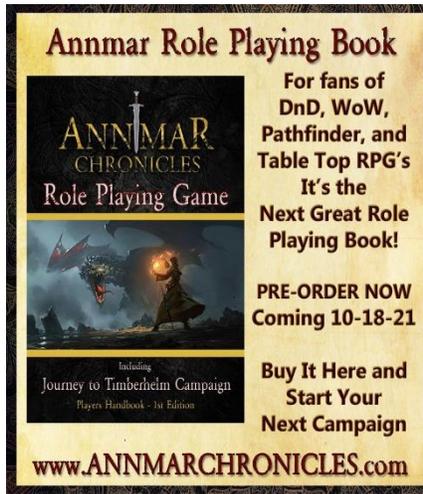
The revival of the Hitman Series a few years ago met with critical acclaim. A beloved video game franchise made for the new generation of consoles in all of its HD and 4K Glory is a no-brainer. Some games just have to be revived for each generation of consoles and Hitman is one of them. Hitman 3 is the next sequel of the series which took Agent 47 to new locations and new missions. Just as good as the previous two games they made, Its, obvious that it would be one of the best games of the year and if you're a fan of the series then you can never get tired of playing more missions in the Hitman series. The gameplay was so good that it makes you feel like you're actually there with Agent 47.





9. ALIENS: FIRETEAM ELITE (MULTIPLAYER OF THE YEAR)

Zombie games are always fun, that's why we love the mode in Call of Duty and it's great for "squad" play, but what can be better than a zombie survival game, how about Aliens? What if you had to be a Colonial Marine as in the movie Aliens and then survive alien hordes that also crawl on the ceiling and spit acid. Yes, Aliens Fireteam Elite was released this year and it's on Game Pass. It's our favorite multiplayer of the year. Of course, we love surviving zombie hordes, but as fans of the Alien's movies, sometimes it's a little bit better to have to survive an alien infestation. It's truly an out of this world game and great for any gaming squad. It may even be better than playing zombies in Call of Duty or at least just as good. So, get your four-person squad together and start playing because it's worth it and it just might make you feel like you are a Colonial Marine in James Cameron's Aliens movie.



10. DEATHLOOP

Deathloop is one of the most unique games created in the last decade. As first-person shooter where you have to survive a Time loop and doesn't really have an autosave feature so if you don't complete a level, you'll have to start all the way at the beginning as if you're playing an old school game. Plus, you get to play as two different characters, the one who's hunting down the main protagonist and trying to disrupt the time loop or the one trying to survive. Unfortunately, this game doesn't rank any higher on our list because it was only made for the PlayStation 5 so only a limited number of gamers really got to play it. This year saw two different games where you had to go back to the beginning if you didn't survive. One is "Returnal" and it was interesting, but the other game, "Deathloop" had a better story, and definitely has the better game to play. Hopefully more gamers will get a chance to play it as it goes to the PlayStation 4 and the Xbox later in 2022, but it does round out our top 10 games the year for its unique concept and gameplay. And any game that makes you feel like you're paying a first-person shooter on the Nintendo 64 has got to be a pretty good game and worth playing.





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HALO INFINITE



DECEMBER 8, 2021

Microsoft buys Activision Blizzard for \$68.7 billion: Takes Control of the “CALL OF DUTY” Franchise!



With three billion people actively playing games today and fueled by a new generation steeped in the joys of interactive entertainment, gaming is now the largest and fastest-growing form of entertainment. Today, Microsoft Corp. (Nasdaq: MSFT) announced plans to acquire Activision Blizzard Inc. (Nasdaq: ATVI), a leader in game development and interactive entertainment content publisher. This acquisition will accelerate the growth in Microsoft’s gaming business across mobile, PC, console and cloud and will provide building blocks for the metaverse. Microsoft will acquire Activision Blizzard for \$95.00 per share, in an all-cash transaction valued at \$68.7 billion, inclusive of Activision Blizzard’s net cash. When the transaction closes, Microsoft will become the world’s third-largest gaming company by revenue, behind Tencent and Sony. The planned acquisition includes iconic franchises from the Activision, Blizzard and King studios like

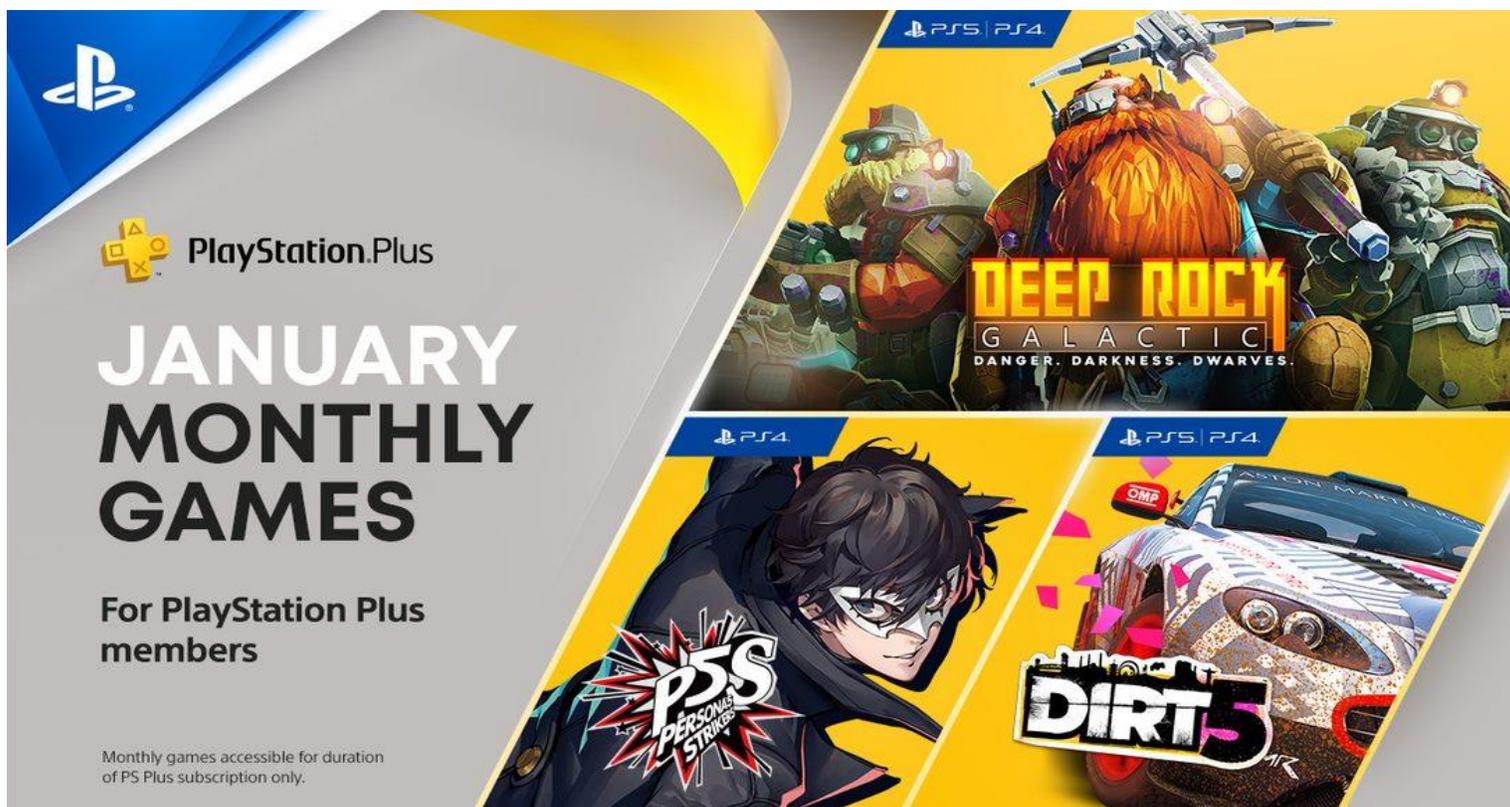
“Warcraft,” “Diablo,” “Overwatch,” “Call of Duty” and “Candy Crush,” in addition to global eSports activities through Major League Gaming. The company has studios around the world with nearly 10,000 employees.

Bobby Kotick will continue to serve as CEO of Activision Blizzard, and he and his team will maintain their focus on driving efforts to further strengthen the company’s culture and accelerate business growth. Once the deal closes, the Activision Blizzard business will report to Phil Spencer, CEO, Microsoft Gaming. “Gaming is the most dynamic and exciting category in entertainment across all platforms today and will play a key role in the development of metaverse platforms,” said Satya Nadella, chairman and CEO, Microsoft. “We’re investing deeply in world-class content, community and the cloud to usher in a new era of gaming that puts players and creators first and makes gaming safe, inclusive and accessible to all.” “Players everywhere love

Activision Blizzard games, and we believe the creative teams have their best work in front of them,” said Phil Spencer, CEO, Microsoft Gaming. “Together we will build a future where people can play the games they want, virtually anywhere they want.”

“For more than 30 years our incredibly talented teams have created some of the most successful games,” said Bobby Kotick, CEO, Activision Blizzard. “The combination of Activision Blizzard’s world-class talent and extraordinary franchises with Microsoft’s technology, distribution, access to talent, ambitious vision and shared commitment to gaming and inclusion will help ensure our continued success in an increasingly competitive industry.” Mobile is the largest segment in gaming, with nearly 95% of all players globally enjoying games on mobile. Through great teams and great technology, Microsoft and Activision Blizzard will empower players to enjoy the most-immersive franchises, like “Halo” and “Warcraft,” virtually anywhere they want.

PLAYSTATION PLUS GAMES FOR JANUARY 2022



Let's start the New Year's celebrations off early with the announcement of the trio of PlayStation Plus games you'll be able to enjoy on Tuesday, January 4. Available to add to your game library until Tuesday, February 1 are Persona 5 Strikers, Dirt 5 and Deep Rock Galactic. Let's take a closer look at each.



Persona 5 Strikers | PS4

Jump into the stylish world of Persona in an all-new story featuring the Phantom Thieves as they embark on an epic road trip across Japan. A summer vacation with close friends takes a sudden turn as a distorted reality emerges, thrusting you in an epic tale as you strike back against the

corruption overtaking cities. Dynamically control your team during explosive action combat as you reveal the truth and redeem the hearts of those imprisoned at the centre of the crisis.



Dirt 5 | PS4 & PS5

Conquer stunning global routes and drive an iconic roster of cars in an amplified off-road racing experience. Let loose in the boldest off-road racing experience ever, with a star-studded Career, four-player split-screen, online multiplayer*, Playgrounds creator mode and more. Blaze a trail on global tracks, covering gravel, ice, snow and sand, with cars ranging from rally icons to trucks, to GT heroes. Race on over 70 routes across 10

global locations – from New York's frozen East River, to the glimmer of Norway's Northern Lights.



Deep Rock Galactic | PS4 & PS5

Deep Rock Galactic is a 1-4 player* co-op FPS featuring badass space Dwarves, 100% destructible environments, procedurally-generated caves, and endless hordes of alien monsters. Work together as a team to dig, explore, and fight your way through a massive cave system filled with hordes of deadly enemies and valuable resources. You will need to rely on your teammates if you want to survive the most hostile cave systems in the galaxy.



The

N E E R D

Opinion

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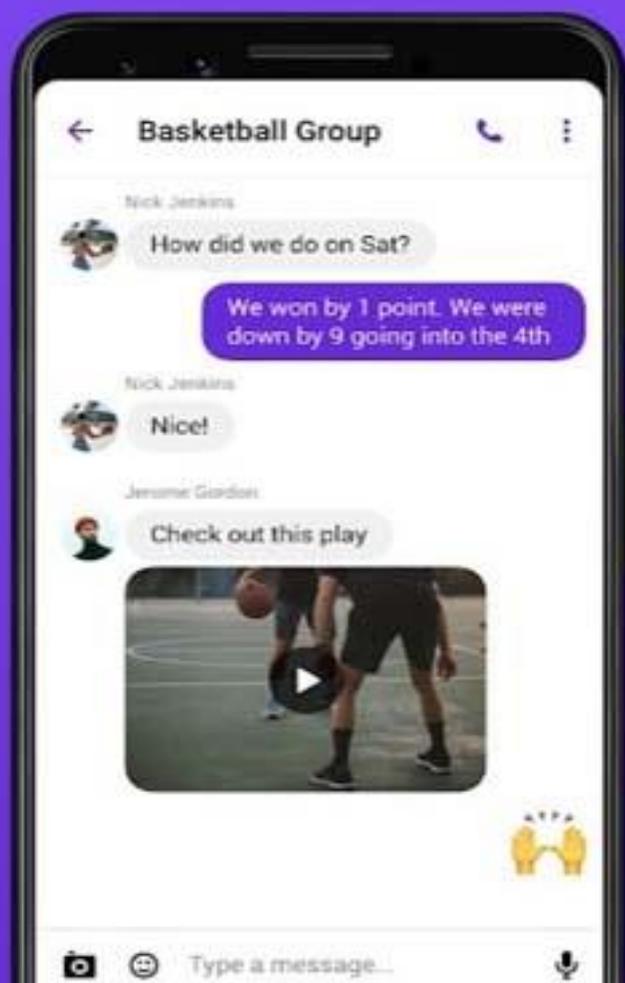
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Last Night In Soho: Edgar Wright's Greatest Film, Or Merely His Latest?

By Chloe James



Coming out of the theaters from seeing *Last Night In Soho* last November, I was certain: this was Edgar Wright's greatest film to date. Quite a bold statement, so know, coming from a cinefile and long established fangirl of the director such as myself. Yet there I was, certain as anything that this was not only his best film, but my vote for 2021's best movie of the year. One exhausting holiday season later, and I'm slightly doubting myself. Was I just caught in the high of seeing a much anticipated (and a bit delayed in release due to COVID-19) film by one of my favorite directors? Sometimes seeing the "newest" of anything can have that blinding effect in one's judgment as emotions are high, memories are fresh, and that popcorn and candy are hitting your bloodstream juuuust right to kick off those happy brain juices.

Last Night In Soho follows Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie), a young fashion student, and ardent enthusiasts for anything from the 1960's era. Eloise additionally is "gifted" in another way: she can see things other people can't, including visions of the past, and even a few ghosts. When she is given the opportunity to study fashion in the posh Soho neighborhood in London, Eloise

begins to see vivid visions of the past in her new flat. At first, she's absolutely enchanted by them, as the visions center around Sandie (Anya-Taylor Joy) a beautiful aspiring singer Pershing her stardom in the 1960s. However, Eloise eventually learns that Sandie's life, as well as the entire era she once idolized, were far less glamorous than they originally seemed.

What was it about this film that made me immediately latch on to it so? Visually, it was absolutely stunning. Everything from the lighting, the juxtaposition of the past and present, meaningful framing, and even the brightly bold color palette had a positively dizzying effect on the senses. It's not only beautiful to look at, but practically a sensory overload, giving a sense of confusion and uneasiness. Perhaps in a happier film, this may have been detrimental, but for this film's intended mood, it's perfect.

Not only are the visuals a lot to take in, but the sounds in this film are every bit as important. Musical cues are one of the driving factors of the story here, as we're treated (very loudly I might add) to veritable "best of" the music of the 1960's. Perhaps it's my bias showing, because like Eloise, I've always worshiped music from this era. Using music in this way is no new trick for Wright, however, as several of his films notably do the same (*Scott Pilgrim Vs The World* and *Baby Driver* being the most glaring examples.) Is using great music to flavor your movie just a cheap way of making it seem like it's good? Song selection per scene is still extremely important, yet no easy task. Also, editing the timing of the music to match the "beats" of your scene can take an expert eye and ear.

Is it perhaps the horror element that draws me to this film? Again, Wright is no stranger to the genre, as both psychological and supernatural horror elements are heavy in his "Cornetto Trilogy" films. But unlike the horror in those, the disturbing parts in *Last Night in Soho* are taken 100% seriously — and by the end I was really feeling them. I think here is where some could find criticism with this film. Wright lingers almost overly long on the more unsettling elements of the movie, perhaps to the point where some would feel like he is overselling it. This is one movie I find very different for the director, as I would often describe Wright's preferred

directing style as ADHD in the best way possible. Maybe I wouldn't like it for everything, but I appreciated Wright taking the extra time with some scenes in this one to really drive in the point. It's extremely important that by the end we experience and empathize with what Eloise is going through.



I think in the end, I'm still going to maintain that *Last Night in Soho* is still the best Edgar Wright film to date, but also concede that part of it may be due to personal taste. While he's great at writing strong female characters, this is his first film truly from a "female" perspective. I hate to bring in feminism or even harder to discuss topics into this, but this film really does a brilliant job of illustrating how scary it can be to be a woman in a world of hidden predatory men. I'm not saying women should all feel scared about this, but most of us have felt this kind of

scared at some point and it's absolutely valid. Something else I relate far too much about this is my idolization of the past (something I address nearly every time I review a period piece.) Eloise learns that no time period was ideal, even if superficial things like music and fashion are better. Much like the main character, I get stuck pining a time and place that isn't my own, and my present tends to suffer for it.

Whether or not *Last Night in Soho* is the best Edgar Wright film is purely objective, of course. But nevertheless, it's undeniably another great entry in his repertoire of wildly entertaining films. Definitely worth a watch if you're looking for a unique suspense-horror, or just love great older music.

It's Great to Have **SAVE BY THE BELL** Back, Especially Season 2!

By Allison Costa

to say that I might even (gasp) like this series better than the original! Of course it helps that all of our favorite characters from the original (besides Screech RIP) is either still a regular on the series or makes guest appearances.

Keeping Mario Lopez, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, and Elizabeth Berkeley on the show and having them poke fun at their characters and the early series has been classic!



The new class of students are excellent as well. They have made sure to stay on top of current issues facing teenagers while keeping it light and funny as well as somehow

poignant. Covering all issues from racism, to class inequality to transgender in a way that resonates with the next generation but also stays away from all of the drama and anger by making so many situations fantastical.

It is refreshing to see a high school comedy back on streaming that doesn't take itself too seriously while still managing to cover serious issues.

Of course for all of us that grew up with Bayside the blast from the past is great! But I think even younger kids today would enjoy some of the comedy these kids get themselves into. And as a mom, I am also grateful it isn't crazy full of foul language and sex like so many other shows that target teenage years.

It's one of the best Peacock Originals in my book!



The remake of Saved by the Bell might be one of the most arguably best satirical comedies for those of us who grew up with the original. As the second season just finished I have





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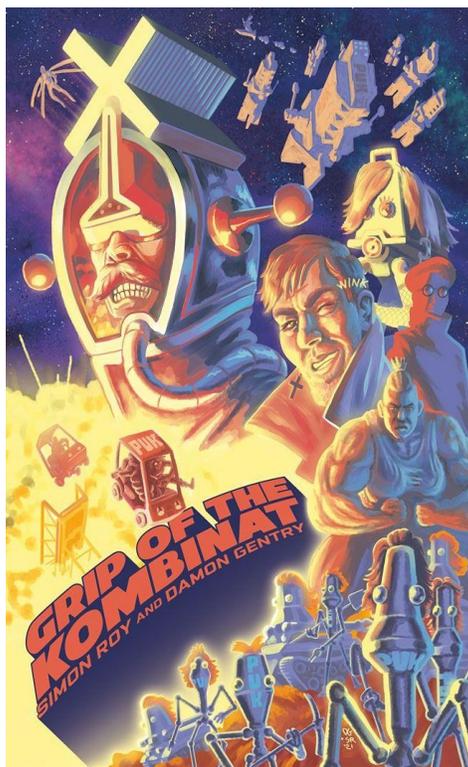
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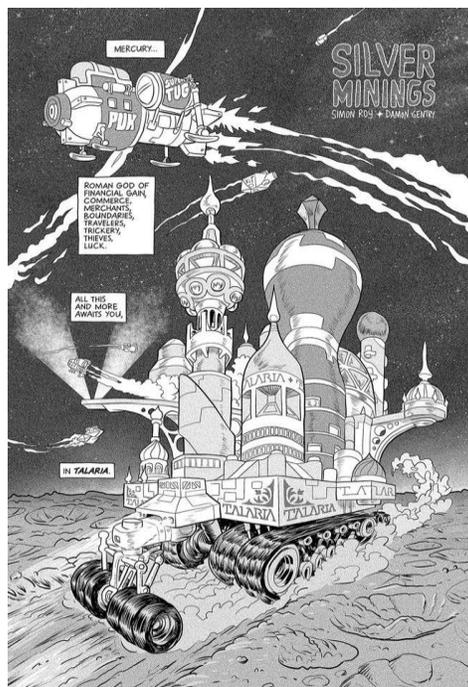
DAMON GENTRY & SIMON ROY TEAM UP TO BRING PULPY SCI-FI ADVENTURE THIS JUNE IN ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL GRIP OF "THE KOMBINAT"



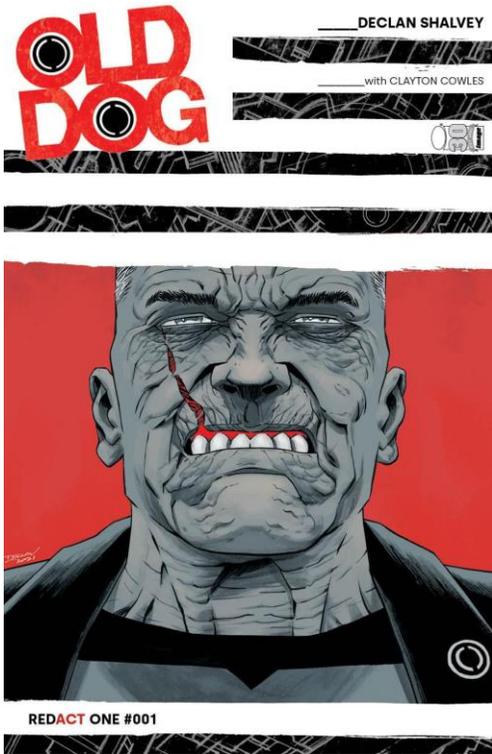
Fan-favorite creators Simon Roy (*Prophet, Habitat, First Knife*) and Damon Gentry (*Sabertooth Swordsman, Vinegar Teeth*) team up for a new science-fiction adventure in the upcoming *Grip of the Kombinat*. This original graphic novel will hit shelves in June from Image Comics. "This book was a real labor of love for Damon and me—we wrote the first story WAY back in 2015 over a rowdy weekend. Then, after much hemming and hawing, we decided to draw it together, between the two of us, in 2017," said Roy. "Once the first piece of the puzzle was complete, we would meet up each year for weekend-long benders and write/thumbail a few stories at a time. A process that was bad for the liver and lungs, but magic on the page." In *Grip of the Kombinat*, two megacorporations wage an eternal tug-of-war for the ruins of our future solar system. Pulp action, escalating unintended consequences, wry satire, and pure tomfoolery combine into seven potent chapters of comics entertainment. Gentry added: "*Grip of the Kombinat* is a

love letter to the big beautiful wide world of science fiction. We dug deep on all our favorite genre fiction, ripped out their guts and wet-slapped them together to create a terrifying Frankenstein (the doctor, not the monster)."

Grip of the Kombinat is best described as an unholy lovechild of Verhoeven and Asimov and a must-read for science fiction fans. *Grip of the Kombinat* (ISBN: 978-1-5343-2301-8, Diamond Code FEB220087) will be available on Wednesday, June 8 and in bookstores on Tuesday, June 14. It can be pre-ordered at your local comic book shop or independent bookstore or via Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-a-Million, and Indigo. *Grip of the Kombinat* will also be available for purchase across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



UPCOMING ACTION-PACKED ESPIONAGE SERIES OLD DOG KICKS OFF IN JUNE



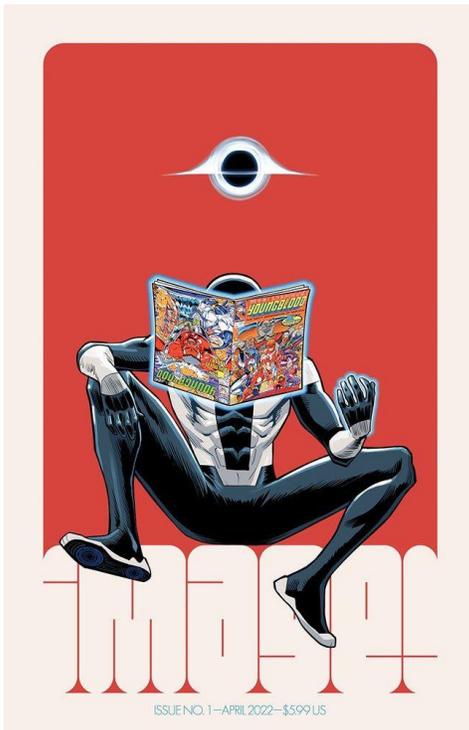
Accomplished, innovative creator Declan Shalvey (*Moon Knight*, *X-Men Unlimited*, *Injection and Time Before Time*) will kick off an all-new, ongoing series in, *Old Dog*. This action-packed spy thriller will launch from Image Comics in June. *Old Dog* follows Jack Lynch, a once-promising CIA operative. On the eve of retirement, looking back at a failed career he is tasked with one final mission ...that goes horribly wrong. He wakes years later to a changed world with even deeper changes within him. When a shadowy group offers Lynch a second chance for a life of adventure, he finds himself paired with the last person he could ever imagine. In order to adjust, this old dog will have to learn some new tricks... "I'm so unbelievably excited to let *Old Dog* off its leash. For a long time I've been itching to develop my own solo series from scratch; one that I write, draw, colour, design and it feels great to finally be doing so with

Clayton Cowles as my right-hand man on letters," said Shalvey. "This feels like the next creative step for me, one which is both terrifying and exhilarating. Anyone who was a fan of the kinetic, done-in-one storytelling I employed on *Moon Knight* will enjoy this series. It's full of mysteries, conspiracies and every now and then, someone gets a serious beating, often the main character." Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips' *Sleeper* meets *The Americans* in this Jason Bourne-esque adventure. *Old Dog #1* will be available in June at [comic book shops](#) in print format and in digital format across many platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

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“IMAGE COMICS” CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY BY SPOTLIGHTING EXCLUSIVE NEW STORYTELLING IN UPCOMING IMAGE! ANTHOLOGY



Celebrate the 30th anniversary of Image Comics with the upcoming anthology series *Image!* kicking off in April. This 12-issue series will treat

readers to all-new stories from some of the biggest and best names in comics.

Edited by Image Comics' Publisher **Eric Stephenson** and featuring a combination of ongoing serials and standalone short stories, *Image!* will be the cannot-miss event of the year. This first issue will showcase a combination of ongoing serials and standalone short stories, including the first chapters of two 12-part stories, “The Blizzard” by **Geoff Johns** and **Andrea Mutti**, as well as the opening installments of a trio of three-parters: “Gospel for a New Century” by **Wyatt Kennedy** and **Luana Vecchio**, “Hopeless” by **Mirka Andolfo**, and “Shift” by **Kyle Higgins** and **Daniele Di Nicuolo**. Readers will also be treated to an exclusive first look at **Declan Shalvey**'s upcoming *Old Dog* series, an original ongoing comic strip by **Skottie Young**, and more. “There's no better testament to what Image is all about than the incredible talent we work with, so an anthology featuring an amazing assortment of those artists, writers, colorists, and

letterers seemed like a no-brainer,” said Stephenson. “We literally would not exist without the creators we publish, and *Image!* is a celebration of their unbridled creativity.” The series will also boast the talents of such comics powerhouses as, **Rick Remender**, **Farel Dalrymple**, **Brenden Fletcher**, **W. Maxwell Prince**, **Martín Morazzo**, **Robert Kirkman**, **Cory Walker**, **Ed Brubaker**, **Sean Phillips**, **Tim Seeley**, **Stefano Caselli**, **Bryan Lee O'Malley**, **Leslie Hung**, **Joe Casey**, **Nathan Fox**, **Zoe Thorogood**, **Maria Lovett**, **Jay Faerber**, **Matt Fraction**, **Fábio Moon**, **Gabriel Bá**, **Kelly Sue DeConnick**, **Emma Ríos**, **James Tynion IV**, **Kieron Gillen**, **Steve Lieber**, and many more. *Image! #1* ([Diamond Code FEB220047](#)) will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, April 13. *Image! #1* will also be available for purchase across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

The advertisement features a red background. On the left, there are several black arrows pointing towards a central black heart. On the right, there are several pink hearts and a black bow with arrows. In the center, there is a black box with the text "ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE CINEMA" in white. Below the box, there is a collage of various movie posters and characters, including a dinosaur and a man's face.

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Rock icon Meat Loaf dies aged 74



Rock icon Meat Loaf has died. The legendary singer-and-actor sadly passed away at the age of 74 with his wife Deborah by his side. A statement on his official Facebook page read: "Our hearts are broken to announce that the incomparable Meat Loaf passed away tonight with his wife Deborah by his side. Daughters Pearl and Amanda and close friends have been with him throughout the last 24 hours.

"His amazing career spanned 6 decades that saw him sell over 100 Million albums worldwide and star in over 65 movies, including "Fight Club", "Focus", "Rocky Horror Picture Show" and "Wayne's World." "Bat Out of Hell" remains one of the top 10 selling albums of all time. "We know how much he meant to so many of you and we truly appreciate all of the love and support as we move through this time of grief in losing such an inspiring artist and beautiful man. "We thank you for your understanding of our need for privacy at this time. From his heart to your souls...don't ever stop rocking! (sic)" Born Michael Lee Aday, the iconic star is best known for the Grammy-winning 'Bat Out Of Hell' trilogy, one of the best-selling albums of all time. Meat created magic with the late Jim Steinman - who died in April 2021 - who wrote and produced 'Bat Out Of Hell'. Steinman also worked on the book, music and lyrics for the 'Bat Out of Hell: The Musical'. Their 1993 album 'Bat Out of Hell II: Back Into Hell' featured the mega-hit 'I'd Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)', which spent five weeks at No1 in the US. Meat's career began in the 1960s, when he founded the band Meat Loaf Soul. As well as a dazzling music career, the larger-than-life entertainer was famous for his role as Eddie in 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show'. Meat has struggled with ill health in recent years and was

previously left unable to stand up for longer than five minutes due to a nerve issue in his back - meaning he was forced to spend most of the time sat down. He explained at the time: "I don't do drugs. I don't drink. I have a pinched nerve in my back and it feels like when I stand up to walk, that Norman Bates from Psycho is stabbing me in the back. And it hurts like hell." When asked if he is on medication, he replied: "No, if you get on medication then you can't speak. And my assistant said 'don't talk about this'. But I went to a doctor the other night and he told me my tongue was swollen. And I have no idea why. It's causing me to talk slower than normal.



"Because when I saw myself on TV I freaked out. I looked like I was drunk. "I'm OK, it's just a pinched nerve. I can't stand up for longer than five minutes." He also collapsed during performances in 2003, 2011 and 2016. A cause of death is not known at this time. The company of Jim Steinman's Bat Out of Hell the Musical here in the UK is deeply saddened to hear of the passing of their great friend and producer, Meat Loaf. He was with us when the show first launched in London at the Coliseum and in Manchester at the Opera House back in 2016 and then came to the show at the Dominion Theatre in London on 25 July 2018. The current UK & Ireland Tour of the musical will perform this evening's show at the New Wimbledon Theatre in Meat's memory.

Bryan Adams drops new single Never Gonna Rain



Bryan Adams has shared the new single 'Never Gonna Rain'. The Canadian rock god has given fans another taste of his upcoming 15th studio album, 'So Happy It Hurts', which arrives on March 11. Speaking of the upbeat nature of the number, Bryan said: "The ultimate optimist is someone who keeps on expecting the best, even in the face of the worst. Living in the moment, instead of in fear. Turning the negatives into positives. Taking the rain and turning it into a gift." The latest track is the fourth single to be taken from the follow-up to 2019's 'Shine a Light', following the release of the anthemic title track and subsequent singles 'On The Road' and 'Kick Ass'.

Meanwhile, the 'Summer of '69' hitmaker recently admitted he would be "thrilled" if no one remembered him. The 62-year-old musician-and-photographer wouldn't mind if all traces of him were removed from the Internet and no one knew of his existence. He said: "I couldn't care less if I'm remembered or not. In fact, if I woke up tomorrow and there was no trace of me on the internet, I'd be thrilled." However, Bryan admitted he's had one legacy suggested to him that he enjoys the idea of. He continued: "Although... I once did an interview with a Brazilian journalist who asked me if I knew how many kisses my songs were responsible for. "I had never thought about that before. He calculated that it would be in the billions. I really liked that.

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"Imagine being responsible for a billion kisses! That would be okay with me, because without love we are nothing. So to be able to bring a little love into this world... that means everything to me." While he's photographed a range of people and places over the years, it's his portraits of his family that mean the most to the 'Heaven' hitmaker. Asked which of his photos say the most about him, he said: "The photos of my family. I treasure them more than anything. "I sat with my grandfather and photographed him when he was 89. We talked about his time as a Royal Engineer in the World Wars. He was so humble. I miss my grandparents terribly." Bryan embarks on the UK leg of the 'So Happy It Hurts'

tour in spring, kicking off in Brighton on May 13, and wrapping at the Blickling Estate in Norfolk on July 8.

Liam Gallagher set to rock the 2022 BRITs



Liam Gallagher, Doja Cat and Ed Sheeran are among the performers confirmed for the BRIT Awards with Mastercard. The annual music awards ceremony returns to London's The O2 arena on February 8, and the former Oasis frontman, 'Say So' hitmaker and 'Bad Habits' singer are among the big names set to take to the stage. Attendees are no doubt in for a raucous night with Liam on the bill. The 49-year-old rocker is set to give the debut performance of his new single, 'Everything's Electric', from his upcoming third solo album, 'C'mon You Know'. He tweeted: "Im gonna be performing my new single Everything's Electric at the Brit awards this year and I'd appreciate it if you stopped what you were doing and tuned in cheers LG x. (sic)" Liam - who performed Oasis hit 'Live Forever' at the 2018 ceremony as a tribute to the victims of the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in 2017 - has a long history with the BRITs.

He once famously slammed his microphone down while collecting an award, leading presenter, comedian Peter Kay, to remark: "What a k***head." His rival Robbie Williams famously challenged him to a fight at the 2000 BRITs - though the 'Wonderwall' singer wasn't in attendance - and Liam and his then-bandmate and brother Noel famously mocked their Britpop rivals Blur by performing a rendition of their hit 'Parklife' at the 1996 ceremony. Grime megastar Dave, rap sensation Little Simz, and this year's Rising Star award winner, Holly Humberstone, have also been confirmed to perform. Although Plan B restrictions in England are set to be lifted next week, including no longer requiring COVID-19 passes at large scale events and mandatory mask-wearing, organizers of the BRITs have announced that:

An advertisement for 'Car Magnet Package 1' from 'The BUSINESS PRO SHOP'. It features a red border and a white background. Text includes 'Call (888) 901-4665', '1 PAIR (18 x 24 inch)', '"2 Car Magnets"', 'Full Color', and a price of '\$65.99'. A small image of a white car with a magnet is shown.

"Nominees and all guests will be asked to show a negative LFT test on arrival to the venue." While social distancing measures won't be in place, those in the audience will be required to wear their masks when not eating or drinking, or in their seats. What's more, for the first time in the event's history, fans will be able to nab tickets on the arena floor, where the nominees are seated. And they are also offering Blue Light Tickets for the emergency services, who can enter a ballot to come to the show, after NHS frontline workers attended in 2021. Adele leads the nominations this year, with nods for Album of the Year, Artist of the Year, Song of the Year and the Best pop/R&B categories after releasing her acclaimed album '30'. The upcoming ceremony will also feature a new selection of gender-neutral categories, after the organizers decided to scrap the best male and female categories and create a broader group of nominees. The BRIT Awards 2022 with Mastercard will be exclusively broadcast on ITV and ITV Hub and hosted by Mo Gilligan. YouTube Shorts is the Official Digital Music Partner and YouTube will host a live-stream and behind-the-scenes action.



Iron Maiden plan tour playing Senjutsu in full for 'diehard' fans



Iron Maiden are planning to perform 'Senjutsu' in full for the "diehard fans". Frontman Bruce Dickinson has confirmed talks of the 2021 LP being played in its entirety live are true, and they will plot an intimate tour doing just that at a later date. Speaking to Fozzy's Chris Jericho on his 'Talk Is Jericho' podcast, he said: "The plan we've got — it's not really a secret; I think everybody else has chatted about it — we will, I hope, we've talked about doing the entire album start to finish, but not this time around."

"And we all appreciate that that is something that really diehard fans will probably love and other people will go, 'Hmmm, I'm not gonna go see that.' "So the answer is you play smaller venues so that they sell out with just your diehard fans. 'Cause it's a musical thing to do — it's a musical thing." The 'Run to the Hills' star had recently hinted at the idea.

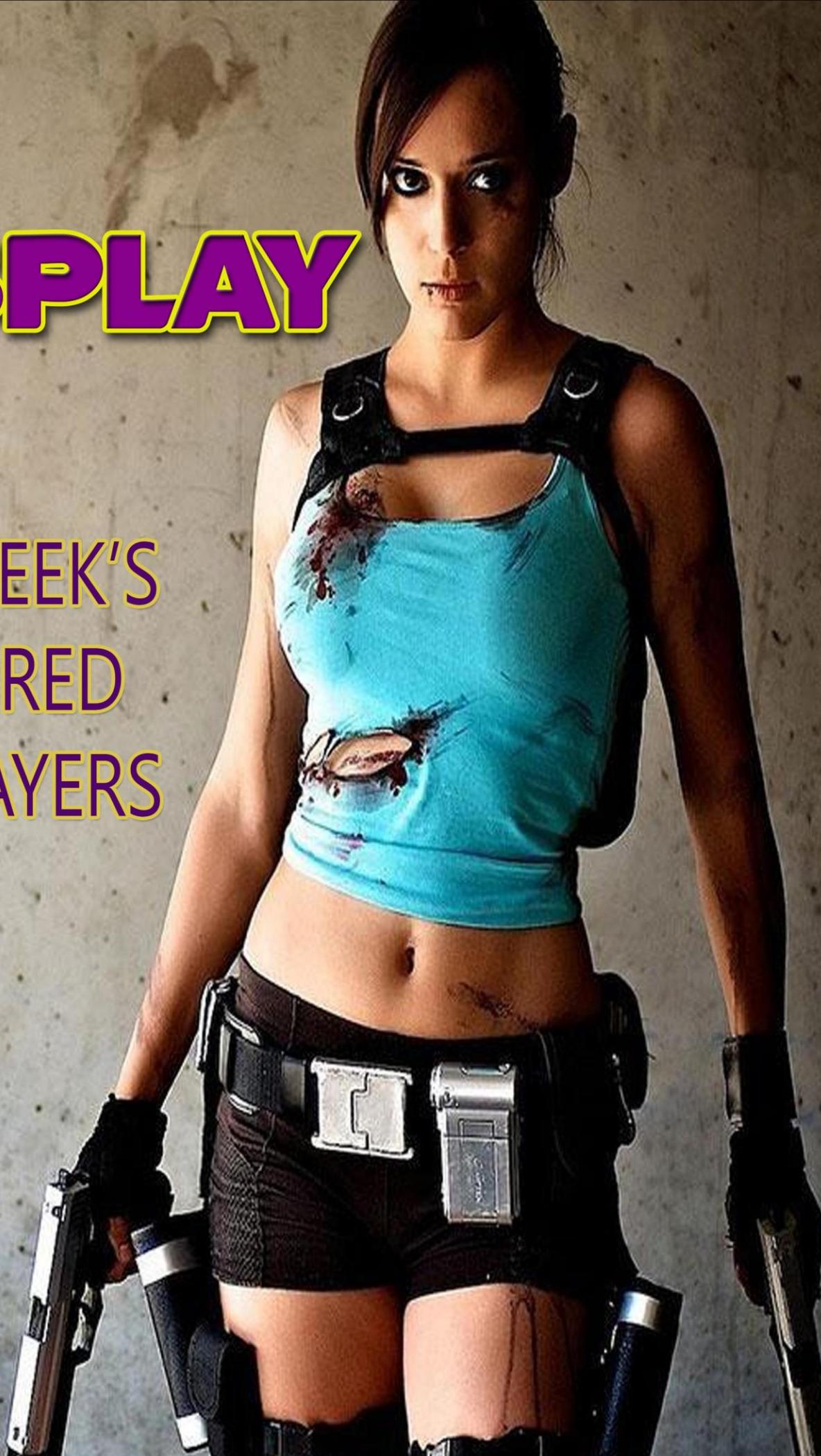
He said in November: "Every song is Maiden at the top of our game. Every song could be a live favourite. We haven't played a Maiden album from start to finish since [2006's] 'A Matter Of Life And Death', but this album is so good that it could warrant being played in its entirety. Obviously, we haven't finished the 'Legacy [Of The Beast]' tour yet, but the thought of taking this album on the road is exciting to all of us."

Meanwhile, the 63-year-old rocker is also planning to finish work on his new solo album after his North American spoken-word tour wraps.

The heavy metal legend explained how he already has several demos to tinker with for his follow-up to 2006's 'Tyranny Of Souls', but he might need to "write a few more tunes" for his seventh studio effort once he's done with his 'An Evening With Bruce Dickinson' shows in March.

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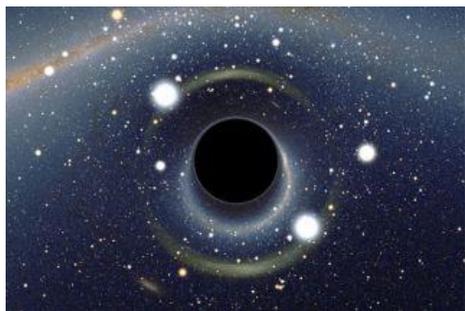
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Hubble Finds a Black Hole Igniting Star Formation in a Dwarf Galaxy



Often portrayed as destructive monsters that hold light captive, black holes take on a less villainous role in the latest research from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope. A black hole at the heart of the dwarf galaxy Henize 2-10 is creating stars rather than gobbling them up. The black hole is apparently contributing to the firestorm of new star formation taking place in the galaxy. The dwarf galaxy lies 30 million light-years away, in the southern constellation Pyxis.

A decade ago this small galaxy set off debate among astronomers as to whether dwarf galaxies were home to black holes proportional to the supermassive behemoths found in the hearts of larger galaxies. This new discovery has little Henize 2-10, containing only one-tenth the number of stars found in our Milky Way, poised to play a big part in solving the mystery of where supermassive black holes came from in the first place.

The Hubble Space Telescope is a project of international cooperation between NASA and ESA (European Space Agency). NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, manages the telescope. The Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) in Baltimore, Maryland, conducts Hubble science operations. STScI is operated for NASA by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy in Washington, D.C. "Ten years ago, as a graduate student thinking I would spend my career on star formation, I looked at the data from Henize 2-10 and everything changed," said Amy Reines, who published the first evidence for a black hole in the galaxy in 2011 and is the principal investigator on the new Hubble observations, published in the January 19 issue of *Nature*. "From the beginning I knew something unusual and special was happening in Henize 2-10, and now Hubble has provided a very clear picture of the connection between the black hole and a neighboring star forming region located 230 light-years from the black hole," Reines said.

That connection is an outflow of gas stretching across space like an umbilical cord to a bright stellar nursery. The region was already home to a dense cocoon of gas when the low-velocity outflow arrived. Hubble spectroscopy shows the outflow was moving about 1 million miles per hour, slamming into the dense gas like a garden hose hitting a pile of dirt and spreading out. Newborn star clusters dot the path of the outflow's spread, their ages also calculated by Hubble.

This is the opposite effect of what's seen in larger galaxies, where material falling toward the black hole is whisked away by surrounding magnetic fields, forming blazing jets of plasma moving at close to the speed of light. Gas clouds caught in the jets' path would be heated far beyond their ability to cool back down and form stars. But with the less-massive black hole in Henize 2-10, and its gentler outflow, gas was compressed just enough to precipitate new star formation.

"At only 30 million light-years away, Henize 2-10 is close enough that Hubble was able to capture both images and spectroscopic evidence of a black hole outflow very clearly. The additional surprise was that, rather than suppressing star formation, the outflow was triggering the birth of new stars," said Zachary Schutte, Reines' graduate student and lead author of the new study.



Ever since her first discovery of distinctive radio and X-ray emissions in Henize 2-10, Reines has thought they likely came from a massive black hole, but not as supermassive as those seen in larger galaxies. Other astronomers, however, thought that the radiation was more likely being emitted by a supernova remnant, which would be a familiar occurrence in a galaxy that is rapidly pumping out massive stars that quickly explode.

"Hubble's amazing resolution clearly shows a corkscrew-like pattern in the velocities of the gas, which we can fit to the model of a precessing, or wobbling, outflow from a black hole. A supernova remnant would not have that pattern, and so it is effectively our smoking-gun proof that this is a black hole," Reines said.

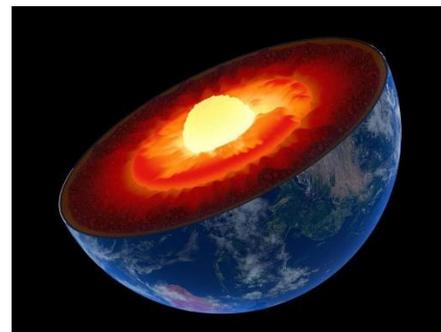
Reines expects that even more research will be directed at dwarf galaxy black holes in the future, with the aim of using them as clues to the mystery of how supermassive black holes came to be in the early universe. It's a persistent puzzle for

astronomers. The relationship between the mass of the galaxy and its black hole can provide clues. The black hole in Henize 2-10 is around 1 million solar masses. In larger galaxies, black holes can be more than 1 billion times our Sun's mass. The more massive the host galaxy, the more massive the central black hole.

Current theories on the origin of supermassive black holes break down into three categories: 1) they formed just like smaller stellar-mass black holes, from the implosion of stars, and somehow gathered enough material to grow supermassive, 2) special conditions in the early universe allowed for the formation of supermassive stars, which collapsed to form massive black hole "seeds" right off the bat, or 3) the seeds of future supermassive black holes were born in dense star clusters, where the cluster's overall mass would have been enough to somehow create them from gravitational collapse.

So far, none of these black hole seeding theories has taken the lead. Dwarf galaxies like Henize 2-10 offer promising potential clues, because they have remained small over cosmic time, rather than undergoing the growth and mergers of large galaxies like the Milky Way. Astronomers think that dwarf galaxy black holes could serve as an analog for black holes in the early universe, when they were just beginning to form and grow. "The era of the first black holes is not something that we have been able to see, so it really has become the big question: where did they come from? Dwarf galaxies may retain some memory of the black hole seeding scenario that has otherwise been lost to time and space," Reines said.

Earth's Interior is Cooling Faster than Expected



The evolution of our Earth is the story of its cooling: 4.5 billion years ago, extreme temperatures prevailed on the surface of the young Earth, and it was covered by a deep ocean of magma. Over millions of years, the planet's surface cooled to form a brittle crust. However, the enormous thermal energy emanating from the Earth's interior set dynamic processes in motion, such as mantle convection, plate tectonics and volcanism. Still unanswered, though, are the

questions of how fast the Earth cooled and how long it might take for this ongoing cooling to bring the aforementioned heat-driven processes to a halt. One possible answer may lie in the thermal conductivity of the minerals that form the boundary between the Earth's core and mantle.

This boundary layer is relevant because it is here that the viscous rock of the Earth's mantle is in direct contact with the hot iron-nickel melt of the planet's outer core. The temperature gradient between the two layers is very steep, so there is potentially a lot of heat flowing here. The boundary layer is formed mainly of the mineral bridgmanite. However, researchers have a hard time estimating how much heat this mineral conducts from the Earth's core to the mantle because experimental verification is very difficult.

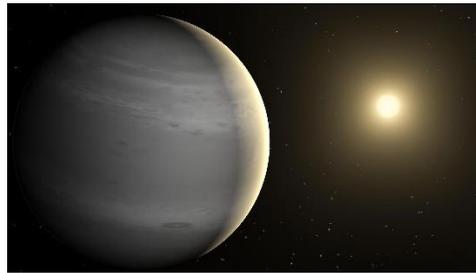
Now, ETH Professor Motohiko Murakami and his colleagues from Carnegie Institution for Science have developed a sophisticated measuring system that enables them to measure the thermal conductivity of bridgmanite in the laboratory, under the pressure and temperature conditions that prevail inside the Earth. For the measurements, they used a recently developed optical absorption measurement system in a diamond unit heated with a pulsed laser.

"This measurement system let us show that the thermal conductivity of bridgmanite is about 1.5 times higher than assumed," Murakami says. This suggests that the heat flow from the core into the mantle is also higher than previously thought. Greater heat flow, in turn, increases mantle convection and accelerates the cooling of the Earth. This may cause plate tectonics, which is kept going by the convective motions of the mantle, to decelerate faster than researchers were expecting based on previous heat conduction values.

Murakami and his colleagues have also shown that rapid cooling of the mantle will change the stable mineral phases at the core-mantle boundary. When it cools, bridgmanite turns into the mineral post-perovskite. But as soon as post-perovskite appears at the core-mantle boundary and begins to dominate, the cooling of the mantle might indeed accelerate even further, the researchers estimate, since this mineral conducts heat even more efficiently than bridgmanite.

"Our results could give us a new perspective on the evolution of the Earth's dynamics. They suggest that Earth, like the other rocky planets Mercury and Mars, is cooling and becoming inactive much faster than expected," Murakami explains. However, he cannot say how long it will take, for example, for convection currents in the mantle to stop. "We still don't know enough about these kinds of events to pin down their timing." To do that calls first for a better understanding of how mantle convection works in spatial and temporal terms. Moreover, scientists need to clarify how the decay of radioactive elements in the Earth's interior -- one of the main sources of heat -- affects the dynamics of the mantle

Gigantic Planet Hidden in Plain Sight



A UC astronomer and a group of eagle-eyed citizen scientists have discovered a giant gas planet hidden from view by typical stargazing tools. The planet, TOI-2180 b, has the same diameter as Jupiter, but is nearly three times more massive. Researchers also believe it contains 105 times the mass of Earth in elements heavier than helium and hydrogen. Nothing quite like it exists in our solar system.

Details of the finding have been published in the *Astronomical Journal* and presented at the American Astronomical Society virtual press event on Jan. 13. "TOI-2180 b is such an exciting planet to have found," said UCR astronomer Paul Dalba, who helped confirm the planet's existence. "It hits the trifecta of 1) having a several-hundred-day orbit, 2) being relatively close to Earth (379 lightyears is considered close for an exoplanet), and 3) us being able to see it transit in front of its star. It is very rare for astronomers to discover a planet that checks all three of these boxes."

Dalba also explained that the planet is special because it takes 261 days to complete a journey around its star, a relatively long time compared to many known gas giants outside our solar system. Its relative proximity to Earth and the brightness of the star it orbits also make it likely astronomers will be able to learn more about it. In order to locate exoplanets, which orbit stars other than our sun, NASA's TESS satellite looks at one part of the sky for a month, then moves on. It is searching

for dips in brightness that occur when a planet crosses in front of a star. "The rule of thumb is that we need to see three 'dips' or transits before we believe we've found a planet," Dalba said. A single transit event could be caused by a telescope with a jitter, or a star masquerading as a planet. For these reasons, TESS isn't focused on these single transit events. However, a small group of citizen scientists is.

Looking over TESS data, Tom Jacobs, a group member and former U.S. naval officer, saw light dim from the TOI-2180 star, just once. His group alerted Dalba, who specializes in studying planets that take a long time to orbit their stars.

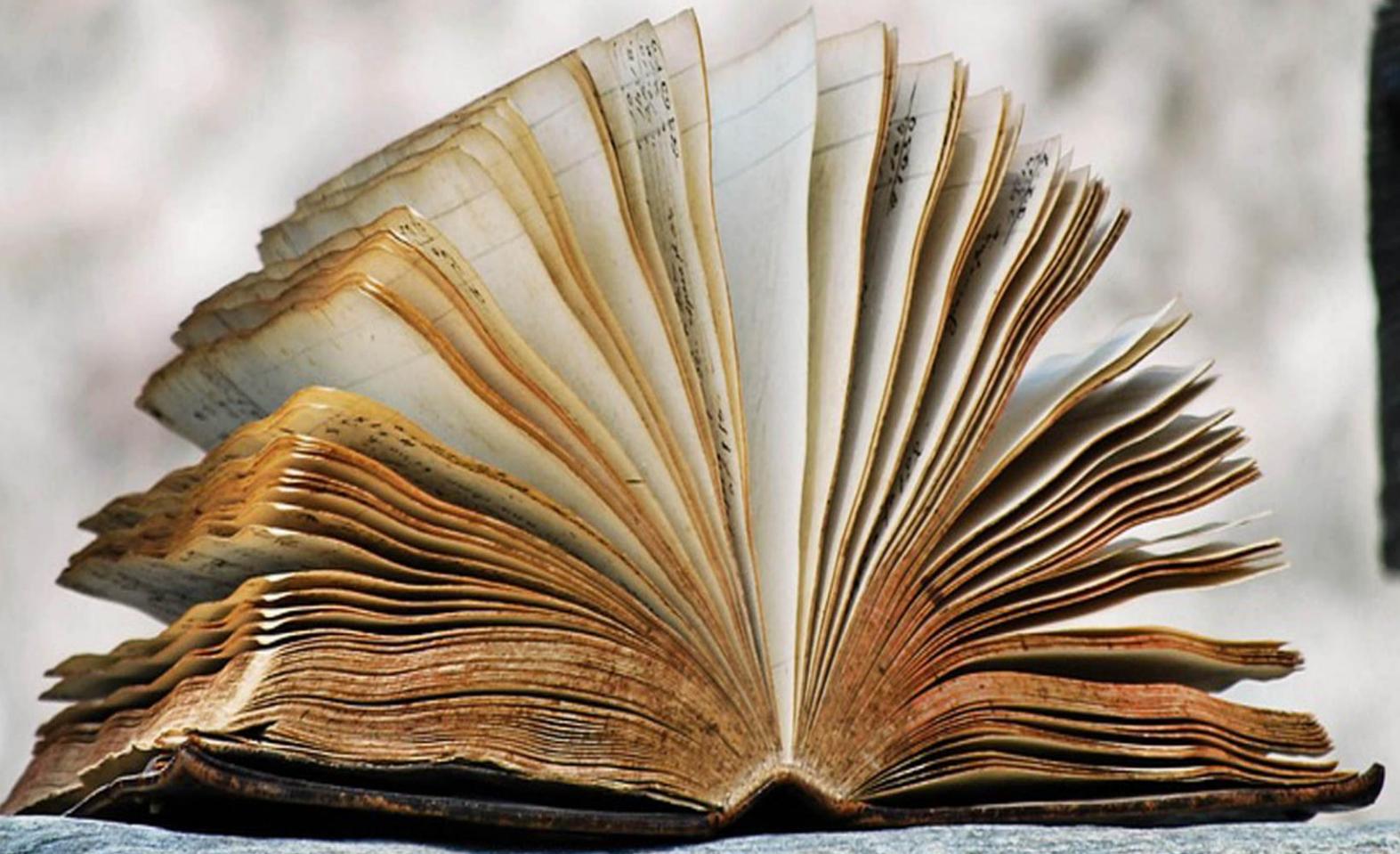
Using the Lick Observatory's Automated Planet Finder Telescope, Dalba and his colleagues observed the planet's gravitational tug on the star, which allowed them to calculate the mass of TOI-2180 b and estimate a range of possibilities for its orbit.

Hoping to observe a second transit event, Dalba organized a campaign using 14 different telescopes across three continents in the northern hemisphere. Over the course of 11 days in August 2021, the effort resulted in 20,000 images of the TOI-2180 star, though none of them detected the planet with confidence. However, the campaign did lead the group to estimate that TESS will see the planet transit its star again in February, when they're planning a follow up study. Funding for Dalba's research is provided by the National Science Foundation's Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. The citizen planet hunters' group takes publicly available data from NASA satellites like TESS and looks for single transit events. While professional astronomers use algorithms to scan a lot of data automatically, the Visual Survey Group uses a program they created to inspect telescope data by eye. "The effort they put in is really important and impressive, because it's hard to write code that can identify single transit events reliably," Dalba said. "This is one area where humans are still beating code."

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The End of the Letter

By Marcus Blake

It was a dark and stormy night. Actually, no, that would be too common for something like this and this story is everything uncommon.

It was a slow-paced rainy night filled with the stalking of death. Death for me was a hungry monster hunting its next prey so it could be fed while waiting behind its own nightmarish memories. The rain slowly fell in small, but sonorous drumbeats on top of the ambulance as it whizzed carefully through the rain-soaked streets of the city. Although I was fading in and out of consciousness inside of the vehicle, time seemed to slow down, but perhaps it was always this way as death approached.

After what seemed like an eternity the ambulance drove up to the hospital and the crew that drove me there with the purpose of stopping this monster rushed me through the hallways of the hospital. Each flashing light above me was a flashing memory of all those that I had killed and all those that I loved. But the persistence of my memory only brought back that single important memory of her and all the good that she had brought to my life.

I was wheeled into the emergency room and her memory faded away while the only things that loomed were the scattering of nurses and flashing lights from the hospital machines.

I could feel the blood and the insides from my lower body pouring over the bed onto the floors and then suddenly all sounds went away except the dripping of my blood on the floor like the slow drip of a leaky kitchen faucet. Then a soothing and sorrowful voice from somewhere above me saying, "I guess death and life for you will start and end with a letter."

It had been a long night so far and the whiskey wasn't making it any easier. It was another one of those days for me as I sat and stared at the piece of paper on the wall. The TV was blaring low muffled sounds in the background; just the right level to push me back into my trance as I tried to push away my contempt for this world and my own life. I found myself wondering if I had eaten that day, or if it had been another liquid diet for me.

Suddenly I jumped up to the phone ringing, hoping that maybe my waiting was finally over. I answered it and immediately recognized her voice.

“Hi John,” she said.

“Hi back kiddo,” I replied.

“It’s been awhile, hasn’t it?” she whispered.

“Yes, it’s been too long,” I said to her, feeling my pulse begin to race.

“I want to see you, can you meet me?” she asked.

“Where do you want to meet?”

“How about the place?” she replied.

With a smile on my face I said, “Our place, you got it.”

I slammed the phone down with excitement and rushed to grab my keys and coat, knocking over a tray of magazines in the process. I was in a hurry because I was going to see my Annabeth. I was so excited that it didn’t register in my head that she was dead and it couldn’t be her. I saw her die. Could I have been mistaken? Could the doctors have been wrong?

Maybe it was all an illusion. Maybe she was hiding, waiting for the right moment when it was time for her to come back again and that time had finally arrived.

Whatever might have been true or false I had to see her and find out what had happened and why my life was the way it was now. She had always made sense out of things and brought peace to the simplest of moments. I needed her to do that again.

That’s why I drove fast and didn’t care about the dangers that could hinder me on my way to the place. I arrived at the diner where we had first met and it was a place very familiar, not only because of her, but because I had spent so much time in it with her. It was a place that we would meet each other for coffee and breakfast quite often, so it wasn’t surprising that she would want to meet me there.

I went inside the diner to see if she was there, waiting in our usual place. She wasn’t there, but it could just be that I arrived before she did. I sat down in our usual booth and the waitress who had worked that same shift and that same section got me a cup of coffee. I seemed to know her well and she didn’t even have to ask what to get me to drink. She instinctively knew what I wanted and what I always yearned for.

It was beginning to rain hard outside now, and it had already been a long time since I arrived. I was worried, more so because maybe this could all be a dream. She wasn’t here and I thought for the first time that night that I didn’t hear her on the phone, but then again, I could hear her. I could hear her as plain as the wind whistling through the trees in the midst of the storm. Her voice was ringing in my head, echoing the memory of that night, a night that would change our lives for the worst.

It seemed like that she haunted me in every sense, but it wasn’t a bad thing because it was the only thing keeping me going. As silly as it might sound, it was my only reason for living. After all, hope like irony had the strangest sense of humor. I sat there in the same place that I always sat when waiting for her when she was running late, and where we would sit together telling each other how our day was over a nice cup of coffee.

Most times I wouldn’t have to wait very long for her, but this time the wait became longer and longer. I always seemed to be waiting for nothing or everything. It was always my hope to be waiting for everything and that’s what my Annabeth was: my everything.

The manager came out from the back of the diner. He was burly man, worn down by the 17 hour shifts he worked and the stale coffee he served. He was friendly though, at least as friendly as anyone could be when spending such long hours with the decaying growth of society, people like me, or at least what I had become.

He walked over to the waitress who had been serving me all night and it became apparent for the first time as I overheard the words coming out of his mouth the truth that had eluded me for so long and I effused to accept.

The burly man sighed and said, “He’s here again, I thought you were going to tell him not to come in here anymore; I thought you were going to finally tell him the truth.”

"I can't do that. Can't you see that he's hurting and that me telling him to go or that I don't care anymore could be the one thing that pushes him over the edge? I can't do that to him."

"Somebody has to. He'll never learn to get on with his life if he doesn't hear it, and it might as well come from you since you seem to be part of the cause."

"Look, I just can't do it, it wouldn't be right," she said.

"Fine, either you do it now, or I will. I don't want to see him agonizing over a stupid memory and wasting what life he has left in my diner."

"It's not stupid. It's his hope, and if it keeps him living in one capacity or another then let him keep living," she replied.

"It's only stupid if it's not true. Now do it; it's time to put an end to this," the manager said.

The waitress walked over to where I was and sat down. This was unusual because she always wanted to stand up and keep her distance. She looked at me hard and very truthfully.

"John I think we finally have to talk. I've wanted to talk to you about this for a long time," she said.

"What is it Kate? I hope I'm not keeping you from your other customers," I said.

"Look, although I do like seeing you almost every day, you need to quit coming here and waiting for her. She's not coming back; she's finally gone and there is nothing that can bring her back," said Kate.

"Hey, she's just late as usual," I said to her.

"Damn it John, you need to let her go. She's dead."

"I know she's just putting you up to this and that she spares no expense to pull a joke on me," I replied.

"John, she was my daughter and I loved her very much. Seeing you two together made me very happy for you both, but she's gone, and although you come here almost every night expecting her to walk through those doors and kiss you hello, it isn't going to happen. You have to accept that and get on with your life," Kate said, almost yelling.

"She's not dead! I heard her on the phone saying she was going to meet me here tonight so we could catch up with one another since we haven't seen each other for a long time. I know she'll be here!" I yelled.

"John, don't keep doing this to yourself. You remember what happened, don't you?" Kate asked.

"I remember something that seems like a nightmare, but it's not real and she will come back when she's ready. I know it's a dream, it couldn't be real," I replied.

"You remember the wreck don't you? You were entering the diner together when a truck slid on the wet street and drove through the front door and hit you both. You were hurt very badly, but she received the brunt of the impact and was killed instantly," Kate explained to me.

"Yes, but it was all a dream, and one that I must have explained to you in detail, wasn't it?" I asked her with a questioning look. I didn't like where this was going one bit.

"John, if it was a dream then where did you get all that scarring on your side, and why do we have a new paint and plaster job around the front entrance?" Kate asked.

I leaned over and lifted my shirt up to feel the scarring on my side. It was like lightning striking the memory of the truck hitting me and Annabeth. All the pain came rushing back in a New York minute. I could see the truck as plain as the rain falling outside coming through the old building and hitting us both. I jumped out of my seat and rushed to the door.

I slowly ran my hands over the new plaster and new paint that was the same color as the paint job in the diner, but had more clarity than the old age colored paint throughout the rest of the place. I had to feel it for a long time to find out if it was real or not, and then suddenly the flashing memories of that horrific night knocked me over onto the floor.

The memory was so intense it was like I was living it again and again, over and over until I, too, was dead. I couldn't stop the revelation, and then the tears came for my Annabeth. They were replaced by anger and sorrow mixed up together, something that was as lethal as a bullet piercing the head.

“No, this can’t be. I won’t believe it to be true. It can’t be the truth. I won’t let it, I won’t let this be true with me, and she will come back,” I shouted.

I ran out of the diner into the rain soaked streets without even looking to see if it was clear. As I looked over my right shoulder a pair of head lights came out of nowhere, rushing the death that was stalking me. My whole body froze as if to wait for the inevitable and I stood there staring down the lights at the end of the tunnel as they came closer and closer, and then it happened.

My body was hit and it flew through the air into the windshield of a parked car. I wasn’t dead, but I was cut very badly and very deep from the waist up. My blood was beginning to pour out and be washed by the rain until the street below was covered by the stain of water mixed with blood.

I laid on the bed in the emergency room and my last thoughts were about how I ended up here. I thought about all the events that led to this moment and the twisted irony of how I should suffer the same fate as my Annabeth. As my blood poured out and the pain pushed me into my eternal sleep, I pulled out the letter that I had been carrying with me every day since that night when I truly died, the night that my Annabeth was taken from me and my life was shattered.

I wasn’t the same man after that, but it was all over now. I closed my eyes for the last time and this sleep would now be my salvation. The letter dropped to the ground and a nurse picked it up to hand to the doctor standing over me. The nurse just looked at the blood soaked letter and the dying man on the hospital bed with the strangest of looks, but she had already begun to figure out what the doctor had meant by the man’s life beginning and ending with a letter.

“Dr. Gray can you take over while I get Dr. Stone out of here. It looks like you won’t have to do much since the patient is already dead,” the nurse said.

“Sure thing Joan. Time of death 11:18 pm” Dr. Gray replied

Dr. Stone began to cry as he heard those words spoken by Dr. Gray which was unusual for this strong man of science, but this time he couldn’t help it. He held the letter tight because it was the only thing left that could make sense out of everything.

It was a thick letter and it was one that words were being added to for it was never finished until death would come and claim it’s writer. The Doctor cried more at the moment of his brother’s death than he had in the last twenty years and part of his sorrow was for the fact that the letter he held would never tell the complete story of all that happened.

“Dr. Stone, are you alright?” asked the nurse. She’d never seen him break down over the death of a patient before.

“Yes, it’s just...”

” It’s just what?” asked the nurse.

“He’s my brother, and I think his torture is finally over so I’m happy and sad in a strange way,” he replied.

“I’m sorry Dr. Stone. I’m sorry that you have to be here for this. If you don’t mind me asking, what happened with your brother that would drive him to this?”

Dr. Stone in a somber tone began to answer her question, “About a year ago his fiancé died in a horrific car accident and it nearly killed him, too. The day it happened he was going to propose to her and make it official by giving her a ring. Anyway, he has never gotten over it and he has tortured himself over it ever since then, thinking that she is still alive and claiming that on more than one occasion he could hear her voice over the phone when he received a phone call. He just hasn’t been the same since then because he won’t let it go and I knew that a physical death for him would be very soon. It’s just hard for me to accept that it’s here now and I won’t ever see him again.”

The nurse replied. “Again I’m sorry for your loss, and if there’s anything you need don’t hesitate to give me a call.”

“Thank you. and thank you for giving me this letter that fell from his coat pocket. I can finally put this to rest now as this letter is truly his end. Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go and call our parents to tell them that John is finally dead, and his torture is over,” he replied.

He walked down the hall to his office as the nurse gave him a confused look, not knowing what he meant. He entered his cluttered office and sat down by the phone. He pulled out the letter that John carried with him. It was a love letter that he wrote Annabeth asking her to marry him and saying everything he felt when it came to being with her.

He told her in the letter that he loved her very much and that his life truly began when he met her and that was when he began to write this letter even if it was only in memory at the time. He had said before to her on many occasions how his life truly began when he met her, but he wanted a record for her to know how his life was changed by her. This was the purpose of the letter.

He remembered when John told him about the letter and what was in it, and how he poured out his heart into the words on the paper, since he was not a man of words or much of a writer. After the tragedy the letter continued and was added to by his grieving brother.

The last parts of the letter were filled with rage and regret, and an anger towards God for taking Annabeth away. It was his cry for help and his own way of dealing with the pain, but towards the end of the letter he was released from his pain in a strange way.

Stone read through all of the letter, but it was the last lines of the letter that caught the doctor's attention most of all, and as he read it, he began to cry for his brother and the love that was taken from him, and putting him on the path of the slow stalking death that waits for us all. The last line read,

“Annabeth, I love you and not even death will make me stop. If you become lost and are taken from me, even though death I will come and find you, for nothing will keep us apart. Even through death I will follow because I love you that much and this is how much I need you in my life.”

He picked up the phone and called his parents.

“Mom, Dad, it's about John. His torture is finally over, and the letter has its end.” He talked to his parents for almost thirty minutes and then quietly put the phone back on the cradle.

He closed his eyes for a long and somber moment and then opened them looking up at the window in his office door. He saw the faces of Annabeth and John and they smiled at him like so many times before while waiting for him to come and have dinner with them. He couldn't believe it and closed his eyes just to make sure, but Annabeth and John were still there. He got up to open the door and suddenly the images were gone as if to have an end to the letter.

Dr. Stone would write to Kate, Annabeth's mother, explaining all that had happened and how the grief of loved ones would never let any of this truly end.

~The End~

COLD COMES IN

Cold comes in
like a blanket
for the warmth
in the folds
of my memories

dampness comes in
like a touch

darkness comes in
like possibilities

wind calls me
like your smile

rain,
like your eyes

love settles
like water finding
its level.

~ Tom Geddie

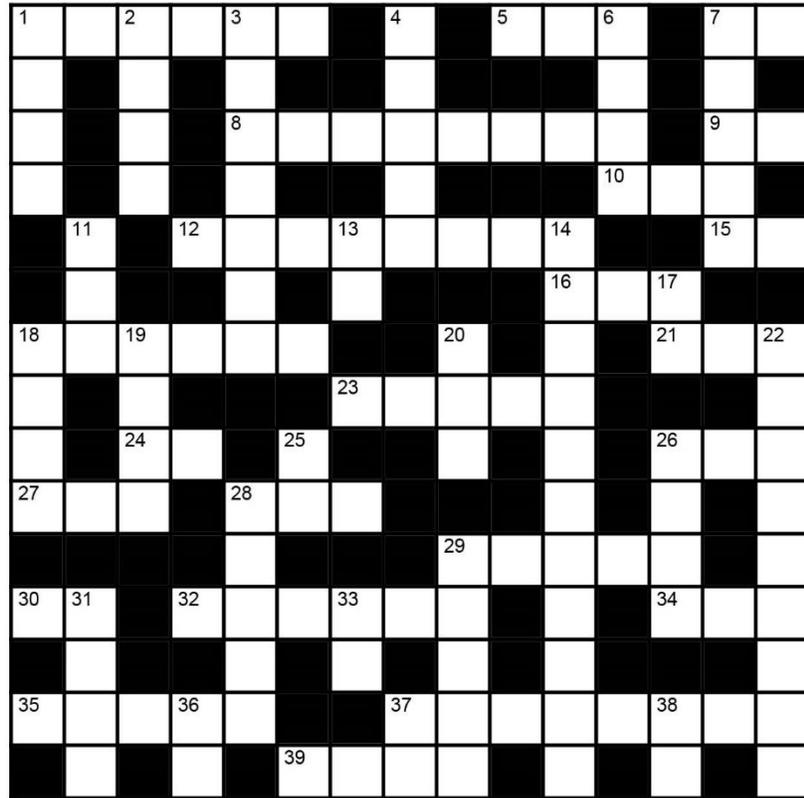
WORD

games

80'S MOVIE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Across

- 1 Framed '80s bunny (6)
 5 'Beverly Hills ___' (3)
 7 Back off man, he's a Ghostbuster! (Initially) (2)
 8 Perfect car for going 'Back to the Future' (8)
 9 '80s teen king, initially (2)
 10 'Flamingo' or 'Karate' (3)
 12 Chevy Chase and family went on a few (8)
 15 One of the 'Young Guns', initially (2)



- 16 'Nightmare' street (3)
 18 '80s 'Weapon' (6)
 21 'St Elmo's Fire' star (3)
 23 '80s 'Balls' (5)
 24 'Platoon' director, initially (2)
 26 This was 'Hard' in the '80s (3)
 27 '80s 'Gun' (3)
 28 Size of '80s 'Chill' (3)
 29 Funny name for 'A Fish'... (5)
 30 'Mask' star, initially (2)
 32 The colour of '80s 'Rain' (6)
 34 '___-Con 4' (3)
 35 'Big' '80s star (5)

- 37 '80s 'Bride' (8)
 39 If you were an '80s one you got 'Revenge' (4)

Down

- 1 '80s 'Genius' (4)
 2 '80s 'Velvet' (4)
 3 Mr Jones of 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' fame (7)
 4 '80s 'Circuit' (5)
 6 'Pretty' '80s colour (4)
 7 '80s 'Runner' (5)
 11 'Peggy ___ Got Married' (3)
 13 'The Terminator', initially (2)
 14 '80s 'Story' (11)

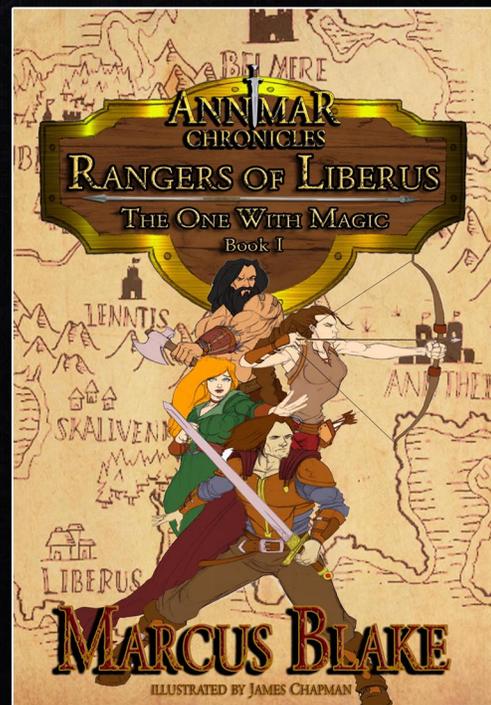
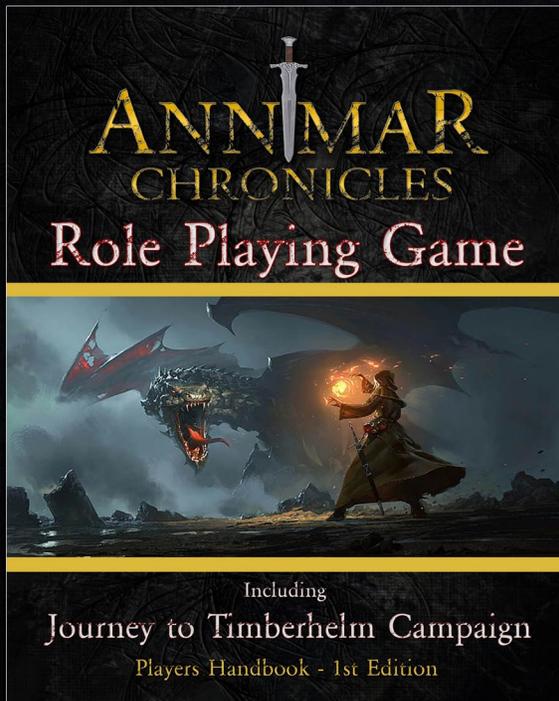
- 17 '80s teen queen, initially (2)
 18 '80s 'Good Friday' (4)
 19 Sucked Jeff Bridges into a computer (4)
 20 Ferris had one off (3)
 22 '80s 'Club' (9)
 25 'A Room with a View' director, initially (2)
 26 What you were 'Better Off' in the '80s? (4)
 28 '80s 'Brothers' (5)
 29 '80s 'Science' (5)
 31 '80s 'Face' (4)
 33 Aka 'Crocodile Dundee', initially (2)

- 36 'Footloose' star, initially (2)
 37 Aka Pee-Wee Herman, initially (2)
 38 Alien that wanted to phone home (2)

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