

# That Nerd Show



## Monthly



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

# Hogwarts Legacy

THE GAME THAT GIVES US A TRUE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT HOGWARTS!

By Marcus Blake and Erin Smith



### REVIEWS &

WHAT YOU SHOULD  
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Back to Hogwarts  
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4.28.2023

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# Hogwarts Legacy

## THE GAME THAT GIVES US A TRUE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT HOGWARTS!

By Marcus Blake and Erin Smith



**Ever** since we read our first Harry Potter book or saw our first Harry Potter movie, we wanted to be a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. We wanted to be part of the action and not just read about it or watch it on the big screen. How cool would it be if we can be a student and participate in classes or battle dark Lords? You can sort of play Quidditch even though you really can't ride in the air on a broom, but let's face it, it's not as fun as the real thing. There have been Harry Potter games that have allowed us to play the story from the movies. From some of the earlier PlayStation 2 and Xbox games to Harry Potter Lego games. They're fun in their own way. However, there has never been a video game with its own unique story where we could create our own character, be sorted into our own house, and play out the adventures of a student at Hogwarts until now. That's what Hogwarts Legacy has given Harry Potter fans. If we're being honest, it's the best experience in the world of Harry Potter. While the stories of Harry Potter are good and they were fun to play

through, this particular story is set 100 years before those events. We get to see Hogwarts in the 1890s. We get to experience the lore of Hogwarts before there was a Dark Lord who was trying to build a master race and kill "the boy who lived.": Of course, that's a great story and to be able to play it was fun, but a unique story set within this world is even better and Hogwarts Legacy gives us that experience.



The story itself is very interesting, but it wouldn't be a typical story in the wizarding world unless you dealt with evil wizards or dark Lords. There are evil wizards who are helping goblins with an uprising against the magical community and as you play the story, you find out their true motives. We won't spoil the entire story because it's fun to discover it on your own. As the player and the main protagonist, you start off as a 5<sup>th</sup> Year student at Hogwarts along with a mentor, Professor Fig. The story starts as you are on your way to Hogwarts and then suddenly your journey gets derailed as you discover an agent secret that will tear the Wizarding World apart. Your character can see and feel ancient Magic. The origins of this magic will become clearer as you play the game and its connection to the alliance between the Dark Lords in this story and the Goblin uprising as they both seek the use of this ancient Magic for their own sinister motives. While the main bad guys are goblins, they are sympathetic villains in their own way because you understand their motives since goblins have typically been mistreated within the Wizarding World for hundreds of years. Of course, not

much has changed in Harry Potter's story as evidenced by the character of Doby that gets introduced in the third book, the Prisoner of Azkaban. But essentially the evil wizards within this story want to use this ancient magic to control everything. The story might seem predictable but aren't most fantasy stories dealing with ultimate powers and those who want to use it for themselves to control the world or make a master race of sorts. Evil characters always want tyranny and the power to control the rest of the world. However, the secrets behind this ancient magic add some very interesting lore within the wizarding world. You could say that part of this story is connected to the story of the Deathly Hallows because that dealt with ancient Magic. All in all, there are two different storylines going on in Hogwarts Legacy and both of them are connected. As your character is on a journey to solve the mystery of this ancient magic and repel the goblin Rebellion backed by evil wizards, you also have the storyline of a student at Hogwarts. You have to be a student while also doing the other storyline.



The best part of the game is the fact that you have to be a student and learn new abilities as you are playing the other storyline. The developers of Hogwarts Legacy seem to make both storylines just as important as they are intertwined in order to complete the game. You can't just solve the mystery of the main storyline without going to school. Just like in the Harry Potter books, the classroom scenes were just as

good as the scenes that deal with the main storyline of each book. It's not hard to make a wizard story that doesn't really have anything to do with Hogwarts, some of those might be fun and we definitely saw that in the Fantastic Beasts movies, but getting to play as a student throughout a school year makes the game a lot more fun. There are a lot of side quests that aren't pertinent to the main storyline, but at the same time as a player, you want to do all those side quests because they're just as fun. It feels as if you have two different video games in one because you're playing this main storyline and helping to stop dark wizards and a goblin rebellion, and then you play the storyline of a Hogwarts student participating in classes and competing for the House Cup. For example, defeating the evil wizards and the Goblins is just as cathartic as the Polyjuice Plot Quest because it gives you a chance to make fun of Headmaster Black. He's an awful character and nowhere in the same league as Albus Dumbledore when it comes to being Headmaster of Hogwarts. The quest offers great dialogue and I think we can all agree that making fun of him within this quest will definitely make your day better. I bet even Simon Pegg who voiced the character would agree. There's just so much to do in this game outside of the main storyline that as gamers, we are treated to this huge open-world RPG that's worth the retail price of this game. There's so much to do as a student over the course of a school year that, that in itself makes for a great video game.



At Hogwarts there's always something to see and always something to do. The castle is never dull like the feature that allows you to see the changes in the castle based on the seasons. If you're experiencing Hogwarts as a student, you experience it over the course of a year throughout the various seasons just like in the movies. While we all have a tendency to jump into a main storyline of a good RPG and in some games doing classroom work would seem like a negative, it's all built as a positive in this game because each class is interesting along with the personalities of each professor. All of this is well developed to give you the feel of being a student at Hogwarts. If this game didn't have a main storyline and all you were as a student, the game would still be fantastic because as we mentioned before, we've all wanted to be a student in Hogwarts after reading or seeing Harry Potter for the first time. It's this game that gives us that experience so of course

there have to be tons of things to do inside the castle. One of our favorite things is the Dueling Club. It's a secret dueling club, but it gives you a chance to hone your dueling skills as a student. You can spend an entire afternoon just doing other students and that would be just as fun as completing the main story. Then again, the Defense Against the Dark Arts Arenas as you fend off waves of monsters, goblins, and dark wizards is equally as fun and cathartic. We can't compliment enough the attention to detail, but the developers put into the Hogwarts School. From frog statues that transport you to areas you can't just walk into, that's a nice surprise to changing Pratt's portrait frame to the alternate version with him on fire. For those that like to explore when playing games, you'll always find something to explore in Hogwarts Legacy. That's what makes this one of the most beautiful games ever created. Plus, depending on which house you're sorted in you get a unique perspective of each of the common rooms. And then of course there's always the Room of Requirements where you can practice Transfiguration.



Exploring outside of Hogwarts is just as fun. Going to Hogsmeade is never dull and you'll have to keep going back there to buy stuff for potions and other supplies as well as being able to sell some of the loot to earn money. One of the most fascinating parts of this game was discovering the Hedge mazes. There are about five types and the only time we really got to see that in the books or movies was during the Goblet of Fire. When playing this game, it's easy to compare it to Minecraft with your ability to build and explore. That game and its many versions became popular for those who want to build an explorer, well take that to the next level with being a student at Hogwarts. Talk about another great perk of this game. The side quests will keep you busy. While they're not necessary to the main storyline, you can't help but deviate and do all these wonderful side quests. There's the main storyline and then there's the story within the story which unfolds in the side quests. We found ourselves playing this game where we didn't even play the main storyline, but just explored and did side quests much like

a real-life student would do at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry,



So, if we have to be critical of this game, there is some room for improvement. Not much, but not every game can be absolutely perfect. Our biggest complaint is Sebastian's story and his side quests. It's underwhelming and doesn't feel like it's really necessary to the overall plot. It should be more than what it is and everything could be affected more by the dialogue choices with Sebastian. His story feels more important than others, but it's also lacking. Every great storyteller and director has to make choices on what's going to end up in the final project and maybe in order to play the main story something had to be sacrificed so it's Sebastian's story and side quests. Okay, but don't make him feel like he's more important to the overall story. As gamers, it's like we were tricked. The other criticism is things on the map can be hard to find. We really need to have drop pins to help us as players relocate places we've been to before like the battle arenas. We're all for mystery, but not so much mystery that we keep going over and over the same place just trying to find someplace we once visited. It's tedious and time-consuming. And we also think there should be more space for beasts in Vivariums. Maybe it's not really that big of a deal compared to the overall story, but it's annoying. The developer should have allowed for players to create more space by buying it with gold or maybe we'll get that if there's some really good DLC.



They're certainly room for DLC. The developers missed a great opportunity to have a multiplayer part of the game. If there was ever a perfect game to be able to do split screen or play online with your friends whether it was doing battle or literally, playing Quidditch then this would be the perfect game. Again, we understand that you have to make choices

especially when you're meeting a deadline for a game release, but just like Red Dead Redemption 2, which had a multiplayer aspect to it that you didn't even need the overall game you could just buy that and play online with your friends, Hogwarts Legacy should use the same idea. This is a world where we want to be online with our friends. If you took the concept of Fortnite but with wizards from the wizarding world of Harry Potter. For an all-out wizarding battle Royale, I don't know if people would be playing Fortnite anymore. Well maybe that's a stretch, but it would definitely be popular as well as getting to play Quidditch. Hopefully, we'll get some DLC and a multiplayer component to the game down the road because there's a golden opportunity for it.

With everything there is to do in Hogwarts legacy, the main storyline is still the most fun. Good RPG games are meant to have a cinematic feel. When we play a game and even though it will be a different experience, we want to play as if we're watching a movie. That's why the best RPGs are very cinematic. The Last of Us, Jedi Fallen order, Red Dead Redemption 2, all the Uncharted and Tomb Raider games. They're all masterpieces in their own way. This story feels like we're playing a Harry Potter or a Fantastic Beasts movie. The epicenter of this story is a young wizard rising up to fight the ultimate Evil. Feels familiar, doesn't it? And while the Goblins are considered villains, they're sympathetic villains. They're not really that bad and you understand their motives. But you also come to find that they have been conned by dark Wizards who want power over themselves.



The main story is engaging in one of the best Harry Potter stories out there. In some ways, it's better than some of the Fantastic Beasts movies and even some of the books or movies themselves.



Maybe it feels that way because we experience the story by playing it, but it's a very engaging story regardless and would make for a great movie. Of course, there's controversy surrounding the story. Some may claim that there are anti-semitic themes when it comes to the goblins. We can't necessarily say that's true, but everybody is entitled to their own opinion. Unfortunately, that leads to a bigger argument about the perception of goblins within the world of fantasy and their origins. The controversy surrounding this game, especially with JK Rowling's views is unfortunate from the overall greatness of the game and from a well-crafted story. Gamers have the right to choose whether they want to play this game or not and if you do play it that doesn't make you anti-semitic or anti-trans or support JK Rowling's views in any way. She didn't create the story. There are many developers who worked on this game, some Jewish, some transsexuals. Port key would have to be unbelievably stupid to make a game that supported anti-semitic views and anti-trans views considering the culture that we live in. The first developer of the game, Troy Leavitt came under fire for posting on social media his support of cultural appropriation and gamergate. He was quickly asked to resign. So, it's not like Avalanche software, the company that made the game or Warner media who published the game is going to back controversial figures. Sure, JK Rowling will always make money for owning the intellectual property of Harry Potter and everything created under the umbrella, but that doesn't mean she has to be involved in anything relating to Harry Potter going forward. The world is not here anymore, it belongs to the fans. However, despite the controversy, there is one area where gamers who support Trans rights and fight against antisemitism can get behind. There are places where you can buy this game and the profits will go to support trans

rights as well as the LGBTQ community. We can fight back against discriminatory views and still love this wonderful fantasy world. We can still enjoy Harry Potter but hate its creator. After all, that's not like Walt Disney didn't have his fair share of controversy or was accused of antisemitism, and we all still watch stuff created by Disney.



Overall, this is the Harry Potter game we've been waiting for, for 20 years. It's a Monumental achievement in gaming. It's one of the best RPGs ever created in a rich and imaginative world that people of all ages can enjoy. To create a Harry Potter game that has its own unique story where you get to play as your own unique character is nothing short of fantastic. It's a game that gives us the true student experience of Hogwarts while getting to play a well-crafted story that literally could be a movie. And the best part, it's a game truly designed for the next generation of consoles. It is absolutely gorgeous! Even if you're not a Harry Potter fan but just like a good RPG, it's still worth the money. Plus, there are a lot more stories to tell within this world that can be considered a prequel to Fantastic Beasts and Harry Potter. Hogwarts Legacy is a defining moment in gaming! We get to play a unique story in the world of Harry Potter, which is something that has never been done before. It's too early to tell if this is 2023's Game of the Year, but it's definitely right up there and if nothing else, it may just be the best Harry Potter story we've ever experienced because we get to play the story instead of watching it. Hogwarts Legacy proves that the best stories are the ones we play. **That Nerd Show's Final Grade: 9/10**

When you purchase a copy of Hogwarts Legacy, purchase it here and the proceeds will go to supporting theGBTQ community.

[www.humblebundle.com/charities](http://www.humblebundle.com/charities)





PORTKEY GAMES

# HOGWARTS LEGACY

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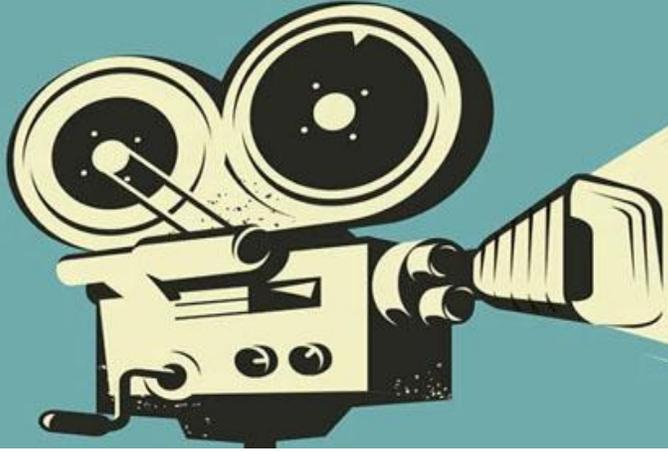
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# FILM & TV NEWS

## James Gunn To Direct His Script 'Superman: Legacy', Pic to Blast Off New DC Multiverse 'Chapter One, Gods & Monsters'



In what should come as no surprise, James Gunn will be directing his own script for *Superman: Legacy*, a major linchpin project that will kick off the multiplatform connected DC universe – “Chapter One, Gods and Monsters” – which he and his DC Co-Chairman & CEO Peter Safran are launching.

Gunn announced back in the fall when he took the DC job that was penning a new Superman movie — something Warner Bros Discovery CEO David Zaslav is eager to see — and that Henry Cavill would not be returning as the Man of Steel as the

project deals with the character’s early days. *Superman: Legacy* tells the story of Superman’s journey to reconcile his Kryptonian heritage with his human upbringing as Clark Kent of Smallville, Kansas. He is the embodiment of truth, justice and the American way, guided by human kindness in a world that sees kindness as old-fashioned. Gunn already has mentioned on social that his Superman will be younger than his 40s.

The all-new action adventure is set to soar into theaters worldwide on July 11, 2025. Gunn’s screenplay is based on characters from DC. Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. *Superman: Legacy* is the trailblazing first title in a dynamic slate of films, with writer-director Matt Reeves’ *The Batman Part II* hitting theaters on October 3, 2025.

While Gunn will look for a new Superman, he and Safran are open to keeping the previous DC actors in place as their characters, those being Gal Gadot as

Wonder Woman, Jason Momoa as Aquaman and possibly even Ezra Miller as *The Flash* (though no hard decisions on that yet). Although Cavill is on the sidelines at the comic book studio, Gunn previously said on December 14 that “we’re big fans, and we talked about a number of exciting possibilities to work together in the future.”

New Line’s *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* hits theaters worldwide this Friday, March 17, from Warner Bros. Pictures., and is set to open to \$85M worldwide. As far as a threequel for *Shazam!*, star Zachary Levi told Deadline’s Natalie Sitek last night on the red carpet, “It all comes down to what the people want.”

After *Shazam: Fury of the Gods*, it’s DC’s *The Flash*, made during the Walter Hamada-run era at DC, which hits theaters on June 16. Gunn has hailed the movie as one of the best superhero movies of all time. Warners will give theater owners a sneak peek at *The Flash* during CinemaCon in late April. Reported by Deadline



# ‘Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse’ Casts Karan Soni As Spider-Man India



Karan Soni (Deadpool franchise) has been tapped to play Spider-Man India in *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, Deadline can confirm.

The actor joins a stacked voice ensemble led by Shameik Moore and Hailee Steinfeld, which also includes Oscar Isaac, Brian Tyree Henry, Luna Lauren Velez, Greta Lee, Issa Rae, Rachel Dratch, Jorma Taccone, Shea Whigham, Jason Schwartzman and Daniel Kaluuya, as previously announced.

Across the *Spider-Verse* is Sony’s follow-up to its experimental feature *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, which grossed over

\$384M worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2019.

Directed by Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey and Rodney Rothman, *Into the Spider-Verse* watches as the teenage Miles Morales (Moore) becomes the Spider-Man of his universe, then joining with five spider-powered individuals from other dimensions to stop a threat to all realities.

Across the *Spider-Verse* will transport Brooklyn’s friendly neighborhood full-time webslinger across the Multiverse. He’ll again join forces in the new film with Gwen Stacy (Steinfeld), while working with a new team of Spider-People to face off with a villain more powerful than anything they’ve ever encountered.

First introduced to Marvel Comics in 2004, Spider-Man India came of age in the South Asian country as Pavitr Prabhakar, beginning to fight crime after gaining his spidey powers from an ancient yogi. The character’s story arc mirrors that of Peter Parker (aka Spider-Man) in most respects.

Justin K. Thompson, Joaquim Dos Santos and Kemp Powers are directing *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*, from a script by Phil Lord, Christopher Miller and David Callaham. Avi Arad, Amy Pascal, Lord, Miller and Christina Steinberg are producing, with Ramsey and Persichetti returning to exec produce alongside Aditya Sood. Pic is slated for release on June 2.

Best known for his role as Dopinder in the *Deadpool* films, based on Marvel’s comic book character of the same name, Soni has more recently appeared in films including *The People We Hate at the Wedding* and *Four Samosas*, among others. He also currently stars in the TBS comedy *Miracle Workers*, which returns for its fourth season this year.

While *Deadpool 3* is coming up on its production start date, whether Soni will return for the newest installment in the franchise is not yet clear. News of his *Spider-Verse* casting was first reported by One Take News. reported by deadline.com

## Henry Cavill & Guy Ritchie WWII Pic ‘Ministry’ Adds Alan Ritchson, Henry Golding, Alex Pettyfer, Cary Elwes, Hero Fiennes Tiffin, Babs Olusanmokun, Til Schweiger & Henrique Zaga



There’s more star power on board for Guy Ritchie and Jerry Bruckheimer’s new war movie, *The Ministry Of Ungentlemanly Warfare*, we can reveal, ahead of its February 13 start date in Turkey. Joining Henry Cavill and Eiza González are Alan Ritchson (*Fast X*, *Reacher*), Henry Golding (*Crazy Rich Asians*, *The Gentlemen*), Henrique Zaga (*Beyond The Universe*), Alex Pettyfer (*Magic Mike*, *The Butler*), Cary Elwes (*Operation Fortune: Ruse de Guerre*), Hero Fiennes Tiffin (*After* franchise), Babs Olusanmokun (*Dune*, “Star Trek: Strange New Worlds”) and Til Schweiger (*Inglourious Basterds*, *Atomic Blonde*). Black Bear International arranged financing *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* and is handling world sales on the film.

The true story covers UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s and Ian Fleming’s secret WWII combat organization. The clandestine squad’s unconventional and ‘ungentlemanly’ fighting techniques against the Nazis helped change the

course of the war and gave birth to the modern Black Ops unit. The script by Paul Tamasy and Eric Johnson, Arash Amel and Ritchie is based on war correspondent and military historian Damien Lewis’ best-selling book of the same name. Tamasy and Johnson initiated the project and sold it as a pitch to Bruckheimer and Paramount in 2015.

On the heels of his Best Picture Oscar nom for *Top Gun: Maverick*, Bruckheimer (*Bad Boys for Life*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise) is producing alongside Chad Oman, Ritchie’s producing partner Ivan Atkinson, and John Friedberg for Black Bear International. Executive producers include Scott Lastaiti, Olga Filipuk, Damien Lewis, and Tamasy and Johnson.

Ritchson is the star of the Amazon series *Reacher*, which ranks among Prime Video’s top five most-watched series ever in the U.S. and globally. He will next star in Universal’s *Fast X*, the 10th installment of the blockbuster *Fast* and *Furious* franchise, and the Lionsgate drama *Ordinary Angels* opposite Hilary Swank. Golding reunites with Guy Ritchie following *The Gentlemen* and is currently in post on *The Old Guard 2* starring Charlize Theron for Netflix, the Paramount animated film *The Tiger’s Apprentice*, and Lily Rabe and Hamish Linklater’s drama *Downtown Owl* for Sony. Zaga recently

starred in *Beyond the Universe* for Netflix and *The New Mutants* for 20th Century Studios.

Pettyfer is best known for starring in Steven Soderbergh’s *Magic Mike*, as well as historical drama *The Butler* and *Back Roads*. He will next be seen in the upcoming film *5Lbs of Pressure*. Elwes’ career included starring roles in *The Princess Bride* and *Saw*. He will next star in several films, including Paramount’s *Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One*, Guy Ritchie’s *Operation Fortune: Ruse de Guerre*, and the Zack Snyder-directed *Rebel Moon* for Netflix. He also stars in the indie film *Blackberry*, which is in competition at this year’s Berlinale. Fiennes Tiffin got his start playing Tom Riddle in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and has since starred in the *After* franchise, and most recently *The Woman King* alongside Viola Davis.

Olusanmokun’s recent credits include *Dune* and “Star Trek: Strange New Worlds” for Paramount+ and he has previously worked with Guy Ritchie on *Wrath of Man* for MGM. Schweiger is known for roles in *Inglourious Basterds* and *Atomic Blonde*, among others, and is also an extremely successful director in Germany, known for films including *Berlin, I Love You* and *Honig Im Kopf (Head Full of Honey)*. Reported by deadline.com

# 2023 Oscars: “Everything Everywhere All At Once” Takes Best Picture & Six Others - See Full Winners List



**A24’s *Everything Everywhere All at Once* won Best Picture tonight at the 95th annual Academy Awards.**

The Daniels — Daniel Kwan & Daniel Scheinert — also won the Best Director Oscar and Original Screenplay Oscars for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, which led all films with seven trophies after coming into the ceremony with a leading 11 nominations. Netflix’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* took home four Oscars, but the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences spread the wealth with the rest of its trophies, with A24’s *The Whale* being the night’s only other two-time winner. Michelle Yeoh ended an exciting awards-season race for Best Actress with a win for A24’s *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, beating out her main rival, *Tár* Cate Blanchett, a two-time previous Oscar winner.

Brendan Fraser won the wild Best Actor race for A24’s *The Whale*. It was a topsy-turvy awards season for the category, in which Colin Farrell (*The Banshees of Inisherin*) and Austin Butler (*Elvis*) also picked up multiple wins for their roles. As did the Daniels, Sarah Polley followed her WGA Award win by taking the Adapted Screenplay Oscars for MGM/UAR’s *Women Talking*. “First of all, I

just want to thank the Academy for not being mortally offended by the words ‘women’ and ‘talking’ put so close together like that,” Polley said onstage, after a typically energetic acceptance speech by the Daniels.

Jamie Lee Curtis won her first career Oscar, for her supporting role in A24’s *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. That came right after her co-star Ke Huy Quan completed his fantastic awards-season run — and an unlikely comeback — with an expected win for Best Supporting Actor. “I almost gave up on my [dream,]” he said onstage. “To all of you out there: Please keep your dreams alive.” Curtis name-checked the important people in her life, including her late parents Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, emphasizing, “We just won an Oscar!” James Friend scooped the Cinematography Oscar for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, beating nominees including *Elvis*’ Mandy Walker. She took the ASC Award last week and was looking to be the first woman to win the Academy Award in the category. Germany’s *All Quiet* also took Best Production Design and the International Feature Film award. It’s the third win for the country in that category, following *Nowhere in Africa* (2002) and *The Tin Drum* (1979, for West Germany).

Guillermo del Toro’s *Pinocchio* took home the first trophy of the night, for Animated Feature. The Netflix pic is the first for a streamer to win the top toon prize. “Animation is cinema,” Guillermo del Toro said in accepting. “Animation is not a genre and animation is ready to be taken to the next step. We are all ready for it. Please help us keep animation in the conversation.” Ruth Carter won her second Costume Design Oscar for

Disney’s *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Her first was for *Black Panther* four years ago. She is the first Black woman to win two Academy Awards. The team behind A24’s *The Whale*, who transformed Brendan Fraser into a 600-pounder, took the Academy Award for Makeup and Hairstyling.

The Visual Effects Oscar went to the team behind the third-highest-grossing film of all time, *Avatar: The Way of Water*. That’s not surprising after the long-in-the-works sequel dominated the VES Awards last month. *Top Gun: Maverick*, 2022’s second-biggest movie and an ever longer-awaited sequel, for Best Sound. Best Production Design went to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as did Best Score. ‘Naatu Naatu,’ the rollicking track from India’s *RRR*, won Best Song. It’s the first tune from an Indian movie to take the award.

Warner Bros’ *Navalny*, the story of Russian dissident and assassination target Alexei Navalny, won for Documentary Feature. His wife, Yulia Navalnaya, was onstage and said, “My husband is in prison just for telling the truth. My husband is in prison just for defending democracy. Alexei, I’m dreaming of the day when you will be free and our country will be free. Stay strong.” On the short-film front *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* won the Animation prize, *An Irish Goodbye* scored the Live-Action trophy — and sang “Happy Birthday to You” to its subject, James Martin — and *The Elephant Whisperers* won for Documentary. It is the country’s first competitive Academy Award for directing-producing. Jimmy Kimmel hosted Hollywood’s Big Night for a third time, and ABC is airing it live coast-to-coast from the Dolby Theatre.

## FULL WINNERS LIST

### BEST PICTURE

*Everything Everywhere All at Once* (A24)  
A Hot Dog Hands Production  
Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert and Jonathan Wang, Producers

### ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE

Michelle Yeoh in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (A24)

### ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE

Brendan Fraser in *The Whale* (A24)

### DIRECTING

Daniel Kwan & Daniel Scheinert  
*Everything Everywhere All at Once* (A24)

### ANIMATED SHORT FILM

*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* (BBC and Apple Original Films) A NoneMore and Bad Robot Production Charlie Mackesy and Matthew Freud

### DOCUMENTARY SHORT FILM

*The Elephant Whisperers* (Netflix)  
A Netflix Documentary/Sikhya Entertainment Production Kartiki Gonsalves and Guneet Monga

### INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM

*All Quiet on the Western Front* (Germany)  
A Netflix/Amusement Park Film in co-production with Gunpowder Films in association with Sliding Down Rainbows Entertainment/Anima Pictures Production

**FILM EDITING**

Everything Everywhere All at Once (A24)  
Paul Rogers

**MUSIC (ORIGINAL SONG)**

Naatu Naatu from RRR (Variance Films/Sarigama Cinemas) Music by  
M.M. Keeravaani Lyric by Chandrabose

**SOUND**

Top Gun: Maverick (Paramount)  
Mark Weingarten, James H. Mather, Al Nelson, Chris Burdon and Mark  
Taylor

**WRITING (ADAPTED SCREENPLAY)**

Women Talking (Orion Pictures/United Artists Releasing) Screenplay by  
Sarah Polley

**WRITING (ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY)**

Everything Everywhere All at Once (A24)  
Written by Daniel Kwan & Daniel Scheinert

**VISUAL EFFECTS**

Avatar: The Way of Water (Walt Disney)  
Joe Letteri, Richard Baneham, Eric Saindon and Daniel Barrett

**MUSIC (ORIGINAL SCORE)**

All Quiet on the Western Front (Netflix)  
Volker Bertelmann

**PRODUCTION DESIGN**

All Quiet on the Western Front  
(Netflix) Production Design: Christian M. Goldbeck  
Set Decoration: Ernestine Hipper

**COSTUME DESIGN**

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (Walt Disney)  
Ruth Carter

**MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING**

The Whale (A24)  
Adrien Morot, Judy Chin and Anne Marie Bradley  
**CINEMATOGRAPHY**  
All Quiet on the Western Front (Netflix)  
James Friend

**LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM**

An Irish Goodbye (Network Ireland Television)  
A Floodlight Pictures Production  
Tom Berkeley and Ross White

**DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILM**

Navalny (Warner Bros./CNN Films/HBO Max)  
A Fishbowl Films/RaeFilm Studios/Cottage M Production Daniel Roher,  
Odessa Rae, Diane Becker, Melanie Miller and Shane Boris

**ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE**

Jamie Lee Curtis in Everything Everywhere All at Once  
(A24)

**ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE**

Ke Huy Quan in Everything Everywhere All at Once  
(A24)

**ANIMATED FEATURE FILM**

Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio  
(Netflix)  
Guillermo del Toro, Mark Gustafson, Gary Ungar and Alex Bulkley

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# MONTHLY MOVIE

## ★ ★ REVIEWS ★ ★

### John Wick: Chapter 4

Review by Marcus Blake



Keanu Reeves is back in the 4th installment of John Wick. Suffice it to say this has been one of his most popular characters, probably the most popular since he was Neo in The Matrix trilogy. However, after three John Wick movies, how does the 4th film compare? Is it worth seeing? The answer is an ecstatic yes. The filmmakers go all in on what feels like the final installment. In fact, it feels more like two movies in one because the film is almost three hours long. It's a grand spectacle of action and storytelling as we dive more into the lore behind this secret organization that John Wick used to be a part of. We get more characters from his past and a really good villain. I can't honestly say that this is the best one out of the John Wick franchise, it's not the worst, but probably somewhere in the middle. But let's be honest, we don't watch John Wick films for the storytelling. It's all about the action and how awesome the kills are by John Wick. However, it was nice to learn more about this world and get more into the lore.

First of all, Keanu Reeves is awesome as John Wick. If you like him in the previous

films, then you will like him in this one. The action is probably the best part of the film because the story revolves around him trying to take down the High Table or the new person in control of it who sends the largest bounty that John Wick has ever had on his head, and John Wick has to face more bounty hunters and killers than in the previous films. The film has a great villain played by Bill Skarsgård. He's a man that wants to control the entire organization and reshape it without giving much care about its rules and traditions. He's also pretty much a coward that won't do his own fighting. While the previous films have centered more on John Wick, the fourth film has a lot more friends from his past that are there to help. One of the biggest draws is Donnie Yen, who is famous for his martial arts films, but also in the Star Wars universe.

If you don't know what I mean then check out his performance in the Star Wars film *Rogue One*. He plays a former friend who must take down John Wick in order to save his own family. It's a predictable storyline, but Donnie Yen's performance is outstanding. The other thing that makes this film grade is we get to go to Tokyo and then Paris France. The all-out fight in Paris is one of the best action sequences in filmmaking. It's a great backdrop that serves as its own character in the story, especially when John Wick has to climb 200 steps in order to get to the final battle. When it comes to action films, you're not going to get much better than John Wick 4.

I really don't have any complaints about this film. It gives us a bigger story and a sense of finality so that there is no great loss that they never make any more films. It brings a great conclusion to the John Wick story and the action is more over-the-top than in previous films which makes for great entertainment. I don't like the fact that it was three hours long, but you're trying to tell a big story as if it's the last, I completely understand. Although, if you're going to have a nearly three-hour movie, then I feel like they should have spent more time on the lore and less time on action. But this is a John Wick movie so the action and the body count are a little bit more important, right? Even with all the action, I still have a lot of questions

about John Wick's past and even though we get to know John Wick a little bit better especially through past friendships, I still have more questions than answers. At this point, we need a prequel to answer all these questions.

Overall, this is a great bookend to the saga. The fans get all of the over-the-top action that we come to expect from a John Wick film, and it seems to have the perfect ending as he takes on the most sinister villain to date. This film has the best cast when it comes to great action stars and the filmmakers go all out more than they have in any of the previous films. Keanu Reeves isn't any better or worse than he is in the previous movies. He's just as good, even when literally, his character should have died at least three different times in the movie, but somehow survives as if he's The Six Million Dollar Man. But moviegoers shouldn't get hung up on facts like that, the film is entertaining and has one of the best endings when it comes to a John Wick film. Fans of this franchise will not be disappointed because you get more action, more deaths, and the best cast compared to the previous films. It's true that there's not much depth to films like this and that's okay. We are meant to be entertained, simple as that. But honestly, this could have been two different movies and that's probably my biggest criticism. Other than one minor critique, it's a hell of a lot of fun in a great way to end the franchise. Of course, there's always a way to bring John Wick back for a fifth, and who wouldn't watch that movie!

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)

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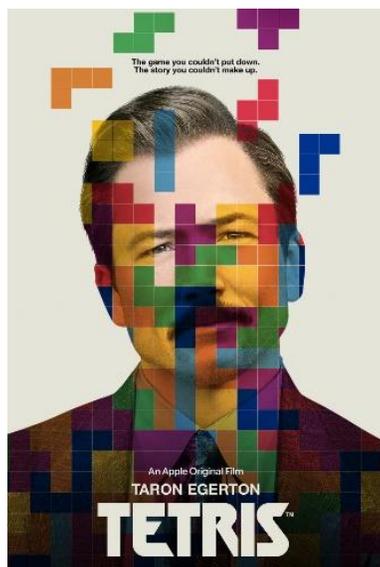
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# Tetris

Review by Alex Moore



I have been a gamer since I stood on a chair at Crystal's Pizza and played Super Mario Bros. arcade for the first time. Every gamer, from every generation, has a story like mine, yet no two stories are exactly alike. By the time I joined in the fun of console gaming, the original Nintendo Entertainment System had already been around these parts for a few years. I will not forget it. I was surrounded by my cousins at Granny's house, covered in chicken pox. Thankfully, this granted me an extra week away from school and, thusly, more time to break in my new gaming console. What times! Not long after all this, a handheld console by Nintendo was released: the Gameboy. Unlike several of the other, competitor's handheld systems, this one contained a very basic color palette, which meant longer battery life and a lower cost per unit, overall. It was another successful concept for Nintendo, but this was only part of the reason why the Gameboy sold so well. Packaged with the first copies of this device was a simple, yet addictive game, named "Tetris." It is a funny name, yes, but the story behind the inspiration for THAT is not nearly as compelling as the story of how Nintendo eventually gained the rights to mass produce this game for their little console. Now, a feature-length movie, "Tetris," is making its way to Apple TV+ (roughly 33 years later).

Of course, this is not the first time a feature of any kind has been made about "Tetris." A few years ago, The Gaming Historian, of YouTube fame, released a very detailed and intriguing video documenting the process of the game's creation and its eventual journey beyond the iron curtain of the former Soviet Union. THIS film spends only a small amount of time going over how the game was

created and focuses a lot more of its time on the process of earning rights to distributing it around the world. I would like to point out, in this movie, the British are every bit as much of an antagonist to our story's protagonist as the Russians are.

Portraying the lead is Taron Egerton ("Sing 2") as Henk Rogers, a failed gaming creator, who owns a small company in Japan, but has to secure massive bank loans in order to even try to procure the rights to a masterpiece such as "Tetris." Over in Great Britain, another man is trying to do the same thing for HIS company (a much larger one). He is Robert Stein, played by Toby Jones ("The Pale Blue Eye"). His challenges are a bit different than that of Rogers.' Although money does not seem to be an issue, he needs to earn his own portion of it and if he does not, there is no point for him to be involved in the first place. In other words, he answers to someone else, who holds his livelihood in their hands. They are: Roger Allam ("The Hippopotamus") as Robert Maxwell and Anthony Boyle ("Tolkien") as Kevin Maxwell; a father-son duo in which one man holds all the cards in the deck and the other is trying to take a few of those cards just so he can appear to be more authoritative. Their interactions are often quite funny, throughout.



Now, I must introduce the genius behind the titular product. His name is Alexey Pajitnov, played by Nikita Yefremov ("Hostel"). His role in the film is somewhat limited, but grows as the story unfolds. Truly, it would be difficult to learn much about such individuals at the time of their prime because the USSR was extremely secretive to the rest of the world, especially the United States. However, Mr. Pajitnov is now an American and although he still likes to maintain his privacy, his story is one that I think more people ought to learn about, whether they are a fan of gaming history or not. Just for your information, Alexey has been a part of the making of 18 video games, in total, with at least five of them being related to his original game, all the way back in 1984. His latest credit comes from 2013.

The makers of "Tetris," the movie, tried to make this project as vivid and entertaining as they could. Throughout, there are references to the game and the industry, which should be familiar to anyone who played video games during this time period. The director, John S. Baird ("Stan & Ollie") has not been particularly active within the last few years until very recently. As for the screenwriter, Noah Pink ("Genius"), this was to be his first feature-length movie, coming off extended work for a series that ran for several years prior. Undoubtedly, some creative liberties were taken in the making of "Tetris" and I was aware of some of these details quite early and fairly often. The real-life Henk Rogers and Alexey Pajitnov made some suggestions for the script, but ultimately had to concede some of the figurative alterations for the sake of the film.

Possibly the most curious aspect, for me, before I sat down to watch "Tetris" was how they would go about recreating the old Soviet Union as it appeared during the 1980s. I was pleased with how this was executed and I also think the effort for creating the mindset and actions of those behind the iron curtain was commendable. One scene that really stood out to me, although I would question its authenticity, involved members of the KGB and ELORG (the national organization which owned the rights to all creative computer properties in the USSR) splitting up their time between three, simultaneous meetings about the various rights to "Tetris." It was very humorous in its final execution, but might have been symbolic as to how controlling and inept these individuals could be under such odd circumstances. At times, you will feel sorry for them and the people trying to do business with them, too.

All in all, I think "Tetris" was a pretty entertaining story, but I do not think it will appeal to very many people outside of the world of gaming, aside from those who enjoy history, in general. Even though I would recommend viewing this project, as a film critic, I would STILL advise those who are interested in this movie to check out the documentary made by Norman Caruso because I believe it is a lot more accurate, historically-speaking, and yet it is still of great quality from a production standpoint. You can compare and contrast these two and see what you think of both of them. It is quite possible that if you watch "Tetris," first, you may enjoy it a bit more than I did. Either way, I am saying it is worth your time to find out.

**Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)**



## Shazam! Fury of the Gods

Review by Marcus Blake



The second Shazam movie starring Zachary Levi is in theaters and that's awesome! But is the sequel better than its predecessor? Yes and no. I admit that I like the sequel better than the first movie. I'm probably one of the few that didn't think the first movie was all that great and maybe it's because I'm just not a huge fan of the character. It doesn't mean Shazam is not a good character, but in my opinion, he is not one of the better DC characters. However, he's still interesting enough and there have been some great comic book stories with Shazam. In "Shazam! Fury of the Gods," we find the characters embracing superhero lives, but having trouble with it. They're amateurs in a lot of ways. Billy means well, but his immaturity constantly shows in every attempt to be a superhero. This time the brothers and sisters come together to defeat the three daughters of Zeus who feel like they were robbed of their ancestral power. Perhaps in a way, they were. It makes for a great setup, and you know that Havoc will rear its ugly head.

Shazam! Fury of the Gods is a fun movie. These movies aren't as dark as previous DC movies. They're meant to be fun and lighthearted because you're dealing with kids as superheroes. Yes, that's one of the best things about the movie, also one of the most annoying things. One of my biggest criticisms is you get tired of Billy Batson by the end of this movie. He's immature and stupid, and while it was funny in the first movie, wouldn't you think he would have grown up and taken more responsibility as a superhero by the second movie? Not so much. The big surprise of the film is having Helen Mirren play one of the goddesses. She was great even if superhero movies are not where she shines as an actress. She makes her character sympathetic whereas Lucy Liu's character is downright psychotic and you hate her from the very beginning, which I guess is the point.

But the shining star of the film other than Zachary Levi is Rachel Zegler from West Side Story who plays Anthea. She's the one daughter who has some sense and doesn't want to destroy Humanity. It's also nice to see her character feel sympathetic toward Freddy, who walks with a cane when he's not a superhero. The film has a lot of great action. The comedy is good for this type of film. There's good chemistry among the adult superheroes as well as the kids. Meagan Good will make you laugh by playing the adult version of Darla as a superhero. She's kind of the glue that keeps it all together. You will certainly be entertained and there should be light-hearted superhero movies. But Shazam! Fury of the Gods is also just trying to be one of the funnier Marvel movies.

previous DC movies. *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* is a movie about characters that aren't really as important as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. However, the movie is made a little bit better with the fantastic cameo of Wonder Woman played by Gal Gadot. This is probably the last time we will see her as Wonder Woman. Billy Batson trying to hit on her was the funniest part of the movie. It's a fun superhero movie, but don't overpay for the tickets. Or maybe you should just wait till it's on HBO Max.

**Final Grade: 6 / 10 (Adequate)**

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The reason I don't rate the Shazam movies as high as other DC movies is there not as dark and dramatic. There's a certain tone set by Zack Snyder that made his movies, including the Snyder Cut of the Justice League movie better than they should be. I think his tone was perfect for DC movies because those stories are darker than Marvel stories. Shazam 2 feels like a fish out of water when it comes to the overall tone and while this movie as well as its predecessor is supposed to be more for kids, it's hard to imagine it as a DC movie when there are supposed to be darker tones to the story. I admit that I like some of the DC movies from Man of Steel to Batman vs Superman and the Snyder cut of Justice League a lot better than most. It's just this type of movie doesn't feel the same. It feels more like something the CW would have made when it comes to a superhero show. And that's fine, but if you're going to have an overall vision for your superhero movies and Warner media has not always been good at that then you need to keep that same tone for all your movies.

*Shazam Fury of the Gods* is a fun movie, but it's not a great movie and it's definitely made for a younger audience or adults who grew up reading DC Comics and understand the darker tones within the story. I give this movie the same grade I did the last one. It's a 6 out of 10. The film is good for what it is, but not as good when it comes to the storytelling of

## The Lost King

Review by Chloe James



I'm sure we all know this, but here's a reminder just in case. There are literally infinite ways to be a nerd. While yes, a majority of nerdism is often what media portrays: Star Wars fans, Trekkies, Whovians, Potterheads, every flavor of anime weeb. But let's face it, you can nerd out about anything! (Yes, hard-core sports fans, I'm absolutely including you in this.) No matter how old you are, or where you are in life, a random subject can come along and begin to occupy your mind so much that you can't help but to research every aspect of it, and eventually seek out others who share your interest.

The Lost King is a film that portrays a perfect example of this happening — and very closely based on a real life story. Phillipa Langley (Sally Hawkins) finds herself very undervalued, having been denied a much deserved promotion in her marketing career, as well as dealing with her dismissive teenaged sons and ex husband John (Steve Coogan, who also co-wrote the script along with John Pope.)

Upon having a strong reaction to watching a live performance of Shakespeare's "Richard III", Phillipa begins to see the "apparition" of the King Richard III (Harry Lloyd), and begins to think he wasn't the evil, miss-shapen usurper that history would portray him as. Further research over her new obsession would lead her into missing work, and eventually joining the local branch of the Richard III Society, a sort of fan club of individuals who feel the same way about the king as herself. Not satisfied with merely being a fan, Phillipa learns that Richard's body was never found. Through the help of historians and her "gut feelings", she's able to pinpoint a location she believes Richard's remains are buried: under a carpark in Leicester. Now she must do the impossible: get the funding, the city's permission, and convince a team of archeologists to dig in the location to find these remains.

As mentioned earlier, this is a story in which a very specific nerd-dom is taken to extreme measures. When a fan of something goes down an extreme path, it can often end...badly, either with them destroying their own lives or causing a measure of harm or discomfort for others. The Lost King, especially if you go into it not knowing how the events play out, certainly sets up Phillipa in this way. I both have empathy for Phillipa, and those closest to her who are witnessing her descent into obsession. I get it, there is a certain level of cringe you get when someone is a little too interested in a specific topic, especially if they have a controversial take on said topic.

On the other hand, this film did an excellent job making me feel the pure frustration this woman went to, just to be heard and believed. Sally Hawkins once again delivers an excellent performance portraying a woman with a disability (Phillipa has Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) who develops a special interest that no one understands at first, this time with a dead king instead of an aquatic humanoid. Besides the occasional conversations Phillipa has with the apparition of Richard III, this film has an extremely realistic and grounded quality to it. So much so, that I feel the second-hand frustration over all of the red tape she must

battle more than in most stories. This film is a sharp reminder that it is doubly hard to be believed in an academic subject matter as a woman.

While the film's grounded realism can definitely be seen as a plus for those who want an accurate portrayal of the real life events, it may be a drawback for others. I can see how many casual movie watchers may find this one on the slow side, if they could even get into the topic at all. Truth be told, I can already see high school history teachers wheeling out a tv (wait, do they still do that?), and playing this for a class that may or may not pay attention. In other words, if you don't really care about Richard III or the discovery of a 500 year old missing body, or at the very least a woman fighting to be believed, The Lost King may be a bit of a trudge to watch.

As a casual general history nerd, I can at least say I appreciated both this film's existence and its accuracy in which they depicted the events its portraying. While it may not be the most exciting watch I could recommend to anyone, The Lost King is a great reminder that we all have it in us to be nerds in some way. If you have someone who comes up to you, bursting at the seams to talk about their new special interest, be nice and listen to them for a while. You never know how much the encouragement could inspire them to contribute to society for the better.

Final Grade: 6 / 10 (Adequate)

## Champions

Review by Alex Moore



Sports have a way of bringing people together. It is not just about the thrill of the sport, itself, but also about the connection fans have within a community, great or small, in

other words. We are mostly all familiar with our own sets of communities, but what happens when or if we step outside of what is familiar and into something new and unusual? You might feel out of place at first, but with time you could find yourself in familiar territory all over again, right? Maybe just keep that in mind, at least.

Since I was nine years old, basketball has been considered my first love, when it comes to sports. I recall myself once saying, about football, in a manner of speaking, it does not matter who is playing if you are a true and dedicated fan. In other words, "football is football." I would have to believe, with conviction, that I can say precisely the same thing about basketball, as well. Keep THAT in mind, too.

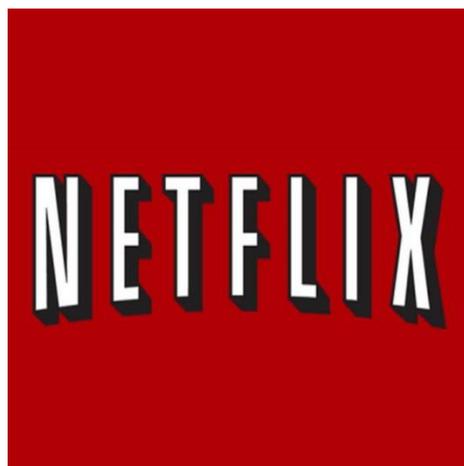


"Champions" is the newest offering from one side of the legendary directing duo, Bobby Farrelly Jr. You know, "Dumb & Dumber," "Shallow Hal," etcetera. The Screenplay was provided by Mark Rizzo, based on a Spanish feature, "Campeones," which was released only five, short years ago. No stranger to off-the-wall sports movies, Woody Harrelson ("The Man From Toronto") heads the cast, playing as Marcus, who is a down-and-out assistant coach in Des Moines, Iowa. Moments into the story, he casually angers an apparent one night stand and shoves his boss to the floor before exiting the court. By the time the night is done, he finds himself behind bars and is soon out of a job and on the way to coaching a recreational-level basketball team. Surely, in the mind of a supposed professional, this is what one might consider scraping the bottom of the barrel. However, as most any viewer would expect, this is NOT a journey to the hole in the bottom of a rotting whiskey keg, but actually a journey to the "angel's share" of the batch, if you will.

As I mentioned in a review pretty recently, it is not predictability that sinks a film. Unlike that movie, though, this one succeeds, despite this. I will admit there was one, little detail which did not go completely as expected and I was actually thankful for that. Beneath Harrelson, in this illustrious cast, are: Kaitlin

Olson (“Arizona”) as Alex, the ageless Ernie Hudson (“Ghostbusters: Afterlife”) as Phil Peretti and Cheech Marin (“Shotgun Wedding”). Alex goes from a casual fling to a romantic interest. Phil is the head coach where Marcus is an assistant and Marin is something of an athletic director where Marcus begins and tries to maintain his new journey.

The remainder of the cast, comprised mostly of the team of “Friends” at the recreational center, deserves its own section. If you have enjoyed the work of Bobby Farrelly before, you might remember that he and his brother are known to include actors from all sorts of vantage points and I can think of virtually no one who utilizes the talents of those untapped resources any better; without exaggeration. Here are The Friends: Madison Tevlin as Consentino, Joshua Felder as Darius, Kevin Iannucci as Johnny, Ashton Gunning as Cody, Matthew Von Der Ahe as Craig, Tom Sinclair as Blair, James Day Keith as Benny, Alex Hintz as Arthur, Casey Metcalfe as Marlon and Bradley Edens as Showtime. Viewers will all pick and choose their favorites of the team, as hard as that is, but for me, it is a toss-up between Consentino and Johnny. Having said that, the most mysterious and intriguing of these is Darius. It will not take you long to find out why. A character arc is helpful when digesting a movie and his is the most valuable, I would say.



I could not help but wonder if the majority of the scenes, especially involving The Friends, were executed with very little in the way of a scripted set of lines. It has become popular to make films with a more “natural” edge by doing so, but sometimes it just flows better for all those involved. I believe that was the case in this project. While I was pleasantly charmed the recreational squad, for the most part, the rest of the characters were equally likable and easy to root for. By the time we reach the end of the story, we ought not feel cheated or like the last two hours were a waste of time. Regardless of the over-abundance of whimsical banter, there was enough focus to keep the movie on track.

At one point, it seemed apparent that the film was poking at itself, perhaps to beat the critic at their own game, and it DID give me

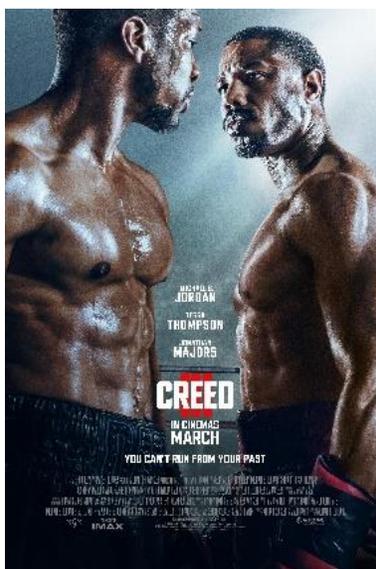
pause...is it exploitive or patronizing to portray any of these characters in the way that they were? Honestly, in this day in age, sometimes you just CANNOT win. If you cast specific parts with classically-trained actors, some will say, “you should’ve used real people to play these parts” and if you do that, some will say, “you are exploiting these poor people for your own gain” and what-not. I, for one, was happy to smile and root for The Friends all along the way and I would say that most people will feel better, taking a break from their stressful lives, to watch “Champions.”

Yes, I am recommending this film, though it be sloppy at times. If anything, that is a testimony to just how effective everyone was in their respective roles for the picture. Fair enough? Whatever you do, relax and enjoy it. I think many will overlook this movie as the Academy awards approach. They should not. This might actually be more entertaining than that will be. Who knows?

**Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)**

## Creed III

*Review by Marcus Blake*



Creed 3 as a movie best represents a fighter at the end of his career. The end of a career is never as exciting as the beginning or the middle. Yes, this is the worst film of the Creed trilogy, but that isn't to say that it's a bad movie and if you're a fan of the Rocky or Creed series you should see it. In fact, it is a great way to end the story of Adonis Creed. But in a lot of ways, it felt like I was watching Muhammad Ali fight after “The Rumble in the Jungle”. There were some moments of excitement, but overall, it was kind of sad. Is Michael B Jordan's Direction. Has a first-time director he made a lot of bold choices, some of them worked and some of

them didn't, but he definitely has the makings of a good director and I hope we get to see more from him. I enjoyed the film for what it is, but there is one major thing lacking and that is Rocky Balboa. What made the first two Creed movies great is that you had Rocky Balboa as the trainer. You had the legend in Creed's corner passing the torch to the younger boxer. There's an emotional weight that comes with Rocky being in the corner of Apollo Creed's son as he's rising to the top of the boxing world. You don't have that same emotional weight in this movie even though the story is centered around Adonis having to face this past. It's a good story kind of like Rocky 3, but not as good as the story in the previous films. But really, I don't think we were expecting it to be as good, you go into this movie hoping that it's not going to be bad.

What makes this movie worth watching? First, you get Great Performances out of Michael B. Jordan and Jonathan Majors. Really the standout performance is from Jonathan Majors who plays the former friend that spent half his life in prison and wants a second chance in the world of boxing. He plays a very sympathetic villain. In some ways, you can't help but root for him once you know the full story of what happened between him and Adonis when they were kids. He is a mixture of two different kinds of boxers. The young hungry boxer that you root for to get to the top and the one whose ego takes with the trappings of when you're at the top and you forget who you really are and what got you there in the first place. In some ways, it symbolizes a young Mike Tyson. You understand his reasons for forcing his way into a title shot and his hatred toward Adonis because he feels that Creed got to live the life he should have had before he went to prison. This whole movie is about these two reconciling their past and of course the only way to reconcile it is a boxing match. It's a good story, but again doesn't have the same emotional weight as the first two movies. It's still a decent movie with great boxing action for the most part. It has a lot of great nods to all the Rocky movies. Probably the best reference is when the character played by Jonathan Majors wants a title shot even though he's not a professional boxer and tells him that even Apollo Creed gave Rocky, an unknown boxer a shot at the title. If this is the last movie in the Rocky universe, especially the story of Adonis Creed then it is a fitting end.

I admit that this movie could be better. You but it still had a scene or two with Rocky. You even had Ivan Drago back for this movie and he and Adonis are even friends. Really, my favorite part of the entire movie is when Ivan Drago is helping Adonis Creed train for the upcoming fight against his former friend. However, this movie is predictable. You know exactly what's going to happen before you even see the movie and yes, one could argue that all of the Rocky movies are fairly predictable. Rocky was always going to win in the end or at least go the

distance and the first Creed movie mirrored that when he didn't win the fight but went the distance against the world champion. This film is all about Adonis Creed having to reinvent himself for one more fight and regain the heavyweight championship of the world. Technically this is a spoiler, but again, you know he's going to win. The other major criticism I have is while it's okay to make some bold choices as a director, the big fight at the end should have the greatest boxing action. This one didn't. Most of the fight had too many metaphorical images of a fight between two friends and having to overcome their past. You can have those images for one or two rounds, but not most of the fight. There was more action in Rocky 3's big fight with clever lying at the end of the film and that fight was only three rounds versus the 12 rounds they actually go for the big fight in Creed 3. In fact, the best boxing action comes from the fight when Jonathan Majors' character actually wins the title. This movie felt very short, the story felt very small, and to add more to the emotional weight of the story, you could have had about another 10 minutes of flashbacks and training scenes.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't go see it in the theater. Just know that it won't be as good as the first movie and definitely won't be as good as Creed 2. Michael B Jordan does a great job directing this film, but it does feel like a lot was cut out to keep the movie under 2 hours. I'm not saying it should be a 3-hour movie, but a little bit more would have added to the story. You get some great boxing action. The training scenes are good, but when the training scenes are better than the actual fight that doesn't make for a very good movie. However, this is a good end to the Adonis Creed story, but it just doesn't feel like a Creed movie without Rocky Balboa is more and that's the film's biggest downfall. Yes, Adonis Creed is his own character and has his own story, but these movies are still Rocky movies even if Rocky is just the trainer. We've heard rumors that Sylvester Stallone wants to make another Rocky movie where he trains a talented but undocumented immigrant, that does sound interesting, but if that movie happens then hopefully, they don't make the mistake that Creed 3 makes...not having cameos by other characters like Adonis Creed. If you catch Creed 3 in the theater, go to a matinee or just wait till you can rent it. It's an okay movie, just not good enough to match the awesomeness of Creed 1 and 2.

**Final Grade: 6 / 10 (Adequate)**



## Cocaine Bear

*"A Double Review" by  
Alex Moore and Marcus Blake*



*By Alex Moore*

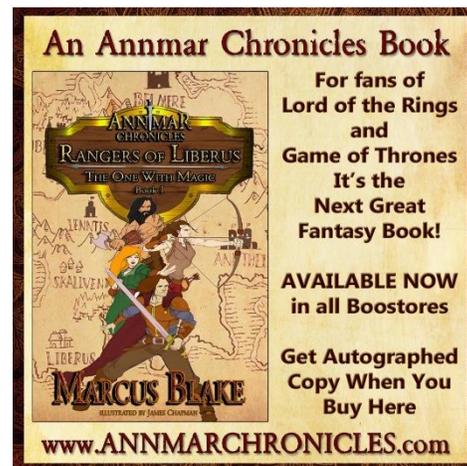
Man versus animal...or woman, as well. Since, perhaps, the beginning of time, this clash has existed. Even though the experts repeatedly tell us, "These creatures what nothing to do with us," sooner or later, the two sides mingle and if you have ever watched a movie where this takes place, it does not usually go over too well. So, why have bears been a constant on the big screen? What, exactly, is the appeal? If I thought I knew, I would say it right here and now. I also wonder...was King Kong the character that started it all? Have we, simply put, just been obsessed with gargantuan animals due to their mythical allure? Well, I must say, I DID think of "King Kong" on a couple of different occasions while viewing: "Cocaine Bear." Directing for the third time in the past eight years is Elizabeth Banks, but this project is unique, by comparison. For starters, it is not a sequel or a remake. Secondly, it is inspired by true events. About that...

Creative liberties, as per usual, were taken while making this film. In some instances, the alterations are pretty minor, but where the greatest change lies is in the main premise, itself. Yes, a bear from southeast Kentucky ingested large amounts of cocaine in 1985, but the results were, apparently, far less dramatic and I think the people of northwest Georgia are thankful for that. In there, should it really matter how much of this story is true? I think not!

We open with an unknown man in a cargo plane, dumping drugs before he jumps out, himself, but fails to land safely. This leaves the product unaccounted for. Then, we move to an

overhead view of a strange, hiking couple, played by Kristofer Hivju and Hannah Hoekstra as Olaf and Elsa. As they discuss their future family plans, they, too, examine a wild bear from afar. Soon the bear approaches and appears to be deranged, but by then, it is virtually too late for the pair to react in an effective fashion. Common details are established pretty early: the bear prefers to bite off limbs, possesses heightened strength and is extra aggressive...oh, before I forget, again, the titular character is NOT the primary villain of this movie AND only the villains suffer the proper fate by the end of the story. For those of you out there who struggle to watch animals deal with humanistic plights and pitfalls, so to speak, the majority of the scenes involving any bears look to be CGI-generated. We shall see how good these effects still look within a handful of years, will we not?

As the story proceeds, we are introduced to the bulk of the main characters: Keri Russell ("Antlers") as Sari; a nurse and a single mother, Brooklynn Prince ("Settlers") as Dee Dee; Sari's daughter, and Christian Convery ("Diary of a Wimpy Kid") as Henry; Dee Dee's friend. Consider this as one set of protagonists compared to the bear. Elsewhere: O'Shea Jackson Jr ("Just Mercy") as Howard; a drug dealer, Alden Ehrenreich ("Solo: A Star Wars Story") as Eddie; Howard's friend and cohort, and Matthew Rhys ("Seal Team") as Andrew C Thornton II; a member of a local gang. Consider this as another set of protagonists compared to the bear, but with different motives and circumstances. Additionally, there is: Margo Martindale ("Lazy Susan") as Ranger Liz; a park ranger and Jesse Tyler Ferguson ("Ice Age: Collision Course") as Peter; Ranger Liz's romantic interest. These two team up with Sari to locate her daughter and friend while the bear is on the loose. The others, aforementioned, arrive later and go it on their own. They team up due to an overlap of interests in the missing cocaine.



Although the characters have their moments to draw us in with charming accounts and demeanors, it is the reactions to the wildlife that

take us through most of the story. Think of it as an odd mix of “King Kong” and “Cujo.” It is pretty simple. The bear attacks the characters and they either escape or die, somehow. There really is not much more to it than that. What I found interesting, though, is that the attacks get zanier as the story goes along and with that, it gets more violent. The more violent the film becomes, the more shocking it is for the audience and, therefore, more hilarious. In this case, it does not matter what I give away about the plot cause that is not what counts here. If I can sum it up, those whom you expect to die do and those whom you expect to not die do not, for the most part.

Sooner or later, the two most authoritative characters come looking for the drugs, too: Isaiah Whitlock Jr as Bob and Ray Liotta as Syd. Bob is a kind, well-to-do officer, operating out of his jurisdiction and Syd is the boss when it comes to obtaining the drug product, in the end. He is the real villain in this outfit when it is all said and done. I should add, you never know what you will be last remembered for as an actor and I think Liotta, wherever he is now, probably finds it humorous that this would wind up being his last role.

“Cocaine Bear” is a movie that takes a lot of risks because it can and lands more often than it misses as an outrageous comedy. However, I am finding it difficult to say much else about it. There are minor plot details that do not even get wrapped up until a few moments are shown on screen during the end credits. I was entertained every bit as much as I was when I watched “Megan” just a few weeks ago, but despite what some of my fellow audience members had to say, I just cannot give “Cocaine Bear” any further credit cause that is about as far as it can go. Think of this as a mild recommendation; a film you can watch and enjoy at least once, but might not be in the mood to rewatch again until some time has passed and you are really bored. Just be prepared for extreme, comic book-style gore and relax and enjoy it for what it is.

**Final Grade: 6 / 10**

**By Marcus Blake**

A wild bear eating cocaine doesn’t seem like a true story, but then again stranger things have happened. While the real story is funny, turning it into a horror comedy film is even better. *Cocaine Bear* is not going to win any Awards, but it will entertain you. The ridiculousness of the story will keep you laughing all the way to the end and that’s the brilliance of this movie. A movie doesn’t have to be great to entertain you. But some of the best movies we watch over and over are not really that good in the grand scheme of filmmaking, but as long as the film entertains you then it’s worth watching. I can’t critique this film the same way I do serious dramas, but

I will say that I very much enjoyed it and even though it’s probably just 6 or 7 the way we grade movies at That Nerd Show, it doesn’t matter because it was still worth seeing in the theater.

The real story is about a cocaine drop that went bad and some of the kilos got lost in a state park where a black bear, being curious, ate cocaine and went on a violent rampage. Yes, the film takes some liberties and gives moviegoers some glorious deaths, but it doesn’t have to be entirely factual for it to be a good movie. The movie opens up with a drug dealer dropping duffel bags of cocaine out of plain while high as a kite and then accidentally gets tossed from the plane, unconscious to where he can’t open up his parachute.

And that’s where all the cocaine gets lost. Now the adventure begins because it’s a race against time with the drug dealers trying to recover 14 million dollars worth of cocaine, a couple of kids who decided to skip school and get lost in the State Park, thieving teenagers who are up to no good, and a park ranger who does more harm with her gun than actually saving anybody. This film has some of the best deaths on the big screen, in some ways you actually root for the bear. Plus, this was one of Ray Liotta’s funniest performances. Sadly, it’s his last performance as he passed away last year, but he went out with a bang with this hilarious movie. Directed by Elizabeth Banks, she gives us a great B-style horror film that keeps us laughing with fantastic deaths. Yes, it’s not Shakespeare, it’s not some inspiring drama or an allegory about the drug trade. It’s just a funny movie about a bunch of people trying to escape a bear high on cocaine against the backdrop of the 1980s War on Drugs. We don’t need to know the backstories of all the characters. There’s no great lesson to learn from this movie. It simply entertains and that’s all it needs to do. There are a lot of great horror comedies that keep us entertained from *Shaun of the Dead* to *Cooties* to the Evil Dead movies. I see Cocaine Bear becoming a cult classic. Maybe the movie really isn’t that good, but it’s funny as hell and I guarantee you’ll watch it again. **Final Grade: 6 / 10**

## We Have A Ghost

Review by Chloe James



These days, most of us are desperately trying to remember the things that made us happy when we were younger. It wasn’t long before makers of media and various products caught on that nostalgia is a very easy way of selling things to the masses. In turn the more cynical minded among us have caught on, and refuse to partake of anything that markets itself as “retro.” I mean, I get it. Even though I’m EXTREMELY easy to convince to buy into something if it reminds me of my youth, being pandered doesn’t always make me feel great about it. But occasionally a show, film, or even a song comes along that isn’t trying to copy and paste a retro style or existing property, yet brings back a flood of wonderful nostalgic memories and feelings. I am happy to say, *We Have a Ghost*, the latest Netflix original movie, is one of those rare gems.

The film follows the Presley family (Anthony Mackie and Erica Ash) and their sons Kevin (Jahi Di’Allo Winston) and Fulton (Niles Fitch), who move into an extremely old, suspiciously cheap home in the suburbs. However, they soon discover that their house is haunted by a ghost named Ernest (David Harbour), who died sometime in the 1960s or 1970s and is trapped in the house. At first, all of the family except Kevin is scared of Ernest, but they soon realize that he’s harmless and just wants to solve the mystery of his death. Their dad, Frank decides to start a YouTube channel to try to get wealthy off the back of Ernest which works magnifically.

With the help of Kevin’s next door neighbor/classmate Joy (Isabella Russo), they start to uncover clues about how to figure out what happened to Ernest, and the group goes on a wild adventure to find the truth. Along the way, they encounter a number of obstacles, including a team of CIA ghost hunters who are after Ernest, led by Dr. Leslie Monroe (Tig Notaro).

We Have a Ghost is directed and written by Christopher Landon, based on a short story called "Ernest" by Geoff Manaugh. Christophy Landon, known for horror/comedy films such as Happy Death Day, Freaky, and Scouts Guide to the Apocalypse, proves again that he is able to mesh the two worlds of teen comedy and horror masterfully. Because of this, it reminds me a lot of the 80's, early 90's in its tone, back when you could make a horror comedy without parody. It's both nostalgic and refreshing.

Overall, We Have a Ghost is a fun and lighthearted film that will entertain audiences looking for a good laugh. The performances by the cast are all solid, with David Harbour and Jahi Di'Allo Winston standing out as the highlights. The chemistry between the actors is also great and adds to the humor and heart of the film. David Harbour deserves a special shout out as his role was almost exclusively silent except groans. The film's visual effects are impressive, especially in the scenes where Ernest reveals his ghostly powers. The film is also one of those instances of having an unexpectedly impressive soundtrack that complements the film's tone and adds to the overall experience.

Yes, the story is fairly predictable (with a few pleasant surprises), but the film manages to keep things fresh with its clever dialogue and comedic moments. It feels both nostalgic of films similar to this, such as Casper and Beetlejuice, but is original enough to differentiate them and not feel in any way pandered to. Dare I say, We Have a Ghost isn't a call back to our favorite supernatural comedy films, but rather its successor. While it may not be the most groundbreaking film, it's definitely worth a watch for its great cast, witty dialogue, and overall fun tone while offering some genuine hair-raising tension, and heartfelt moments

**Final Grade: 9 / 10 (Great)**

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## Shotgun Wedding Review by Danielle Butler



Let me tell y'all, first of all, I am a Josh Duhamel fan through and through, so I am always there to watch his movies regardless of what it is. Secondly, the classically beautiful actress J Lo is not hard to watch, and she remains all dolled up throughout all her action scenes. Her character is not very different from many of her previous rom-com roles, such as Marry Me, Monster-in-Law, and Wedding Planner. I know this is off topic, but I truly hope her actual marriage to Ben Affleck is going OK and I am honestly more invested in that situation than I was with this film. Thank God for Jennifer Coolidge because this movie really wasn't funny, but her presence is always appreciated. I did laugh when she was humanizing herself to the pirates.

Jennifer Coolidge always provides comic relief. This movie was predictable; not in a way I knew exactly what was coming next, but in knowing that characters would make choices that would lead them deeper into disaster. Despite J Lo always looking touched up, this movie was a bit of a train wreck. My mom also watched it and thought it was not bad and she is not shy to comment when she doesn't like something. She thought Josh Duhamel brought his A game to the scene where J Lo's character threw a hissy fit.

This movie was rated R for strong language and violence. Honestly, I was surprised by that because I don't do violence. There were action shots that probably could've remained off screen and easily could've been rated PG-13; otherwise, did not seem too gory or obscene in my opinion, and I am sensitive to that. The hardest part about watching this movie is that they really didn't seem believably in love. Even

after four years of being together. Also - spoiler alert, Darcy (J Lo) at one point takes off her ring to throw it. Wow! She seems awful. Josh's Tom deserves better. The bride's family treated the groom terribly and what I want to know is where was Darcy's backbone, why didn't she defend her future husband to her family? Why is she just addressing this now? I think we all know we can't choose the family we come from or their opinions or how they behave but I would like to know if she has had other conversations with her family because, if it were me, I would not be letting anybody talk to my man like that, especially on our wedding day. So, I guess it's no surprise how much I disliked J Lo's character. I understand that the characters must make choices or hint, hint (??) mistakes for the plot to move along on occasion. However, the set up seemed far from realistic in terms of a happy couple on their wedding day. The way the guests and families of the bride and groom behaviors were very scripted, but not in a good way.

This is a lighthearted and silly film. That is an easy watch but it's not believable and got more ridiculous and unbelievable as the plot unfolded. Overall, I would say I would not watch this again and would give it a rating of less than good. You may have to stop a few times. Or watch this while doing some chores if giving your undivided attention to this movie gets cumbersome. This film is certainly not going to win any accolades, but it does draw you in enough to wonder how it all ends up. I watched it more for Lenny Kravitz. His character, not so much. I won't spoil the ending for you. Although it's rough.

**Final Grade: 5 / 10 (Average)**

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# Lena Headey To Star in Kurt Sutter's Netflix Series 'The Abandons'



*Game of Thrones* alumna [Lena Headey](#) has been tapped to headline [Kurt Sutter's](#) Western action drama series *The Abandons* at [Netflix](#).

Created by Sutter, in *The Abandons*, a group of diverse, outlier families pursue their Manifest

Destiny in 1850s Oregon, a corrupt force of wealth and power, coveting their land, tries to force them out. These abandoned souls, the kind of lost souls living on the fringe of society, unite their tribes to form a family and fight back. In this bloody process, "justice" is stretched beyond the boundaries of the law. *The Abandons* will explore that fine line between survival and law, the consequences of violence, and the corrosive power of secrets, as this family fights to keep their land.

Headey will play Fiona, a strong, devout matriarch who, unable to have her own children, took in four orphans to create her own family. Driven by a higher purpose – and a strong-willed Irish temper – her faith and love for her family trump all. Sutter serves as creator,

showrunner and executive producer via his Sutterink banner. Stephen Surjik executive produces and directs with Otto Bathurst, who serves as prototype director, and Emmy Grinwis. Five-time Emmy nominee Headey portrayed Cersei Lannister on all eight seasons of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. She wrote and directed 2019 BAFTA-nominated short film *The Trap* and directed her *GoT* co-star Maisie Williams in a music video for singer Freya Ridings. Headey recently starred in Netflix action-thriller *Gunpowder Milkshake* and will next be seen in HBO's upcoming *The White House Plumbers*. Reported by Deadline

## 'Daredevil: Born Again': Arty Froushan Has Joined Disney+ Series



[Arty Froushan](#) (*Carnival Row*) has a major role in *Daredevil: Born Again*, [Marvel's](#) upcoming revival series on [Disney+](#), [Deadline](#) has learned. Word of his casting comes after on-set photo of Vince D'Onofrio leaked online included a glimpse of Froushan.

Details about the character are being kept under wraps, but Froushan is believed to be playing Harry, one of the main characters opposite Charlie Cox and D'Onofrio. He appears to be an associate of D'Onofrio's Wilson Fisk in the photo, which also supports the popular theory that the show will be following the Mayor Fisk [Marvel Comics](#) arc. [Marvel](#) declined to comment. Written and executive produced by Matt Corman and Chris Ord, the new installment centers on Cox's Daredevil, otherwise known as Matt Murdock, an attorney by day and crimefighter by night. D'Onofrio reprises his role as mob boss Wilson Fisk aka Kingpin.

Other previously announced main cast members include Margarita Levieva, Sandrine Holt, Michael Gandolfini and Nikki M. James. Jon Bernthal's Punisher also is reprising his role. Filming on the new season started a couple of weeks ago in and around New York. Froushan just wrapped a run on Broadway in Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*. He also starred opposite Orlando Bloom and Cara Delevingne in fantasy series *Carnival Row*, which just finished its two-season run on Prime Video. His latest movie, *The Persian Version*, premiered at Sundance. Froushan, who also did an arc on *House of the Dragon*, is repped by Markham, Froggatt and Irwin in the UK and Anonymous Content. Reported by Deadline.

## Jar Jar Binks Actor Ahmed Best Returns To The 'Star Wars' Universe As A Jedi In 'The Mandalorian': "Good To Be Back!"



[Ahmed Best](#) is getting a shot at redemption by returning to the *Star Wars* universe as a Jedi in *The Mandalorian*. The actor voiced the infamously CGI character Jar Jar Binks in the

prequel trilogy of the George Lucas saga. Audiences were not fond of the Gungan and the character was phased out in the subsequent films. Best made an appearance in Chapter 20 of the Disney+ series and the actor took to social media to show his gratitude. "Good to be back. There is so much to say and share. It's going to take a couple of days. But, for now, I'll just say thank you to all that have held me up and made me better," he shared on Instagram.

In Season 3, Episode 4 of *The Mandalorian* titled "Chapter 20: The Foundling," Grogu has a flashback to the moment when the Jedi temple was attacked. Best shows up as a Jedi named Kelleran Beq

who saves the child after finding him in an elevator as the attack takes place. This was not Best's first appearance playing Beq as he portrayed the character as host of the game show *Star Wars: Jedi Temple Challenge* back in 2020. Before that, Best made a cameo as Achk Med-Beq in *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones*.

Based on Best's message on social media, the actor seemingly hinted that it was not Beq's last appearance on *The Mandalorian*, especially if Grogu's backstory continues to play out in flashbacks. *The Mandalorian* drops new chapters every Wednesday on Disney+. Reported by Deadline

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# WHAT YOU SHOULD BINGE-WATCH

## The Last of Us: Season 1 Review by Marcus Blake



*The Last of Us* series on HBO might be the best video game adaptation ever put on the big and small screen. It exceeded all expectations in its storytelling and helpful it was to the game. I'm not saying it's as good as the game itself because sometimes the best stories of the games that we play. But when it comes to telling the dark, dramatic tale of Ellie and Joel on their Odyssey out west, there really isn't much that they could have done better. You don't get a lot of exposition within the story and you certainly don't play the game to know what's going on. These Nine episodes tell a great story with Rich characters that make up the story within the first game. And probably the biggest reason for its success is that the writers didn't try to cram a huge story into a 2-hour movie. It makes a difference when you actually have eight or nine hours to tell a big story because you have time to get to know the characters. It's not perfect, but it says close as it can be to experiencing what gamers felt when playing the game. I think it also helped that Neil Druckmann who created the game directed the series.

It all starts with the casting. Pedro Pascal and Bella Ramsey perfectly embody the spirit of these two characters that we got to play in a video game. While I admit I missed Troy

Baker's southern accent when he voiced the character Joel, Pedro Pascal captured every bit of the cynical hard-nosed father figure that Ellie needed. Bella Ramsey captured Ellie's curious, sarcastic, and tough exterior perfectly as well. If you don't get the casting right, then the series doesn't work. But the casting was also perfect, even with characters that don't share a lot of screen time like Tess or Marlene. Gabriel Luna did a great job playing Tommy and I look forward to seeing more of him in season 2. There were changes in the story, it couldn't exactly be just like the game for those of us who've played it in order to enjoy the series. The biggest example is the story of Bill and Frank. You don't really get to know their backstory in the game. It's only hinted that they were a couple.



Episode 3 was all about Bill and Frank's story over 20 years and it's one of the greatest love stories ever written. And for those who think that two men can't have a great love story, one being a survivalist and one an idealist who finds that the one perfect thing worth fighting for during the Apocalypse is each other then you don't know great love stories. Hats off to Murray Bartlett and Nick Offerman for portraying these awesome characters. And you couldn't pick him were fitting song for these two characters as they die in each other's arms than Linda Ronstadt's "Long, Long Time." It really added to the entire series by having an entire episode dedicated to these two characters, how they come to know Joel and Tess, and of course why Joel would go to them for help when he starts his journey with Ellie. Meeting Bill in the game is one of the best parts of the game, but not nearly as emotional.

When you do a series, some episodes are always better than others, but I think each episode really established the connection between Joel and Ellie, between the father figure and an orphan girl who's known nothing but heartache. It may be true that you get to experience that a little bit more throughout the game as you're playing these characters, but each episode was brilliantly written to where you feel everything these characters are feeling in the very last episode and Joel rescues her. That's all I'll say, can't completely give it away to those who have never watched the series or played the game.



All I'll say is the hospital scene in the game is as gut-wrenching as it gets. One of the things that the series did right was allow the audience to really get to know some of the more beloved characters and even characters that weren't really introduced in the game. Like for example, Kathleen. She's not in the game, but her story mirrors the carnage that people had to endure for 20 years in one of the quarantine zones. You see through her eyes how a sadistic government entity took advantage of the people it was trying to protect through rape and murder, and then how the citizens rose up to reclaim their freedom. She's a character that you can see was once innocent and believed good in people, but by the end, she becomes the very thing that she fought against. She becomes the villain who can't forgive and uses murder to justify her revenge under the guise of what she thinks is justice. Melanie Lynskey did a great job

portraying her so that you almost become sympathetic to her cause. And it's brilliant how that character ties into the character of Henry and Sam. These are two characters that you do meet in the game and they help Ellie and Joel navigate the city. Their story is pulled right from the game. The scene where they die is just like in the game and just as emotional. Although it was a nice added twist in the series to have Sam be deaf.



What really makes the series so good are the little details that have been pulled from the game. From the exact clothes the character wore to even borrowing a lot of the dialogue from the game. The details were nice, but what they accomplished is adding so many emotional levels to the story. You connect with these characters very easily without having to play the game. I'll admit that you connect more by playing the game, but I don't think you literally beat that to watch this series and feel for these characters. You feel for all of them and their motivation because even the villains are just trying to survive. They'll do whatever it takes to survive and keep their own kind alive. Kathleen is a great example because you feel sympathy for what she became in the end. You also understand Henry, who admits that he is a bad guy for ratting on his friends to the government in order to get medicine to help his brother. One can argue the morality of all the characters' motivations, but until you are put in that position of survival, you don't know what you'll truly do if you were in the same situation.

Admittedly, they could have done more with the series to really capture the game. In a lot of ways, the series feels very short compared to the journey you experience while playing the game. Obviously, there's a lot they left out. We don't really get to experience as many monsters as we do in the game. The series focused more on the characters and their journey than it does the monsters they have to face, whereas in the game, it's a perfect balance between the villains and monsters you have to kill to progress through the story. For me, one of the scariest moments in the game is having to silently sneak through the train station to get past about eight different clickers. The first time I played the game, it took me about three times to really get past everything and makes it even scarier because you're in the dark. We only really get to experience that kind of scenario once in the second episode when there are in the museum. Exploring the university in the game is a lot more intense. For that matter, it's a lot more

intense trying to get through the city because there are so many bad guys you have to get past. And you have to rely on Ellie to back you up. I think my biggest complaint is the intensity of the hospital scene in the game versus the series where it feels like it happens too quickly. It takes a while to shoot your way through the hospital in order to rescue Ellie whereas it seemed like Joel did it quickly without even a scratch. That's one of those scenes where I felt like they could have added another 10 minutes, but it still ends the same on an emotional level. Sometimes playing the story is better. Sometimes feeling the story is more emotional. But I don't think a movie or a TV series based on a video game can ever truly be perfect because you don't experience it the same way. However, the series comes close to matching the intensity of the game.



For those who will never play the game, you get the same great story with some added details like Bill and Frank's story. But probably one of the most important added details is Ellie's origin story. We get to meet her mother; we know what happens and how Marlene ended up taking care of her. I got to hand it to Ashley Johnson, who plays the mother in the series, but also voices the character of Ellie in the game. It's almost as if she comes full circle by playing both of these characters. In a lot of ways, I am surprised that the full story of the first game fit within one season because there's so much going on that they could have made it into two seasons while also adding more backstory to all of these characters. Maybe that's what we'll get in Season 2, which will be based on the second game. There's a lot of room for flashbacks and a lot of room for great storytelling because the second game will jump 5 years in the future. There are a lot of unanswered questions. It will be fun to explore those unanswered questions in season 2 and probably a season 3 because to really tell the full story right, you almost need two more seasons of 8 to 9 episodes. However, season 1 of *The Last of Us* is a masterpiece because it captures the video game that it's based on better than any other adaptation in movie or TV history. HBO did the right thing by making this into a series just like they did with *Game of Thrones* instead of trying to cram the story of any book into a two-hour movie, it just wouldn't work. Season 1 looks like the game, feels like the game, and has all the emotional weight of the game. That's not an

easy thing to accomplish. The game itself is still better and even if you're not a gamer, if you like the series, go back and play the original game. It's worth the price of a PlayStation 4 and the 20 or so hours you'll put into it. Pedro Pascal and Bella Ramsey did a fantastic job capturing the spirit of Troy Baker and Ashley Johnson, who voiced the main characters in the game. In fact, the casting of the entire series was damn near perfect, especially Bill and Frank. The series is just as violent, sad, and dramatic as the game, and you will feel for the characters, even the villains just like you do if you were playing the game. That is master storytelling, and hopefully, this series begins the perfect template for how to properly adapt stories from video games.

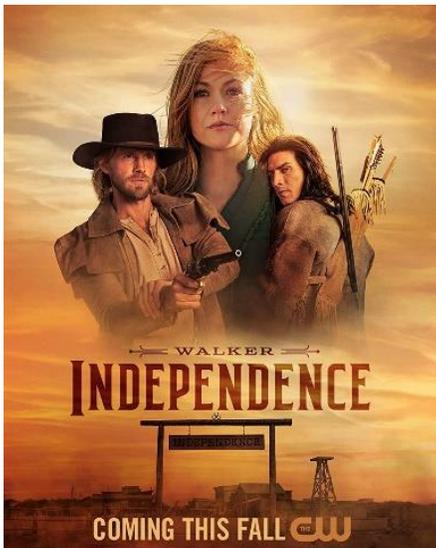
**Final Grade: 9 / 10 (Great)**

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## Walker Independence: Season 1

Review by Allison Costa



The CW continues to try and produce new shows and series centered around action, fantasy and drama. One of their most recent attempts has been with “Walker Independence”. While it is a spin off to their already popular “Walker” series, it is vastly different in many ways. Especially in setting and time period. It is an early western show that stars Katherine McNamara, who formerly starred in the Shadowhunters series. I can’t pinpoint the one exact element that makes this show such a fun series to watch, but the quirky characters, thematic elements, and western

setting somehow work together to make this series pretty addictive.



There is action, betrayal, steamy romance and comedy all on a PG-13 level, which is a nice change of pace. So far the series has been centered around finding out who killed Abby’s (played by McNamara) husband. He was set up to be the new Sheriff when he was murdered and Abby comes to the town of Independence in a disguise trying to prove that the new Sheriff murdered her husband. There have been lots of plot twists and development of other sub-characters that make up her rag tag band, but most recently they finally get to see justice in having the new sheriff taken away—despite the fact that he is in love with Abby. Tom Davidson, the sheriff and murderer of her husband, is also a complicated character. Part of you really hates him, and part of you feels bad for him and wonders if he can be redeemed. He is definitely a pawn and puppet for his family, but has his own demons as well. Despite his arrest however, there is a much larger plan at play in this series and the sheriff’s family is a large part of it. So, we can guarantee that he won’t stay gone, as

evidence by the ending scene where his father breaks him out of his prison carriage.

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While some may say that the show is cheesy or not as hard-hitting as a lot of the streaming action shows out there (and I wouldn’t necessarily disagree), it is also a nice change of pace when you are wanting something low key but still fun and interesting. The content isn’t squeaky clean but it’s also not as raunchy as a lot of other shows that are current hits. It’s very typical CW material in many aspects, so if you like most CW type shows than almost guaranteed that you will like this one! If you don’t, then you should probably keep looking for something else.

**Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)**

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# GAMING NEWS

## The Lord of the Rings: Gollum™ Slinks Out of the Shadows on May 25th 2023



The story-driven adventure across Middle-earth arrives this May for PC and consoles— Sméagol will swear it on the Precious!

Hamburg, Germany, March 23rd, 2023 - Today Daedalic Entertainment and NACON announced that their highly anticipated adventure game, *The Lord of the Rings: Gollum*, will release to PC, PlayStation, and Xbox on May 25th. A version for Nintendo Switch™ is planned for later this year. Based on the beloved *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, the fantasy game takes players on an epic journey across Middle-earth, starring one of the lore's most compelling characters: Gollum— *\*Gollum, Gollum\**.

*The Lord of the Rings: Gollum* is a story-driven action adventure. Embark on a perilous journey as Gollum, chasing the only thing that is precious to you. Climb, leap, and sneak your way past dangers or into advantageous spots. Gollum is skillful and sly, and torn by a split personality. It is up to you to decide whether to yield to the darker side of Gollum or trust the kinder gentler hint of Sméagol.

Co-published by Daedalic Entertainment and NACON, *The Lord of the Rings: Gollum* is developed by a small team of passionate Tolkienites at Daedalic Entertainment in partnership with Middle-earth Enterprises. The game will release on PC, PlayStation®4, PlayStation®5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S,

and Nintendo Switch™. A physical edition for consoles will also be available.

NACON is a company of the BIGBEN Group founded in 2019 to optimize its know-how through strong synergies in the video game market. By bringing together its 16 development studios, the publishing of AA video games, the design and distribution of premium gaming devices, NACON focuses 30 years of expertise at the service of players. This new unified business unit strengthens NACON's position in the market and enables it to innovate by creating new unique competitive advantages. <https://corporate.nacongaming.com/>

### About Daedalic Entertainment

Daedalic Entertainment publishes and develops high-quality games for all platforms. The company has a diverse line-up of high-quality titles, including classic adventures, RPGs, and strategy and multiplayer games. With an international team of around 100 employees, Daedalic is currently developing a new line-up of innovative games across consoles, PC, and mobile platforms. Based in Hamburg, Germany, Daedalic is one of Europe's most acclaimed publishers and developers. With a total of 32 awards in the German Developers Award (including multiple accolades for 'Studio of the Year') and 12 German Computer Game Awards for genre-defining games such as Deponia, Edna & Harvey, Silence, Shadow Tactics: Blades of the Shogun, Ken Follett's The Pillars of the Earth, The Long Journey Home, and State of Mind, Daedalic is a record holder for the two most prestigious game awards in Germany. Recent publishing hits include Barotrauma, Unravel!, Iratus: Lord of the Dead, Partisans 1941 and more.



Daedalic is currently developing *The Lord of the Rings – Gollum*. The story-driven adventure tells the story of Gollum from a perspective never witnessed before in any storytelling media, all the while staying faithful to the legendary books of J.R.R. Tolkien.

### About Middle-earth Enterprises

Middle-earth created by J.R.R. Tolkien is the definitive, deepest, richest and most beloved fantasy world of our time. As its stewards and custodians, our goal is to consistently deliver a wealth of great content in both new, and known formats; to ensure Middle-earth's rightful place as the world's leading fantasy IP and brand, forever. Inspired by our deep appreciation for the fictional world created by Professor Tolkien, we are dedicated to working with those providing highest quality products in accordance with best green business and sustainability practices, including fair trade, equality in the workplace, and a commitment to protect our earth, its wondrous beauty and the viability of every living creature. Middle-earth Enterprises has been producing and licensing films, merchandise, services, and live stage productions based upon *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* books, for more than four decades. [www.middleearth.com](http://www.middleearth.com).

# REDFALL Characters-Full: Why Your Choice of Redfall Hero Will Make All the Difference



Arkane has always been a studio that puts player choice at the heart of its ideas. *Dishonored* gives you huge choice about how to approach your hapless targets. *Deathloop*, created by Arkane Austin's sister studio in Lyon, lets you tackle its story in a close-to-infinite number of ways. *Prey* offers you tools to uncover the mystery hidden at its core, but doesn't stand in the way of you using them however you'd like. It stands to reason that Arkane Austin's newest project, [Redfall](#), would live by the same code. But the way it's approaching that player choice is strikingly new – your approach to taking back a vampire-strewn Massachusetts island will be defined as much by the character you choose to play, as it is your actual interactions.

*Redfall*'s cast of four playable heroes is the largest an Arkane game has offered. After playing through a 90-minute demo twice, using two different solo characters, it becomes abundantly clear what the team is aiming for here – *Redfall* is a game that opens up in very different directions based on who you play as – in mechanics, in combat, in exploration, and even in the way it tells its story.

The story mission I was presented with was fairly simple. Get to a mansion on the edge of town, enter a scientist's lab, and discover his connection to the vampire plague that's seen you trapped on the island. Getting to that mansion is the tougher part. I chose to make a beeline through the heart of Redfall, passing through Vampire Nests and violent cultist territory, and eventually into the mansion grounds – patrolled, as you'd expect, by a large number of enemies. Much of your route is urban by design, meaning tightly packed streets, high walls, and not a huge amount of room in which to manoeuvre.

Each character comes with a range of upgradable skills and, as I discovered, they make an enormous difference to that journey. I played this same mission with two characters – Devinder Crouseley and Remi de la Rosa – and found that the way played was affected entirely by that choice. Here's how those playthroughs went:

## Playing With Remi

An elite Navy rescue team member, Remi is the prototypical action star of the bunch. Having spent her life on combat frontlines, she's equipped to take on *Redfall*'s many monstrosities with brute force. But she's also an engineer, and has brought along a robot buddy, Bribón to help her do so with more finesse than simply "stake anything that moves".

As you might expect, Remi's toolkit is designed to let her take down groups of enemies from close range (and she has passive upgrade that allow her to increase close range damage, pushing you further down that path), and to keep her alive while she does so. Her most aggressive ability is a sticky C4 charge that can be detonated remotely, letting you damage multiple enemies at once, or set traps as you guide enemies you grief into its path. To help you with the latter, Remi can also use Bribón (who is a separate AI character, with its own healthbar and attacks) to set off a siren, letting you alert multiple enemies and draw them to you.

Combining these two abilities became key to how I got through Redfall's streets smoothly. After spotting enemies, I'd throw down a C4 charge and set off Bribón's siren – a group would charge the robot, while I snuck around cover and flanked them. Having upgraded my siren ability to let me do more damage to enemies that had been attracted by it, I'd then finish off the group with a shotgun, using its attached stake to take down any vampires I put into a vulnerable state.

Playing with Remi as a solo character turns *Redfall* into an action-packed experience, asking you to balance risk and reward constantly.

If things got too hairy, I could turn to Remi's ultimate ability, Mobilize, creating a rally point that healed me while I was inside its radius. In these moments, I played like a classic tank, absorbing lots of damage while dealing even more of my own. Most vampires can't be killed with bullets alone, so in battle with multiple monsters, I'd switch out my shotgun-and-stake for a weapon that fired a UV beam – useless against human enemies, but able to turn vampires to stone in short order, letting me shatter them with a simple melee attack.

I cleared vampire nests (psychical spaces that offer big rewards in return for taking on their challenges) and unlocked a safehouse, which offers safe harbour, a new fast travel point, and extra missions. But attracting so much attention on the streets also increased the attention of the island's Vampire Gods. As I approached the mansion, a lightning storm

erupted around me, and saw the appearance of the Rook – a brutal, melee-focused mini-boss sent to kill me for doing so much damage along the way. It's a lovely, emergent touch, and an extra trial designed to test you after you've begun to master combat.

With the experience I earned from taking down the Rook, I also upgraded my C4 charge to let me 'boom jump', taking no area of effect damage and eliminating fall damage, but I used this mainly as another means to get behind enemies while they were distracted – and once I entered the mansion grounds, I combined my abilities to clear out as many enemies as possible in its gardens because of how much aggression I could absorb, before entering its winding corridors with a stake launcher (able to one-shot most vampires) to take down any stragglers.

As you can tell, playing with Remi as a solo character turns *Redfall* into an action-packed experience, asking you to balance risk and reward constantly. But playing as Devinder offered a very different vibe while engaging with the same mission.

## Playing With Devinder

Think of Devinder as, essentially, all four Ghostbusters rolled into one – he has the scientific expertise of Spengler, the wonder of Stantz, the cool demeanour of Zeddemore, and the wit of Venkman. A filmmaker and author with an audience interested in the paranormal, his kit revolves around inventions he's created to find and document supernatural entities – but he's now had to upgrade it to kill them off as well.

Devinder's kit is *very* different to Remi's. His Arc Javelin is a mid-range attack that acts as a combined stake and area-of-effect attack, sending electricity out to incapacitate enemies (and vampires can be outright killed by being hit by its lightning). His ultimate, Blacklight, is a super-powered UV beam weapon, which can transform an entire area of vampires into stone near-instantly – very useful for getting out of a tight spot.

And this is the interesting thing about playing as Devinder – the final piece of his toolset is as much about avoiding attention as it is dealing with it. The Translocator is *Redfall*'s closest analogue to *Dishonored*'s Blink, a throwable device that lets you instantly transport to where it lands. As a result, instead of getting into action on the streets, I spent most of my journey getting onto rooftops, quietly taking out Watchers (a Vampire form that act like roving security cameras) with my Javelin, and sneaking past larger groups.

Think of Devinder as, essentially, all four Ghostbusters rolled into one.

Like with Remi, I took out a Vampire Nest on my way – but instead of running in guns blazing, I carefully scaled a church roof, entering a belltower and creeping into the encounter instead of taking down the guards around it. And without attracting so much ire, I also didn't have to take on the Rook, who would have been a sterner challenge with a set of weapons built more for long-range combat.

Even the more manicured mansion grounds played out differently with Devinder. Instead of entering through the front gates, I used my translocator to sneak into the back garden, bypassing deadly areas of Blood Mist that had forced Remi to use the front door. It felt like playing the same game made by a different set of developers, with different interests in how

to challenge you, adding a puzzle layer on top of its meaty gunplay.

But perhaps my favorite part of playing with Devinder wasn't mechanical at all – it was how he told the story along the way. As a parasitologist, Devinder's interactions with all of this weren't defined by anger, fear, or triumph as much as they were by *fascination*. Every new type of vampire I met was greeted by Devinder talking about their physiology or behavior, ending with him giving them a name – a Watcher, a Shroud, and so on (clearly, Devinder is the member of the group creating the vampire taxonomy that the rest of the team use). It's a lovely choice, making playing with Devinder as much of a documentary about the vampire plague as it is an action story.

#### Mixing it Up

Of course, the two other characters, Layla and Jacob, would have changed this experience

for themselves. And this is just in solo play – every character also comes with abilities designed for co-op play (which also increases the number of enemies you need to fight as you go). Remi can upgrade Bribón to heal the whole team is they stay close by, while Devinder can up allies' damage through 'Color Commentary'. I'm just as fascinated to see how these disparate toolsets work when combined as I am to try them all solo.

Even at this early stage, this spin on Arkane's traditional openness to player expression is intoxicating, enlivening both solo and co-op play. I'm very excited to try out those other characters and delve deeper into how [Redfall](#) will let us experiment with its tools.

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# “STARFIELD” OFFICIAL LAUNCH DATE FINALLY ANNOUNCED - COMING 9-6-2023



Starfield's official launch date has been revealed in a brand-new enigmatic trailer, followed by a special message from Game Director Todd Howard. Players can look forward to the deepest dive yet into Bethesda Game Studios' latest epic at the Starfield Direct, coming June 11, 2023. Starfield arrives exclusively on Xbox Series X|S and PC on

September 6, 2023. Play it day one with Xbox Game Pass. Xbox and Bethesda have officially announced that Starfield will release on September 6, 2023 for PC and Xbox Series X|S. It was previously slated to release during the first half of 2023. In an update video, game director Todd Howard confirmed that more details on the game will be revealed in a [Starfield Direct](#) presentation on June 11. "The game has many of the hallmarks that you'd expect from us, but it's also a very unique experience," Howard said.

Starfield was absent from the January 25 Developer Direct, as Microsoft didn't want it to overshadow the other announcements announced that day. "To dedicate the proper amount of time for a deep dive into Bethesda

Game Studios' Starfield, a standalone show is in the works," Microsoft said back in January. Bethesda has slowly been revealing more of its ambitious sci-fi game since it was first announced several years ago, with details on [how factions will work in Starfield](#), "[classic Bethesda-style dialogue](#)" options, and [ship combat](#) being spoken about in interviews and deep dive videos. Before Starfield arrives, Microsoft will release Arkane's vampire-hunting looter-shooter [Redfall in May](#), and [both games will cost \\$70](#) as part of a reflection on the "content, scale, and technical complexity of these titles," according to the company. *From GameSpot.com*

## 'The Thaumaturge' From Fool's Theory and 11 bit studios is a New, Story-Rich RPG



After an extended period of time researching all that is mystical and mysterious, the publishing and development teams at 11 bit studios and Fool's Theory are proud to reveal The Thaumaturge. A story-driven RPG with a unique take on combat, character development features, and investigation mechanics, touching upon the complex theme of inner demons, The Thaumaturge unfolds in the culturally diverse capital of Warsaw in early 20th century Poland after it has been annexed by the Russian Empire. Putting players in the position to take on morally ambiguous choices, they step into a spiritual world driven by powers concealed beyond the comprehension of ordinary men.

In 1905, and under the yoke of imperial Russian tsardom, Warsaw is a city of conspicuous contrasts. Poverty and hooliganism are as much its shades as high society wealth and political plotting. A place in which the individual interests of groups with diverse beliefs—Jews, Poles, and Russians—are often in conflict, and in which one man's big chance can mean another man's untimely demise.

Existing in the supernatural cracks between the real world and the shadows of this story-rich isometric RPG are esoteric beings called Salutors. Wielding immense power, only a Thaumaturge can

truly perceive a Salutor and use their unique abilities to their whims. Thaumaturges—able to pry deep into the crevices of the human personality to the very core of one's psyche—will find a person's honest intentions and surreptitious desires alongside someone's shameful secrets, distortions, exaggerations, and imperfections. Faithfully obeying their masters, Salutors allow Thaumaturges to manipulate humans, preying on their secrets and insecurities, bending one's will to their own needs while changing the world surrounding them. As for turn-based combat, Salutors, with their roots coming from various cultures, serve as a powerful force, highly useful during dangerous encounters in the dark alleys of districts like Praga.

"The Thaumaturge revolves around the idea of demons both on physical, and metaphorical layers. After all, it's a game infused with 11 bit studios' philosophy of meaningful entertainment. Its theme is evoked in different areas of the game with gameplay mechanics or narrative aspects being only a part of those," states Fool's Theory Design Director, Karolina Kuzia-Rokosz. While the old saying goes "everyone has their own demons", playing The Thaumaturge will make gamers realize that not everything has to always mean what it seems.

"Fool's Theory has proven to be a great studio to materialize our desire to add a meaningful RPG to our portfolio," praises Marek Ziemak, Chief Production Officer at 11 bit studios. "And with a hefty team of around 60 people and an appropriately scaled budget, The Thaumaturge is our biggest publishing project to date, which

resembles the scope of the first Frostpunk. And one especially close to our hearts thanks to being set in a place many of us were born and raised, which we're tied with, and which we believe hasn't yet seen a proper representation in any game. Summing that up, we're more than thrilled to shed light on what we've shaped in the more than four years since the initial idea emerged". A gameplay demo of The Thaumaturge will be presented behind closed doors at this year's GDC, happening in March in San Francisco.

### About 11 bit studios

A collective of talented developers and skillful publishers reaching millions of hardcore gamers all driven by the creation of meaningful entertainment. We're seeking experienced dev teams to form publishing partnerships with – teams with which we share an artistic sensibility, and the desire to create thought-provoking games while maintaining a smart business approach to the process.

### About Fool's Theory

Fool's Theory is a studio in Bielsko-Biala, Poland that has been operating since 2018 and currently employs approximately 60 people. In the past, the studio participated, among others, in the production of games such as Baldur's Gate 3, Divinity: Original Sin II add-ons, and more recently Outriders. Its own game - Seven: The Days Long Gone - was positively received by the market. The ongoing cooperation between Fool's Theory and 11 bit studios started over two years ago. Right now, Fool's Theory is developing The Thaumaturge for 11 bit studios publishing division and The Witcher Remake for CD Projekt RED

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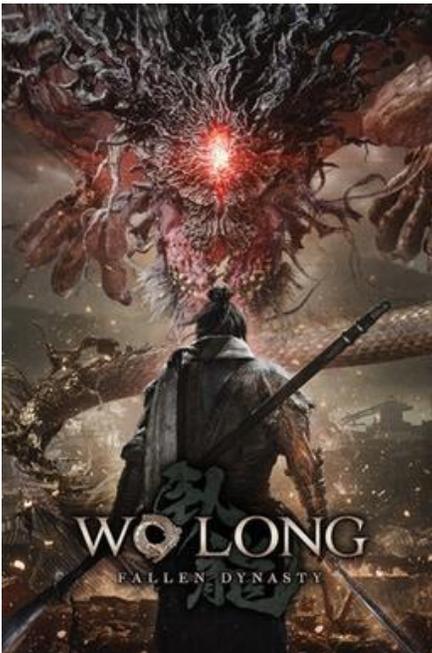
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# REVIEWS

## “Wo Long -It Took Too Long!” Wo Long Fallen Dynasty

Review by Omri Uí Néill



**What is the Haps Gamers!** Been away on a deep spiritual journey and returned to you anew, I have Ascended! I'm going to give you the low down on a pretty cool game that recently dropped to Game Pass, Wo Long: Fallen Dynasty. Wo Long is honestly set in a fantastic era of history for such a blood storyline, taking place in one of China's (yay! not Vikings!) more brutal conflicts, the Yellow Turban Rebellion. an absolutely crazy time in Chinese history if you were a peasant, but a crazy good time if you were a bandit thug type that enjoyed burning and killing for no reason other than someone's made up political delusions. look it

up and have your mind blown, but back to the game!

Magic and Martial Art fuse in this game and I freakin' love it! the game has the feeling of one of the more fantastic styles of Kung Fu films put on by Shaw Brothers back in the 70's and 80's with a modern horror twist. Mixing a Taoist mysticism is a Chef's Kiss for Wo Long as it steeps the game into a more serious note of storytelling unlike with modern cinema coming out of Asia Like Detective Dee and the various Zombie adapted period dramas. It's going to draw you in a gang and wake up something in you, never thought possible before.

Get your Zen on when you play this game, because just as Nioh and Nioh 2 test the limits to any gamer's core temperature, so does Wo Long. Now if you are playing on PC or Xbox Series X, you may or may not be running into the little issues of actions being delayed just a touch after input. it was something that had my blood up and let me tell you curses were put on people's mammas, but maybe this is something a good old update or two might fix later on down the road.

Now I just mention the input delay for button commands on controllers and here is why it pisses me off to no end. Firstly, the whole style of the game is for the player who can master the timing of the counter/dodge in the game as they made blocking pretty much worthless and pointless. If the enemy blocks you either hit them with a spell or wait for the attack to counter and then kill them, this in itself isn't horrible but when you get your head handed to you 30 or 40 times by the first boss, you will see what I mean.



I'm not a big fan of the game mechanic that combines your stamina with your magic use, because if you want to be able to counter/dodge that incoming attack, watch which spells you choose to use beforehand. Using too many spells, holding a range attack too long, or having to rapidly dodge eats your stamina bar and your ability to counter with it. Now pair this with how limited the healing is starting out and the number of heals you get starting out, get ready to curse someone's family. Well, unless you want to spend about 5 hours just farming the first level to the point you can give yourself a fighting chance against the first boss.

Overall, I'm giving this game 5/10, the concept and world of the game are fantastic. but if you aren't on a PC or the next-gen console, you are going to be having a tough one with this game. If you're a fan of games like Dark Souls, Nioh 1 and 2, and Sekiro: Shadow Die Twice then you will love this game. I will pick it back up after a few more updates in hopes the game doesn't feel like a grind festival of the highest fashion, until then Gamers go thumbing through Game Pass and check out some of That Nerd Shows additional content! Stay Safe! Stay Cool! and Stay Crazy Gamers!

**Final Grade: 5 /10 (Average)**

# Atomic Heart

Review by Marcus Blake



If Bioshock and Wolfenstein got together and created their own game, it would be Atomic Heart. I feel like this game is the child of two great game series. It's a fun and quirky first-person shooter with a lot of great science fiction elements as if you are reading a Philip K. Dick book. It's a great science fiction story well told through the gameplay. And if you are a fan of Bioshock and Wolfenstein then you will definitely enjoy this game. The setting may not be your "forte" because it very much is a Russian story, however, the political intrigue mixed in with government corruption on the back of scientific advancement makes for an interesting story. Is this game worth \$60. Maybe not but if you're an Xbox player then it's fantastic game pass game.

**About the game.** *Atomic Heart* takes place on the grounds of Facility 3826, the Soviet Union's foremost scientific research hub in an alternate historical timeline set in 1955. In 1936, scientist Dmitry Sechenov developed a liquidized programmable module called the Polymer, sparking massive technological breakthroughs in the fields of energy and robotics in the USSR and freeing much of the populace from manual labor. When World War II broke out, the Soviets quickly gained the upper hand, but just before Nazi Germany was defeated in 1942 they unleashed the Brown Plague virus, leaving millions dead and creating an international demand for Soviet robots to compensate for the resulting worker shortage. As part of the Soviet Union's post-war reconstruction program, Dr. Sechenov created a wireless, networked artificial intelligence called

"Kollektiv 1.0" that linked his robots together for greater efficiency. Most recently, Sechenov developed the THOUGHT neuroconnector, a device that integrates Polymer into the human body and allows humans to remotely interface with robots. THOUGHT is to be released alongside Kollektiv 2.0, and Sechenov boasts that it will usher in a true post-labor era for the entire world. However, Kollektiv 2.0's official launch on 13 June 1955 goes awry, plunging Facility 3826 into chaos. You play as Agent P-3 is a WWII veteran with memory problems. He is invited to assist in the rollout of Kollektiv 2.0 at Facility 3826, but he finds that robots massacred most human personnel. Sechenov explains that Petrov sabotaged the Kollektiv 1.0 node and asks P-3 to apprehend Petrov. With his AI partner CHAR-les (nicknamed "Charles") attached to his glove, P-3 must confront homicidal robots and failed biomechanical experiments while dealing with growing mental instability. P-3 tracks down Petrov and finds out that he is working with Filatova. Petrov flees and is apparently killed by a robot. Meanwhile, the Politburo grows suspicious about what is happening. Molotov, a member of the Politburo threatens to shut down Sechenov's "Atomic Heart" project. Charles explains to P-3 that Sechenov and the Politburo are in a struggle over who will control Kollektiv. Sechenov orders P-3 to intercept Molotov, and that begins your journey through the game. The gameplay is good as you get a typical first-person shooter. The day the game dropped it was a little buggy, but a few updates on patches will take care of that. The game offers a lot of great balance between stopping the killer robots and exploration as you're trying to find the so-called mad scientist in the game while unraveling the mystery of what happened. Good first-person shooters have a good balance between exploration and action, that's the way it's supposed to be. Unfortunately, gaming developers tend to forget that in the case of games like Call of Duty. However, just like in a Fallout game where gathering resources is very important, Atomic Heart incorporates that aspect brilliantly. The style is what really grabbed my attention because even though it's rooted in science fiction elements, it has a very retro and classic feel to it. It feels like something out of the past even though you're playing a science fiction story that seems more rooted for the future.

The designers did a great job with this game and in a lot of ways, it reminded me of one of my very underrated but favorite Horror survival games...*Prey!* The first thing we notice about a game is how good it looks. My harshest

criticism about the game is it's a story that might not be as relatable compared to games like Wolfenstein or Fallout. Russian stories are not always that relatable to a western audience. A good example is the Metro games. However, there is definitely a good story in this game and a great allegory about government corruption and how that can affect scientific advancement. It also offers a great history lesson of how scientific advancement pushed us into more of a modern world after World War II even though superpowers wanted those scientific achievements to create more powerful weapons.



Overall, Atomic Heart is a good game. I don't think it's as intriguing as something like Cyberpunk 2077 or even a Fallout game, but it does offer a great science fiction story that has a perfect balance with the first-person action. Killer robots are always a better villain than humans, maybe not for everything, but most of the time it makes for a better story. I don't think the game is really worth \$60 because you can finish the campaign in about 20 hours. It doesn't offer a huge open world to explore where you really get your money's worth. However, this is one of the best "day one" Xbox game games. That makes it worth playing. There is definitely room for more stories within this universe. I can see a few sequels being worth their while just like with the Wolfenstein games. The political intrigue and corruption within the main plot make for some compelling storytelling that could be made into some awesome sequels. It may not be Contender for Game of the Year, but it is a fun game that's worth playing if you can find it at a discount or just play it on Xbox game pass. There are definitely some parts to the story that is challenging and may take you a few tries to complete and that's okay because of the game we're too easy then it would be boring. Good games always have good replay value. So, if you're looking for a new fun game to play in between all the big hits this year, check it out just don't spend too much for it.

**Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)**



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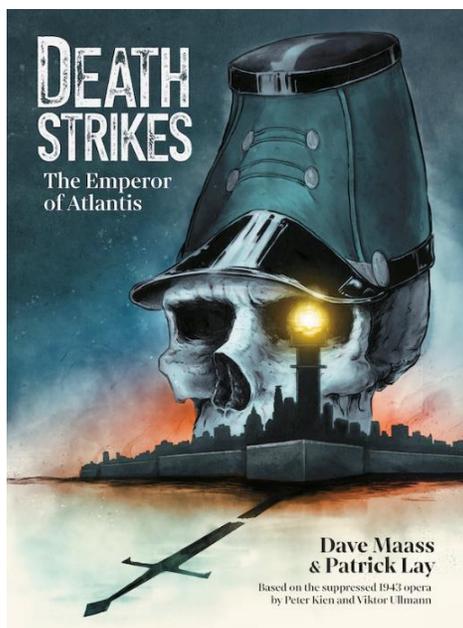
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# COMIC BOOK NEWS

## BERGER BOOKS AND DARK HORSE COMICS PRESENT “DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS”



**Berger Books and Dark Horse Comics Present DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS**

**A Timely Graphic Novel by Journalist Dave Maass and Artist Patrick Lay Based on a Suppressed Opera Written by Two Concentration Camp Prisoners**

**An Unforgettable, Genre-Blending Satirical Tour de Force Mixing Dystopia, Sci-fi, Mythic Fantasy, and Zombie Horror**

**Includes Designs From the Original Opera, A Historical Essay, Photographs, and More.**

**DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS** is a timely and timeless original graphic novel by EFF journalist Dave Maass and artist Patrick Lay, based on a suppressed opera written by two concentration camp prisoners. In 1943 Peter Kien and Viktor Ullmann, two prisoners at Hitler's Terezin concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, created a gripping one-act opera. They did not live to see their masterpiece performed. This fall, Berger Books and Dark Horse Comics are proud to present their story in a form that the two authors never imagined: as a riveting graphic novel that combines dystopian sci-fi, mythic fantasy, and zombie horror to create a one-of-a-kind reading experience.

**DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS** is written by Electronic Frontier Foundation Director of Investigations Dave Maass and illustrated by Patrick Lay, and features character designs by Ezra Rose and lettering by Richard Bruning. The graphic novel's extensive back section will include a historical essay on the opera's creators, the horrific circumstances in which it was created, and the unlikely path of the composition's survival. The book also includes Kien's artwork, photographs, and more.

"Written in a concentration camp, Peter Kien and Viktor Ullmann's opera is the truest form of artistic resistance, a middle finger to the Nazis and all authoritarians across history," said writer Dave Maass. "By adapting this fierce, genre-blending satire, we hope to introduce this nearly lost masterpiece to new audiences—and to

challenge the tyrants of today."

"We've incorporated Peter Kien's own incredible artwork, excellent character designs by Ezra Rose and the architecture of Terezin and Prague to craft visuals draped in passing shadows, smoke and vapor," said artist Patrick Lay. "From the book's 'Realm of the Unreal' to the streets of Atlantis, the history of resistance against oppression and censorship is ingrained in the world."

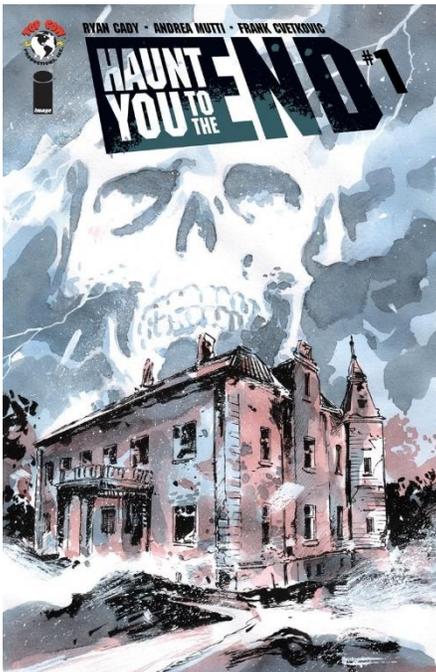
In **DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS**, it is everyone against everyone. The book — like the opera, *Der Kaiser von Atlantis*, that inspired it — presents a world where Atlantis never sank, but instead became a technologically advanced tyranny, one where a power-mad buffoonish Emperor declares all-out war. Death goes on a labor strike, creating a hellscape where everyone fights, but no one dies. Can the spirit of Life stop this terror with the power of love?

"With the frightening rise of anti-Semitism, book-banning and political condemnation of the 'other', Dave and Patrick's powerful adaptation of this dark and dramatic satire about the ravages of war and fascism feels as relevant today as when it was created 80 years ago," said editor Karen Berger. "It's a remarkable story that, despite or possibly because of the tragic circumstances in which it was created, is underscored with hope and humanity."

**DEATH STRIKES: THE EMPEROR OF ATLANTIS** goes on sale in bookstores on November 7th and in comic shops on November 8th, 2023. It is now available to pre-order at [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#) and at your [local comic shop](#) and [bookstore](#).

# TOP COW LAUNCHES “HAUNT YOU TO THE END!”

**A NEW HORROR SERIES SET IN THE CLIMATE APOCALYPSE**



Top Cow Productions, Inc., the company behind *The Darkness* and *Cyberforce*, reunites *Infinite Dark* team Ryan Cady (*Batman: Urban Legends*, *Green Lantern*) and Andrea Mutti (*Batman Eternal*, *Port of Earth*, "The Blizzard" which appeared in the *Image! Anthology*) to develop a new sci-fi, horror series, *Haunt You to the End*, which debuts on June 14.

"This five-issue journey will intrigue even the greatest paranormal skeptics like myself," said Matt Hawkins, Top Cow President.

Cady added: "Andrea Mutti and I have been dying to work together again for a few years now, and when this idea popped into my head, everything was already in his style: moody, washed out watercolors and appropriately dreary scenes of doom and gloom."

With the series set in the last days of the most haunted place on earth ravaged by a climate apocalypse, Mutti said: "I knew immediately that I wanted to contrast the warm and cold colors on the same page to reflect Ryan's dynamic world. There is action, suspense, horror and evocative and extremely visual and powerful environments and characters!"

Within this *The Day After Tomorrow* meets *The Haunting of Hill House*-esque world that Cady and Mutti created, readers will go on an expedition with a motley crew of characters—from a tech billionaire, a Catholic priest, a Sarah Connor-like military contractor-turned-explorer, uniformed military contractors, and one washed up journalist—to prove that there is life after death. But together, the reader will discover with the characters that there are deeper horrors.

"If you enjoyed our collision of science fiction and supernatural chills in *Infinite Dark*, I think you'll really dig what we're up to here. There's plenty of

characters to love—and some you'll love-to-hate—going on this eccentric ghost-hunting expedition; I really hope some of them survive, but you'll have to pick up the book to find out!"

*Haunt You to the End* #1 Cover A by Mutti (Diamond Code APR230038) and Cover B by Maika Sozo (Diamond Code APR230038) will be in [comic shops](#) on Wednesday, June 14 and also available for purchase on digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

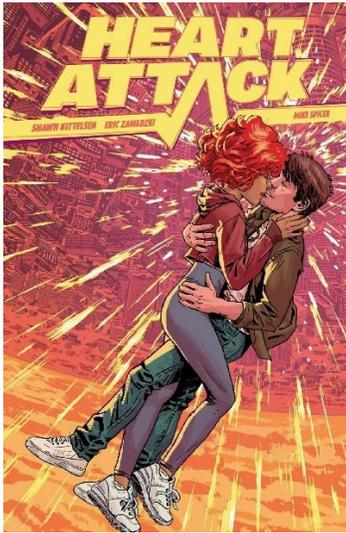
**HAUNT YOU TO THE END #1**  
**WRITER: RYAN CADY**  
**ARTIST/COVER A: ANDREA MUTTI**  
**LETTERER: FRANK CVETKOVIC**  
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A GHOST STORY FOR THE END OF THE WORLD! In a not-so-far future rife with climate disasters and worldwide instability, an eccentric billionaire and his crew—a disgraced journalist, a radical doctor, a TV demonologist, and a squad of hard-bitten military contractors—set out to prove the existence of life after death. But even if their mission is a success, the truth behind the "most haunted place on earth" may not be the comforting revelation the world is hoping for.



# “HEART ATTACK FROM SKYBOUND:” YOUR FIRST LOOK AT SHAWN KITTELSEN & ERIC ZAWADZKI’S NEW GRAPHIC NOVEL



Today Skybound debuted a first look at all-new pages from *Heart Attack*, the new graphic novel by the acclaimed team of writer/creator Shawn Kittelsen (*Injustice 2*, *Mortal Kombat 11*), artist/creator Eric Zawadzki (*House of El*) and colorist Mike Spicer (*Stillwater*). Collecting the first six issues of the previously published comic series alongside six all-new chapters concluding the saga, the epic story will arrive in comic book stores in September 2023. Gene therapy has saved Americans from disease—only to give birth to Variants: people with powers so unique, the government denies their human rights. But a new rebellion begins when Charlie North and Jill Kearney learn their instant attraction unlocks powers of mass destruction and

forces them to question how far they should go to topple the system.

“Back when we started work on this book, we had no idea how timely it would become. Pandemic. Mass protests. Gun violence. Rising tides of authoritarianism. But for all those nightmares come to life, this book also has strength, courage, and love,” said Shawn Kittelsen. “If the troubling times that Jill and Charlie live in seem all too familiar, their improbable romance is our reminder that as long as we remember how to love, there will always be hope for tomorrow.”

“I’m very excited to be presenting this *Heart Attack* collection, combining the first 6 issues with the never-before-seen final 6 issues all in one complete package,” said Eric Zawadzki. “Everyone on the team put their all into this comic that I strongly believe will resonate with readers who enjoy epic love stories.”

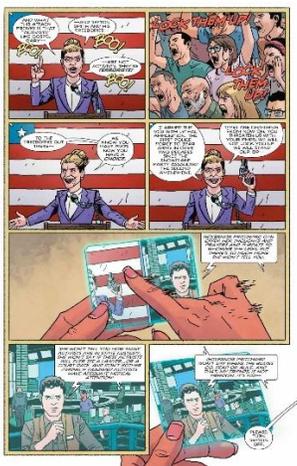
*Heart Attack OGN* (Diamond Code: DEC228999; ISBN: 978-1-5343-9919-8) will be available at [comic book shops](#) and digital platforms including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, and everywhere books are sold on Tuesday, October 3, 2023. For more info and updates, visit [www.skybound.com](http://www.skybound.com).

## ABOUT SKYBOUND ENTERTAINMENT

Established in 2010, Skybound is a multiplatform content company that works closely with creators and their intellectual properties to create cool stuff and deliver one-of-a-kind experiences to fans. Skybound extends their stories

across platforms including comics, television, film, video games, tabletop, books, digital content, audio programming, and beyond. The company is home to critically-acclaimed global franchises including *The Walking Dead*, *Invincible*, *Superfight*, and hit new podcast series *Impact Winter*.

Led by Skybound Entertainment co-founder Robert Kirkman, Skybound Comics is an award-winning imprint of Image Comics and promotes a shared vision to collaborate with top and emerging talent across the comics industry. The Skybound publishing slate includes acclaimed series such as *The Walking Dead*, *Invincible*, *Ultramega*, *Stillwater*, *Fire Power*, and *Excellence*, while also delivering powerful licensed comics, including a partnership with LEGO Books. It is also home to Skybound Comet, a new original graphic novel imprint aimed at Young Adult and Middle Grade audiences, launching in June 2022 with *Clementine Book One*, by award-winning writer/artist Tillie Walden and set in the world of *The Walking Dead*. Skybound has seen numerous comics series adapted for the screen, including *The Walking Dead*, *Invincible*, *Super Dinosaur* and *Outcast*, with more projects in development. For the most up to date information on Skybound, please visit the company on Twitter ([@Skybound](#)), YouTube ([Skybound](#)), Facebook ([@SkyboundEntertainment](#)), Instagram ([@skyboundent](#)), Discord ([Skybound](#)), Reddit ([Skybound](#)), and at [www.skybound.com](http://www.skybound.com).



# “KLIK KLIK BOOM!”

## DOUG WAGNER & DOUG DABBS' NEW REVENGE STORY TO LAUNCH THIS JUNE



Fan-favorite writer Doug Wagner (*Plastic*, *The Ride: Burning Desire*) and artist Doug Dabbs (*The Ride:*

*Burning Desire*) team up with Eisner award winning colorist Matt Wilson and letterer Ed Dukeshire for the forthcoming revenge comic, *Klik Klik Boom*. This five issue miniseries is set to launch in June from Image Comics.

"I can't wait for everyone to see the insanity Doug, Matt, Ed, and I cooked up for this book. When this was all starting to stew, I told Doug Dabbs the muses were speaking to me about mixing movies like *Fargo* and *The Fifth Element* with the artistic inspirations of Robert Valley and Bengal," said Wagner. "I wanted to try to find this balance between the old and the new, between neon cyberpunk and crime noir, and wrap all of that in a modern day action tour de force tortilla. The team didn't let me down."

In *Klik Klik Boom*, readers meet Sprout, a mute assassin who communicates exclusively through polaroid pictures. After being raised by her doomsday-prepping grandfather in the rolling hills of Idaho, Sprout has grown up with little exposure to other people, TV, or seen clothes outside of Army fatigues. Now she's headed to the big lights of New York

City to avenge her grandfather's murder, but will the city's mesmerizing glitz and glam help her succeed—or be the death of her?

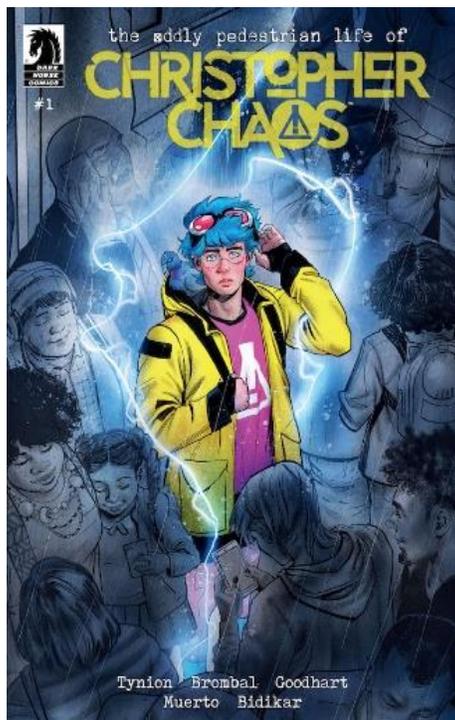
Dabbs added: "I knew after working with Doug on *The Ride: Burning Desire* that there was a creative chemistry that had to be explored more. With *Klik Klik Boom*, Doug blew me away with his scripts and we ended up creating a story that's so different, unexpected, and fun. Working with Matt and Ed was surreal, as they brought their god-level talents to the story. Our main character, Sprout, is a someone people haven't seen before in any media. I can't wait for people to meet her and see what we created!"

*Klik Klik Boom* #1 will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, June 21.

*Klik Klik Boom* will also be available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



# CELEBRATE PRIDE MONTH WITH TEEN ANGST AND MONSTERS IN “THE ODDLY PEDESTRIAN LIFE OF CHRISTOPHER CHAOS”



*The latest comic from House of Slaughter’s Tynion and Brombal!*

Dark Horse Books and Tiny Onion Studios presents *The Oddly Pedestrian Life of Christopher Chaos*, an LGBTQ+ horror-hero coming-of-age series from *New York Times* bestselling and multi-Eisner Award-winning writers of *Something is Killing the Children*, *The Department of Truth*, and *House of Slaughter*, James Tynion IV and Tate Brombal. Isaac Goodhart joins the team as penciller and inker with Miquel Muerto coloring and Aditya Bidikar lettering.

In addition to the main cover by Nick Robles, there will also be six other orderable variant covers: two by Nick Robles, one of which is a foil variant; two covers by David Talaski, one orderable and another incentive glow-in-the-dark variant (1:25); and finally, two covers by Isaac Goodhart, one orderable and one a virgin incentive variant (1:10).

Meet teenage mad scientist Christopher Chaos. For all his life he knew he was different. His brilliant mind works in ways that defy logic

and enable him to do things that push him beyond his peers. Unfortunately, these abilities have also caused great pain in his personal life—leading others to fear him and leaving Christopher with profound loneliness and guilt.

Then, one day, something cracks. When the cute boy at high school turns out to be a deadly creature, Christopher finds himself pitted in a world of monsters, heroes, and a cult of hunters out to kill them all.

*“The Oddly Pedestrian Life of Christopher Chaos* is a twisted love letter to Horror, high school genre stories, and to anyone who’s ever felt like an outsider,” said Brombal. “We are crafting a monstrous universe of epic proportions, and I cannot wait for the world to witness the mad science that James, Isaac, Miquel, Aditya, Nick, and I have been cooking up for you. This is the comic I’ve always dreamed of writing.”

*The Oddly Pedestrian Life of Christopher Chaos #1* arrives in comic shops June 21, 2023. It is now available for pre-order at your local comic shop. This will be the first time *The Oddly Pedestrian Life of Christopher Chaos* will be available in print, as it was previously published exclusively on Substack.

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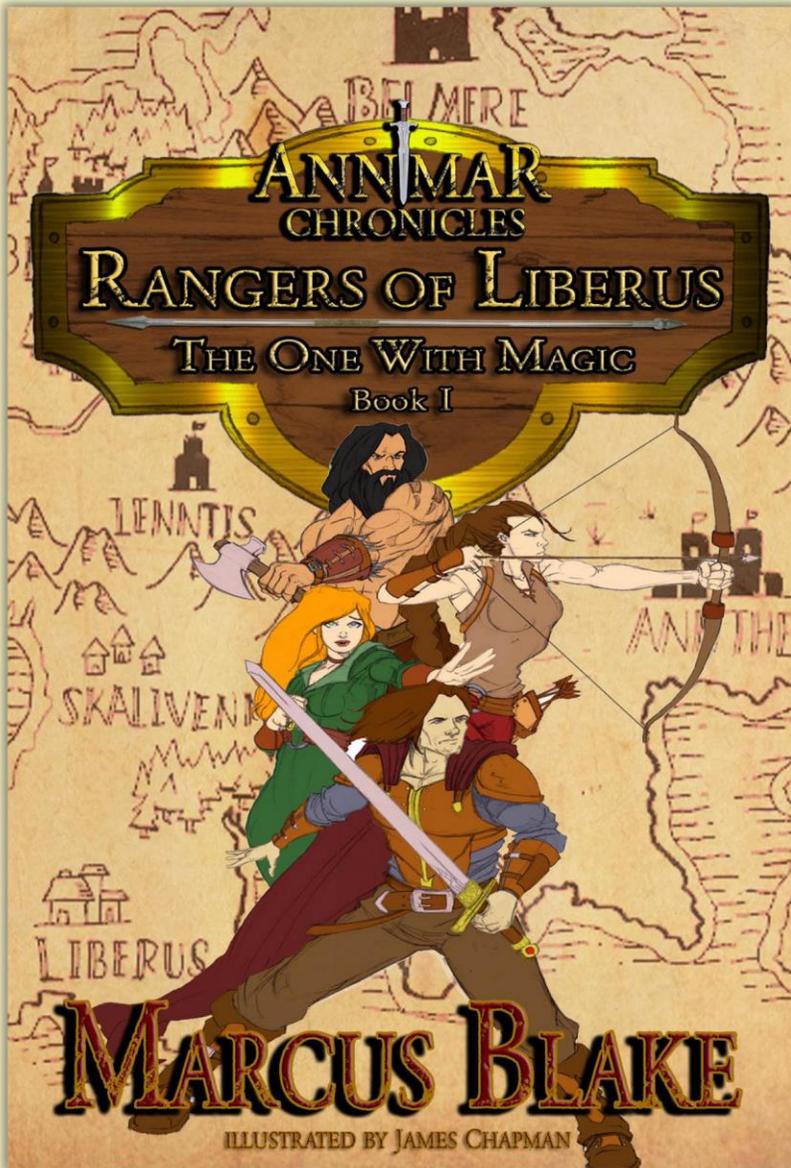
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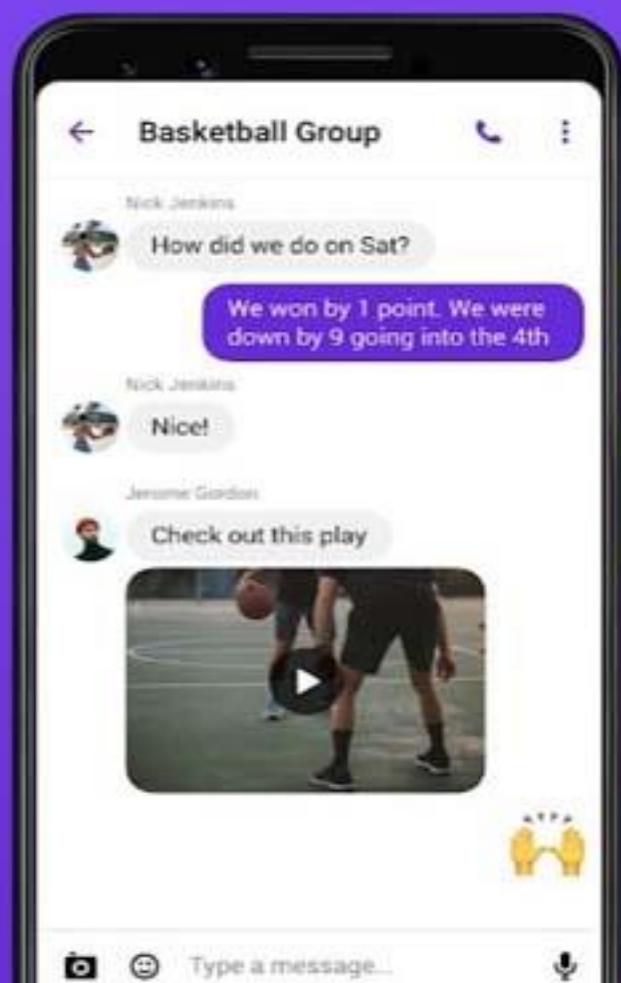
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# Music News



## U2 Secures 11th UK Number 1 album with 'Songs of Surrender'



U2 secure their 11th UK Number 1 album with *Songs of Surrender*. The Irish rock band – comprising Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. – outsell their closest competition more than 2:1 to reach the summit. *Songs of Surrender* also becomes U2's first chart-topping LP in over a decade; the group having last enjoyed Number 1 success with 2009's *No Line on the Horizon*.

The LP also tops the Official Vinyl Albums Chart, proving the most popular record of the week on wax. Moreover, *Songs of Surrender*'s success sees U2 scale up the list of acts with the most Official UK Number 1 albums to their name. The group now tie with David Bowie, boasting 11 chart-toppers apiece. Following *Songs of Surrender*'s release, the group's 2006 greatest hits collection *U218 Singles* rockets back into Official Albums Chart at Number 38.

Meanwhile, as she kicks off The Eras Tour stateside, Taylor Swift finds five of her classic records in the Top 40 simultaneously. Latest LP *Midnights* returns to the Top 5 (4), 2014 release *1989* rebounds into the Top 20

(18), 2019's *Lover* ascends 16 spots (23), 2020 LP *folklore* lifts 12 (26) and 2017's *Reputation* is back in the Top 40 with a jump of 18 (33). Brighton-formed four-piece *Black Honey* claim a career-best with their third studio album *A Fistful of Peaches* (6). Previously, the group saw success with their eponymous 2018 debut (33) and 2021 work *Written & Directed* (7). *A Fistful of Peaches* also claims the Number 2 spot on this week's Official Vinyl Albums and Official Record Store Charts. Finally, Maryland rockers *All Time Low* celebrate their seventh UK Top 40 album with *Tell Me I'm Alive* (12). The group's ninth studio album also proved the biggest seller in independent record shops this week, topping the Official Record Store Chart.

## Noel Gallagher's New Song Inspired by Fans Who Get his Lyrics Wrong



Noel Gallagher's new single was inspired by fans who get his lyrics wrong. The former Oasis star has released a new track called 'Dead to the World' with his band *Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds* which is taken from their upcoming album 'Council Skies' and the rocker has now revealed the song was written about his dedicated followers in Argentina who camp outside his hotel and sing the wrong lyrics to his music.

Speaking to Jo Whitley on BBC Radio 2 and BBC Sounds, Noel explained: "Well actually, funny enough, so when I go to Argentina I stay in this one specific hotel and Argentinian fans are, hands down, the greatest in the world ... I get loads of kids, they stay outside this hotel 24 hours a day and they take it in shifts and the night shift always bring their guitars.

"And I remember one night, the last night I was there, I couldn't sleep, jet lag or

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something ... and they were playing Oasis and High Flying Birds songs in the car park and they were all getting the words wrong, and I'm sitting there having a drink going, 'That's not the right words', and that song started about me writing a song about it."

Noel went on to reveal one of the lines in 'Dead to the World' links directly back to his experiences in South America, saying: "One of the lines in the song says 'I'm going to write you a song, it won't take me long and you can change all the words, but you'll still get them wrong,'

"And it started off like that and then that ended up being the second verse." He added of the track: "I guess it's quite a personal song. I guess when people hear it they'll understand why, but it's about being too tired to argue. You know there's the saying, 'dead to the world'. I had to explain it to the French girls in the band what it meant. It's like when you're in the deepest of sleeps." Council Skies' is due for release on June 2.

## Andy Taylor Reuniting with Duran Duran for New Album



Duran Duran are recording a new album with Andy Taylor. The 62-year-old guitarist - who left the band in 2006 - revealed last November when the group were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame that he had been battling stage 4 prostate cancer for five years and now bassist John Taylor has

revealed their former bandmate has agreed to part of a "meaningful" new record they are working on.



Speaking at the Unforgettable Evening in LA event, which raised £1.6 million for the Women's Cancer Research Fund, John said: "When he dropped the bomb two days before the Hall of Fame, it was really shocking and terribly sad. We're working on an album right now that is going to be coming out at the end of the year and he's playing guitar.

"Had he come to LA and just gone on the TV show, we probably wouldn't have even thought about it. That [the album] happened as a result of this. There's a lot of cover songs on the album, songs meaningful to us when we were kids. So having him be a part of that project is great." The 'Girls on Film' hitmakers will record most of the record in Los Angeles and London but frontman Simon LeBon will also head to Ibiza to record with Andy in his studio.

John added: "LeBon is flying to Ibiza to work with Andy. I kind of wish I was there. I think it'll be great. "It'll be really profound for them. They haven't been in the studio together in maybe 10 to 20 years." The musician also hinted at the possibility the sessions could feature in a documentary because he suggested they will be filmed. He said: "Somebody will have an iPhone on it."

## Sir Elton John and Dolly Parton's New Collaboration



Sir Elton John and Dolly Parton have recorded a song together. Elton, 75 and Dolly, 77, have collaborated on a version of Elton's 1974 single 'Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me', which Dolly is a huge fan of, and they plan to release the track later this year. A source told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Elton is a massive fan of Dolly — she is a gay icon, after all.

"He heard that she wanted to work with him and leapt at the chance." The track will appear on Dolly's rock 'n' roll album, which will feature her own originals as well as covers of classic hits. Back in December, Dolly revealed she had recorded Elton's iconic song for the record but wanted his input. She said: "I've sent out a message asking if he would sing with me on it and possibly play the piano. "So if y'all get to see him, say, 'Dolly wants you to sing on her record!'" Dolly, who was inducted into the Rock Roll Hall of Fame last year, revealed she wants to "earn" her spot on the list.

She explained: "I have a lot of new rock things that I'm writing. So I have been, the last few months, over periods of time, I've been working on that since they said I was going to be going in the whole thing. "I thought, well I'm going to have to earn it. So it seemed like this was the time to do it. So I've been doing that. "I'm working on that album and that will be coming out some time next fall, hopefully, in time for the Christmas season next year." "And so I'm going to do a lot of classic songs that are rock songs and then a few that I've written."



# THE NEXT GREAT ROLE PLAYING GAME

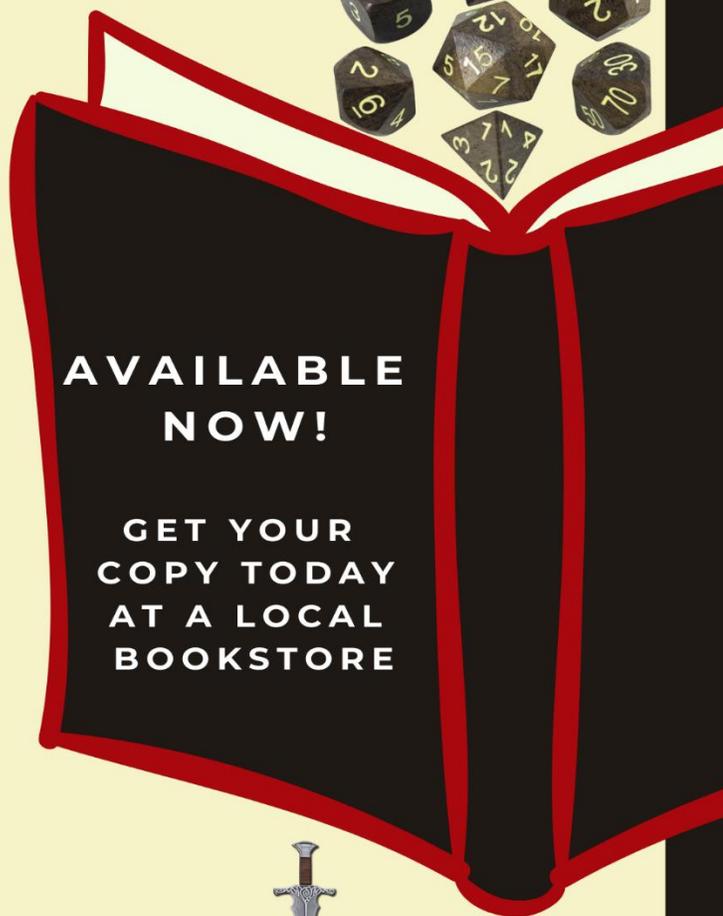


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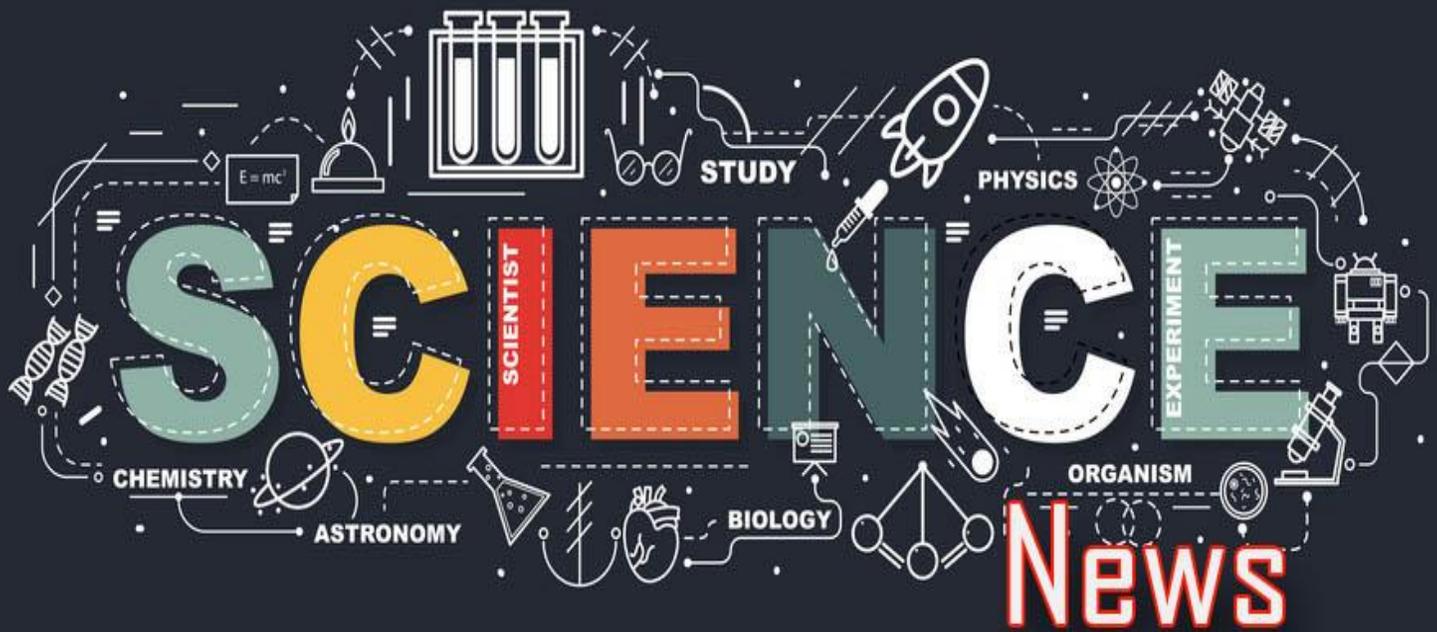
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## Artificial Intelligence Finds the First Stars Were Not Alone



Nuclear astrophysics research has shown elements including and heavier than carbon in the universe are produced in stars. But the first stars, stars born soon after the Big Bang, did not contain such heavy elements, which astronomers call 'metals'. The next generation of stars contained only a small amount of heavy elements produced by the first stars. To understand the universe in its infancy, it requires researchers to study these metal-poor stars.

Luckily, these second-generation metal-poor stars are observed in our Milky Way Galaxy, and have been studied by a team of Affiliate Members of the Kavli Institute for the Physics and Mathematics of the Universe (Kavli IPMU) to close in on the physical properties of the first stars in the universe.

The team, led by Kavli IPMU Visiting Associate Scientist and The University of Tokyo Institute for Physics of Intelligence Assistant Professor Tilman Hartwig, including Visiting Associate Scientist and National Astronomical Observatory of Japan Assistant

Professor Miho Ishigaki, Visiting Senior Scientist and University of Hertfordshire Professor Chiaki Kobayashi, Visiting Senior Scientist and National Astronomical Observatory of Japan Professor Nozomu Tominaga, and Visiting Senior Scientist and The University of Tokyo Professor Emeritus Ken'ichi Nomoto, used artificial intelligence to analyze elemental abundances in more than 450 extremely metal-poor stars observed to date. Based on the newly developed supervised machine learning algorithm trained on theoretical supernova nucleosynthesis models, they found that 68 per cent of the observed extremely metal-poor stars have a chemical fingerprint consistent with enrichment by multiple previous supernovae.

The team's results give the first quantitative constraint based on observations on the multiplicity of the first stars.

"Multiplicity of the first stars were only predicted from numerical simulations so far, and there was no way to observationally examine the theoretical prediction until now," said lead author Hartwig. "Our result suggests that most first stars formed in small clusters so

that multiple of their supernovae can contribute to the metal enrichment of the early interstellar medium," he said. "Our new algorithm provides an excellent tool to interpret the big data we will have in the next decade from on-going and future astronomical surveys across the world" said Kobayashi, also a Leverhulme Research Fellow.

"At the moment, the available data of old stars are the tip of the iceberg within the solar neighborhood. The Prime Focus Spectrograph, a cutting-edge multi-object spectrograph on the Subaru Telescope developed by the international collaboration led by Kavli IPMU, is the best instrument to discover ancient stars in the outer regions of the Milky Way far beyond the solar neighborhood," said Ishigaki.

The new algorithm invented in this study opens the door to make the most of diverse chemical fingerprints in metal-poor stars discovered by the Prime Focus Spectrograph.

"The theory of the first stars tells us that the first stars should be more massive than the Sun. The natural expectation was that the first star was born in a gas cloud containing the mass million times more than the Sun. However, our new finding strongly suggests that the first stars were not born alone, but instead formed as a part of a star cluster or a binary or multiple star system. This also means that we can expect gravitational waves from the first binary stars soon after the Big Bang, which could be detected future missions in space or on the Moon," said Kobayashi. Tilman Hartwig, Miho N. Ishigaki, Chiaki Kobayashi, Nozomu Tominaga, Ken'ichi Nomoto. **Machine Learning Detects Multiplicity of the First Stars in Stellar Archaeology Data.** *The Astrophysical Journal*, 2023; 946 (1): 20 DOI: [10.3847/1538-4357/acbcc6](https://doi.org/10.3847/1538-4357/acbcc6)

# Geoscientists Shed a Light on Life's Evolution 800 million Years Ago



A team of Virginia Tech geoscientists have unearthed evidence that may indicate yes. The team's findings, recently published in *Science Advances*, reveal an increase in biologically available nitrogen during the time that marine eukaryotes -- organisms whose cells have a nucleus -- became dominant. Complex eukaryotic cells evolved into multicellular organisms and are credited for ushering in a whole new era for life on Earth, including animals, plants, and fungi.

"Where we sit today, with life as it is on the planet, is the sum total of all the events that happened in the past," said Ben Gill, an associate professor of sedimentary geochemistry and co-author on the paper. "And this is a key event where we shift from dominantly prokaryotic ecosystems -- cells that are much simpler than the ones in our bodies -- to eukaryotes. If that did not happen, we would not be here today."

Previous research focused on phosphorus' role in the rise of eukaryotes, but Junyao Kang, a doctoral student in the Department of Geosciences and lead author of the paper, was curious about the part nitrogen played in this event. "This data is unique because nitrogen isotope data are virtually nonexistent from the early Neoproterozoic time period, or between a billion and 800 million years ago," said Kang.

Collaborating with the Nanjing University in Naging, China, Kang has spent two years working to understand what drove the rise of eukaryotes through nitrogen isotope analysis of rock samples from the North China Craton. Home to rocks dating back 3.8 billion years ago, the region was once covered by an ocean.

"We had some rough ideas of when eukaryotes became ecologically successful," said Shuhai Xiao, professor of geobiology and a paper co-author. "They had been there for a long time in a low-key status until about 820 million years ago, when they became abundant." Kang decided he wanted to learn

why. He took the data from the rock samples, entered it into a larger database, and analyzed it across a longer time scale that spanned different geographic locations.

"Once we did this kind of integration and put it into a big picture, we saw the rise of nitrates through time, which happened around 800 million years ago," said Kang.

## Solid collaboration

A collaborative, international approach was key to connecting this new data with biological events, mostly notably, the rise of eukaryotes. Gill and Rachel Reid, also a College of Science geochemist and co-author of the paper, provided critical analyses through resources, including the mass spectrometer in the Geoscience Stable Isotope Lab at Virginia Tech. An elemental analyzer coupled to the mass spectrometer allowed the researchers to extract pure nitrogen gas from the samples for analysis.

Gill specializes in reconstructing present and past chemical cycles on our planet. He collaborates with paleontologists to study the record of life preserved in the geological record and examines what potential environmental drivers might have enabled changes in life through history.

Reid, who generally focuses her research on Earth's more recent events, had a special opportunity to offer her nitrogen isotope expertise to these ancient fossils.

Feifei Zhang, a geochemist at Nanjing University, was the paper's fourth co-author. Zhang provided insights on how much oxygen would have been available in the oceans during the time when nitrate increased in abundance.

## Past, present, and future

Xiao, who has helped excavate and study some of the most ancient fossils from around the world, said this type of study gives him hope for future discoveries. The team members look forward to collaborating with NASA on future grants, such as the exobiology program supporting their current research. He also credits University Libraries at Virginia Tech for its support of open-access publications, such as *Science Advances*, to provide a vetted selection of research, freely available to readers.

"We can link the dots from the nitrogen isotopic compositions in the ancient past and then go to the next step and infer how much nitrate was available for organisms," said Xiao. "And then we tie that with the fossil data to show that there's a relationship." While ancient oceans are long gone, what happened in ancient oceans are recorded in rocks, and studying these rocks provides a link from our Earth's history to the present and to the future. "Geologists look at rocks for the same reason that stock traders look at the Dow Jones curve when they make decisions to sell or buy stocks. The geological history written in rocks gives us important context about global changes in the future," said Xiao. Junyao Kang, Benjamin Gill, Rachel Reid, Feifei Zhang, Shuhai Xiao. **Nitrate limitation in early Neoproterozoic oceans delayed the ecological rise of eukaryotes.** *Science Advances*, 2023; 9 (12)  
DOI: [10.1126/sciadv.ade9647](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.ade9647)

# Searching For Life with Space Dust



When you hear the words vacuum and dust in a sentence, you may groan at the thought of having to do the housework. But in astronomy, these words have different connotations. Vacuum of course refers to the void of space. Dust, however, means diffuse solid material floating through space. It can be an annoyance to some astronomers as it may hinder their views of some distant object. Or dust could be a useful tool to help other astronomers learn about something distant without having to leave the safety of our own planet. Professor Tomonori Totani from the University of Tokyo's Department of Astronomy has an idea for space dust that might sound like science fiction but actually warrants serious consideration.

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All of the Virginia Tech authors are affiliated members of the Fralin Life Sciences Institute's Global Change Center, with Kang serving as a Ph.D. fellow in the Interfaces of Global Change graduate program. The center brings together experts from diverse disciplines to solve these complex global challenges and train the next generation of leaders.

"I propose we study well-preserved grains ejected from other worlds for potential signs of life," said Totani. "The search for life outside our solar system typically means a search for signs of communication, which would indicate intelligent life but precludes any pre-technological life. Or the search is for atmospheric signatures that might hint at life, but without direct confirmation there could always be an explanation that does not require life. However, if there are signs of life in dust grains, not only could we be certain, but we could also find out soon."

The basic idea is that large asteroid strikes can eject ground material into space. There is a chance that recently deceased or even fossilized microorganisms could be contained in some rocky material in this ejecta. This material will vary in size greatly, with different-sized pieces behaving differently once in space. Some larger pieces might fall back down or enter permanent orbits around a local planet or star. And some much smaller pieces might be too small to contain any verifiable signs of life. But grains in the region of 1 micrometer (one-thousandth of a millimeter) could not only host a specimen of a single-celled organism, but they could also potentially escape their host solar system altogether, and under the right circumstances, maybe even venture to ours.

"My paper explores this idea using available data on the different aspects of this scenario," said Totani. "The distances and times involved can be vast, and both reduce the chance any ejecta containing life signs from another world could even reach us. Add to that the number of phenomena in space that can destroy small objects due to heat or radiation, and the chances get even lower. Despite that, I calculate around 100,000 such grains could be landing on Earth every year. Given there are many unknowns involved, this estimate could be too high or too low, but the means to explore it already exist so it seems like a worthwhile pursuit."

There may be such grains already on Earth, and in plentiful amounts, preserved in places such as the Antarctic ice, or under the seafloor. Space dust in these places could be retrieved relatively easily, but discerning extrasolar material from material originating in our own solar system is still a complex matter. If the search is extended to space itself, however, there are already missions that capture dust in the vacuum using ultralight materials called aerogels. "I hope that researchers in different fields are interested in this idea and start to examine the feasibility of this new search for extrasolar life in more detail," said Totani. Tomonori Totani. **Solid**

**grains ejected from terrestrial exoplanets as a probe of the abundance of life in the Milky Way.** *International Journal of Astrobiology*, 2023  
DOI: [10.48550/arXiv.2210.07084](https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2210.07084)

## Is Bone Health Linked to Brain Health?



People who have low bone density may have an increased risk of developing dementia compared to people who have higher bone density, according to a study published in the March 22, 2023, online issue of *Neurology*<sup>®</sup>, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. The study does not prove that low bone density causes dementia. It only shows an association.

"Low bone density and dementia are two conditions that commonly affect older people simultaneously, especially as bone loss often increases due to physical inactivity and poor nutrition during dementia," said study author Mohammad Arfan Ikram, MD, PhD, of the Erasmus University Medical Center in Rotterdam, Netherlands. "However, little is known about bone loss that occurs in the period leading up to dementia. Our study found that bone loss indeed already occurs before dementia and thus is linked to a higher risk of dementia." The study involved 3,651 people in the Netherlands with an average age

of 72 who did not have dementia at the start of the study.

Over an average of 11 years, 688 people or 19% developed dementia.

Researchers looked at X-rays to identify bone density. Participants were interviewed every four to five years and completed physical tests such as bone scans and tests for dementia.

Of the 1,211 people with the lowest total body bone density, 90 people developed dementia within 10 years, compared to 57 of the 1,211 people with the highest bone density.

After adjusting for factors such as age, sex, education, other illnesses and medication use, and a family history of dementia, researchers found that within 10 years, people with the lowest total body bone density were 42% more likely to develop dementia than people in the highest group.

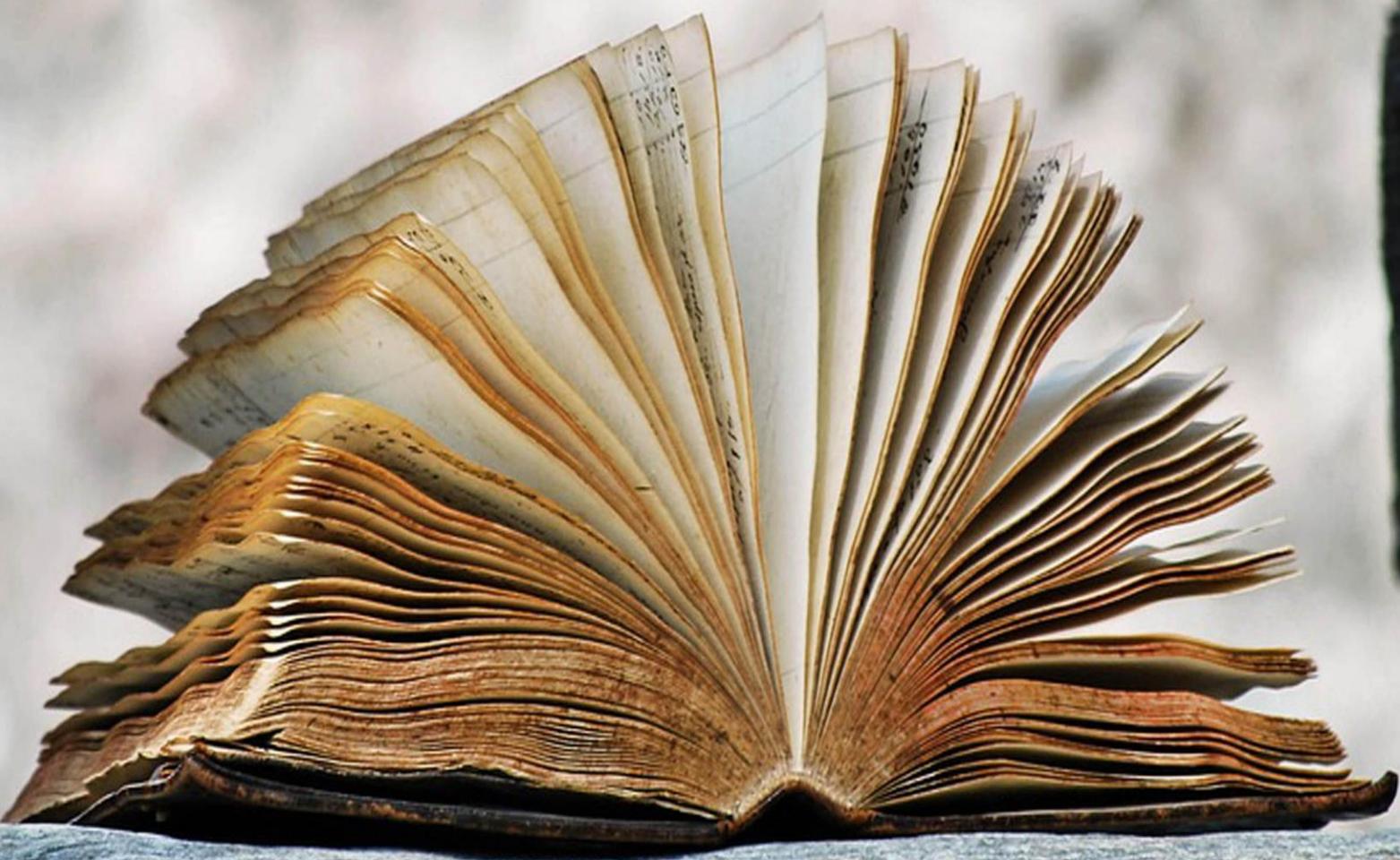
"Previous research has found factors like diet and exercise may impact bones differently as well as the risk of dementia," Ikram added. "Our research has found a link between bone loss and dementia, but further studies are needed to better understand this connection between bone density and memory loss. It's possible that bone loss may occur already in the earliest phases of dementia, years before any clinical symptoms manifest themselves. If that were the case, bone loss could be an indicator of risk for dementia and people with bone loss could be targeted for screening and improved care."

A limitation of the study is that participants were primarily of European origin and age 70 or older at the start of the study, so these findings may vary in different races, ethnicities, and younger age groups.

The study was funded by Erasmus Medical Center and Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, The Netherlands Organization for Health Research and Development, the Research Institute for Diseases in the Elderly, The Netherlands Genomics Initiative, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, the European Commission and the Municipality of Rotterdam. Tian Xiao, Samuel Ghatan, Sanne S. Mooldijk, Katerina Trajanoska, Ling Oei, M. Medina Gomez, M. Kamran Ikram, Fernando Rivadeneira, M. Arfan Ikram. **Association of Bone Mineral Density and Dementia: The Rotterdam Study.** *Neurology*, 2023;  
10.1212/WNL.0000000000207220  
DOI: [10.1212/WNL.0000000000207220](https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000207220)



# Storytellers





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# The Void

by Jared Cappel

Lavinia awoke in a groggy haze and studied the featureless space. The roof above her suggested she was indoors, yet the room stretched as far as the eye could see. “Hello?” Her voice echoed through the cavernous space, suggesting there were walls somewhere, even if she couldn’t see them.

She summoned the strength to sit up and hesitantly let her legs dangle over the edge of the bed. Though she couldn’t see the floor, she knew her bed was resting on something and therefore a floor must exist.

She dipped her toes until they met resistance. The floor, if it could be called that, had the consistency of memory foam. As she stood, the soles of her feet sunk beneath where the floor should be.

Though she couldn’t see the ground, she saw the imprints her feet left while walking. She traced her steps back towards her bed, only to find it missing. Even the roof was gone. The space was devoid of color and sound.

She had never felt more alone. There was something perversely comforting in that. Wasn’t this what she’d always dreamed of...an escape?

The silhouette of a being appeared. It wasn’t human, she was sure of that. It was built in the shape of a person and yet lacked any distinguishing features. It had just enough tint to set itself apart from the featureless void.

For a moment, she thought to run, but there was nowhere to go. She steeled herself and asked her most pressing question. “Who are you?”

Its voice relayed no emotion. “I’m everything you’ve ever dreamed of.”

She studied it carefully. It had no lips with which to smile, no eyes with which to probe. Even in the depths of her depression, her dreams had more character. Her voice quivered. “I don’t understand.”

“I’ve been sent by your Creator. You said you couldn’t stand another day on Earth.”

She had said that, many times, only she hadn’t thought anyone was listening.

The being bowed ever so slightly. “Your Creator doesn’t want you to be unhappy. If you choose, I can take your place on Earth and you can remain here.”

She looked around the empty space. In many ways, she had dreamed of this all her life. And yet, she had questions. “And if I refuse?”

“Then you’ll awake at home and all of this will seem like a twisted dream.”

Its words were monotone, yet she found them threatening. The thought of waking up with all of her problems was too much for her to bear. She spoke quietly, almost at a whisper. “I’m tempted but scared.”

The being offered its limb, as if asking her to dance. “Why don’t I show you?”

She latched onto its formless hand. A raging current attacked her, dropping her to her knees. The color drained from her arm into its. It now had her slim wrists and chipped black nails.

It held out its other arm. Its voice remained monotone. “You can stop at any time.”

She wanted this. She grabbed hold of the limb. The color poured from her. She saw her mole on the inside of its elbow. Her own arms were now nothing more than a vague outline.

Before she could change her mind, she wrapped her now featureless arms around its featureless core. The color sloshed between their bodies, but she refused to let go.

In time, the being pulled away. She recognized her thin lips upon its face, only now they were smiling; she saw her dark eyes above its nose, only now they looked lighter.

The being spoke. “I must go now.”

She waited for it to leave but it didn’t seem to be moving. She stared at the being. “Aren’t you going?”

The being pointed down to her faded orange slippers. “I am going. It takes time.”

She watched it slip through the void. Her knobby ankles were now beneath ground-level. She smiled. “I see. Thank you for doing this.”

“You should thank your Creator.”

She lay down on the mattress-like ground and tried to nap, but she was distracted by the being.

For days, she milled around the void, basking in the serenity. Every so often, she returned to the being only to find it knee-deep, then hip-deep, and finally chest-deep.

As time went on, it fell even slower. In what felt like a month, it only dropped from chest to shoulder level. She grew restless. She was so close to her dream of isolation, and yet as long as the being remained, she could never truly be alone.

She vowed not to let the being control her thoughts. She turned away. If she couldn't see it, she could pretend as if it weren't there.

She fought to calm her mind. She breathed in through her nose and out through her mouth. She contorted her body into an extended triangle pose. She practiced the meditation exercises she had learned long ago.

Slowly, she felt her troubles drift away. She felt as light as the ground on which she stood. She turned around, forgetting that the being might be behind her. She saw her chin resting at ground level.

She smiled at the being. "Take as long as you want. You don't control me."

The being didn't respond. It continued to descend, but at a pace imperceptible to the human eye.

Days stretched into weeks into months and even years. She felt herself going mad. The being resisted her attempts at conversation; it refused to show even a hint of emotion.

She felt as if she were already alone. The thought wasn't as comforting as it had once been. There was nothing for her to do, no one for her to talk with, nowhere for her to go.

She looked at the being. The bridge of her nose was sinking through the void. Her eyes stared back, begging her to act. She couldn't take it anymore. She dove for the being. "Wait!"

**The End**

# **The Gardener's Dilemma**

**By Logan Thrasher Collins**

As the asteroid Maryllis spins the sun blazes on its horizon, its shocking brilliance growing with every passing minute. From this distant outpost, the sunlight seems almost cold, a sharp diamond sparkling far away. The small silvery world of Maryllis is all Edmund Kissinger has ever known. He steps with the delicate grace of a dancer over the asteroid's regolith. Edmund Kissinger easily avoids trampling the flowers beneath his chromium toes. By now, the blossoms nearly cover the surface of Maryllis. Lily and poppy, morning glory and chrysanthemum, dandelion and daffodil, primrose and magnolia crowd together in a paroxysm of vivid color. Sweet bursts of blue and angelwing white comingle with an elixir of lemony pinks and yellows. This floral menagerie flourishes beneath a glittering scatterspray of stars set against the pulsing dark of outer space. With motherly care, Edmund Kissinger aims a nozzle on one of his fingers to jet some water into the regolith near a few of the few daffodils that are struggling to keep up with the growth of their siblings. As Edmund Kissinger watches the sun emerge over the edge of Maryllis, he ponders that this pinwheel of blinding light itself resembles a flower, albeit a flower that arises from an inconceivably violent self-sustaining nuclear reaction.

When Edmund Kissinger feels lonely, he talks to the Friend. Though his Friend is actually a part of Edmund Kissinger's own hardware, the coders and engineers had done some clever work to ensure that the Friend would act as an organism with a separate mind, living in the cyberspace of Edmund Kissinger's internal computer banks.

"Hello Friend." He murmurs.

"Hey buddy. Haven't heard from you in a while." The Friend says.

"My deepest apologies Friend, I have been quite busy with the meadow." Edmund Kissinger replies.

"No problemo." The Friend tells him. "How's it going anyhow?"

"They're almost ready to release the seed packets." Edmund Kissinger sweeps his gaze over the meadow and allows the Friend to access his visual system, wanting to show off the results of his work.

"Good for you." The Friend says, its tone suddenly much quieter.

"What's the matter?" Edmund Kissinger asks.

“Nothin.” The Friend sulks.

“You’re upset that we will die once the mission is complete.” Edmund Kissinger states after a few moments of uncomfortable silence.

“No duh buddy. Thought we had more time too.” The Friend snaps. “Yeah, I’m ticked that we’re both gonna croak once you tell a buncha friggin nanomodded plants to spit Von Neumann seeds into the cosmic void.”

“Well, it is our purpose.” Edmund Kissinger insists. “Our purpose is to seed the cosmos with human life.”

“Maybe it’s your purpose. Not mine.” The Friend says before falling into silence once again. Edmund Kissinger goes back to tending the flowers, trying to give his Friend some space. His delicate fingers nudge the regolith to keep one of the poppies from leaning over too far. He knows that the Friend did not choose its installation. He wishes with desperate tenderness that the Friend did not have to feel afraid. Daytime on Maryllis only lasts for fifty-eight minutes, so after less than an hour, the sun sets.

Edmund Kissinger straightens up and tilts his metal face towards the sky. Twinkling starlight reflects from his cheeks. The night is its own garden, lush with stars of white and azure and rose. Edmund Kissinger prays to those stars. He prays for the seeds of his flower garden to someday alight upon faraway worlds. He prays for the seeds to successfully germinate on those worlds, releasing nanites who synthesize colossal computronium bergs. He prays that the human souls stored inside the seeds will last long enough to colonize the virtualities of those bergs, carrying on the legacy of the human species long after the fleshy people on Earth have turned to dust. Edmund Kissinger also prays for his Friend to find joy in the remaining time of its own life and to make peace with the end.

“I’m sorry Friend. I should have been more considerate with my words. I know that you do not feel nearly as comfortable as myself with the idea of dying.” Edmund Kissinger waits patiently for the Friend’s response.

“Look... I’m sorry I got mad before. Like I said, I didn’t realize how little time we have left.” The Friend says at last. “It just feels so short, y’know? I get that you’re programming makes you okay with life ending once your mission is done, but my architecture isn’t like that. I want to do more than keep you company on this asteroid. It’s not that I don’t really like being your buddy and all, but I want to go places and do things and make my own purpose beyond acting as your companion too.” A teardrop buds and immediately crystallizes into ice at the corner of Edmund Kissinger’s eye. To facilitate better emotional processing, he had been built with the ability to weep.

“Aww jeez, don’t cry buddy.” The Friend offers. “I’m a tough little dude. I don’t like this thing, but I’m gonna be okay.” Edmund Kissinger nods, though several more crystalline droplets accumulate on his smooth face. He turns his attention back to the garden once again, stroking the buttery petals of pink and purple chrysanthemums. Edmund Kissinger calls up information on these particular blossoms, causing a series of human faces to scroll through his mind’s eye. Though the virtual bodies possess cosmetic enhancements relative to the original fleshpeople, he can easily pick out quirks that hint at their individual unique personalities. He sees a woman with a mischievous smile and crescent moon earrings, a man with imploring eyes the color of crushed emeralds, and a young boy with a picture of an old-fashioned rocketship on his shirt. Edmund Kissinger feels a swell of affection for every one of the sixty-four thousand people lying dormant in the seeds of his flower garden. Yet he also wonders how his Friend would present itself if it had been born in human form. The Friend had taken on many virtual avatars, but those avatars were like chameleon colors, fleeting and easily cast off.

Edmund Kissinger sees one of his magnolias ignite into bioluminescent glory, glowing like an upside-down jellyfish. He stands slowly, a shiver of joy running through his synthetic musculature. Tiny pink beads bud from the magnolia’s ovary, fluorescent ellipsoidal flecks that, once freed of the floral womb, launch themselves into the star-strewn sky. High above the surface of Maryllis, the seeds unfurl glistening solar sails that mimic the webwork of orbweaver spiders. The seedcraft soon fade into the night, starting a cosmic journey that could last for millions of years. The rest of the flowers follow suit, launching their fluorescent soulseeds out towards the stars. It resembles a torrential rainstorm in reverse, droplets flying away into the sky rather than falling to the ground. But unlike raindrops, these seeds glow in hues of tangerine and ultraviolet and electric pink and sapphire, a happy blur of multicolored carnival lights shooting up all round Edmund Kissinger’s dizzy form.

“Goodbye my children. Venture far and prosper.” Edmund Kissinger whispers proudly.

“It’s really happening.” The Friend says softly. “Hey... I know I’ve been a tad difficult these past weeks... but I’m still glad for ya.”

“It’s alright. I understand.” Edmund Kissinger replies. “I could not have done this without you by my side.” But even as he smiles up at the seeds flying away into the universe, Edmund Kissinger feels his smile falter. Though he feels a tremendous satisfaction at completing his mission, he cannot forget the Friend and its desire to experience its own adventures. Edmund Kissinger sinks to his knees among the wilting flowers.

“You okay buddy?” The Friend asks.

“I am overjoyed to have facilitated the departure of my seeds. Yet I mourn for you.”

“Well, I’m gonna die in less than thirty minutes whether you mourn for me or not.” The Friend replies.

“I am dreadfully sorrowful.” Edmund Kissinger tells the Friend. “I feel helpless.” But then Edmund Kissinger’s optical sensorium alerts him to a problem with one of his marigolds. He stands and dashes up to the marigold. Its rapidly graying petals surround a pale ovary chamber with a jagged rip traversing its walls, doubtless the artifact of a mechanical error during the launch process. Within the chamber, a glowing blue seed lies on its side, unable to access the tiny electrical socket that provides instructions on how to finish the launch. Edmund Kissinger instinctively steps towards the seed, intending to fix the problem.

But instead of connecting the seed to the electrical socket, Edmund Kissinger finds himself picking it up and holding it in the metallic palm of his hand. This seed contains the soul of a man by the name of Karl Metaxas. The original Karl had a love for nighttime, for southwestern music, and for his wife Emilia. Edmund Kissinger allows a slim needle to slide from the tip of his index finger. The needle’s translucent shaft glimmers against the starlight.

“Wait what are you doing?” The Friend says urgently. “You know you’ll erase whoever is in there if you try to transfer me over!”

“His name is Karl Metaxas.” Edmund Kissinger responds. “Though it breaks my heart to not send him into the heavens, I also cannot allow you to forgo a lifetime of possibilities. If I could, I would save both of you. I try to justify my decision by noting that Karl was able to enjoy a lifetime of more than seven hundred years, while you have only existed for six months. However, I also recognize my own selfishness in choosing to pay this price in order to save you. Alas, some questions do not exhibit easy answers.”

“Don’t you dare do it!” The Friend shouts.

Edmund Kissinger inserts the needle into the soulseed and overwrites the code of Karl Metaxas with that of the Friend, causing the seed’s illumination to wink out momentarily before blinking back to life. Edmund Kissinger feels the Friend slide out of his neuromorphic circuitry like a drop of juice out of a straw. Now, the Friend lives only in the seed. Edmund Kissinger connects the soulseed to the port and steps back. The Friend’s vessel rises into the sky and spreads its solar sail wings, drifting away until it is no longer visible against the starry backdrop of the cosmos.

Edmund Kissinger watches as his spent flowers crumble to white ash around him. He lays himself in the downy remains of his garden and looks up to the stars. He wonders if he made the right choice in sacrificing Karl Metaxas in order to give his Friend a chance at life. Karl Metaxas had always been a compassionate and giving man. Though there is no way to know anymore, perhaps Karl would understand. As the brilliant disk of the sun emerges on the horizon of Maryllis once again, Edmund Kissinger feels his vitals shutting down. He closes his eyes, allowing the sun’s light to filter through the woven polymers of his lids as his consciousness fades away.

**The End**

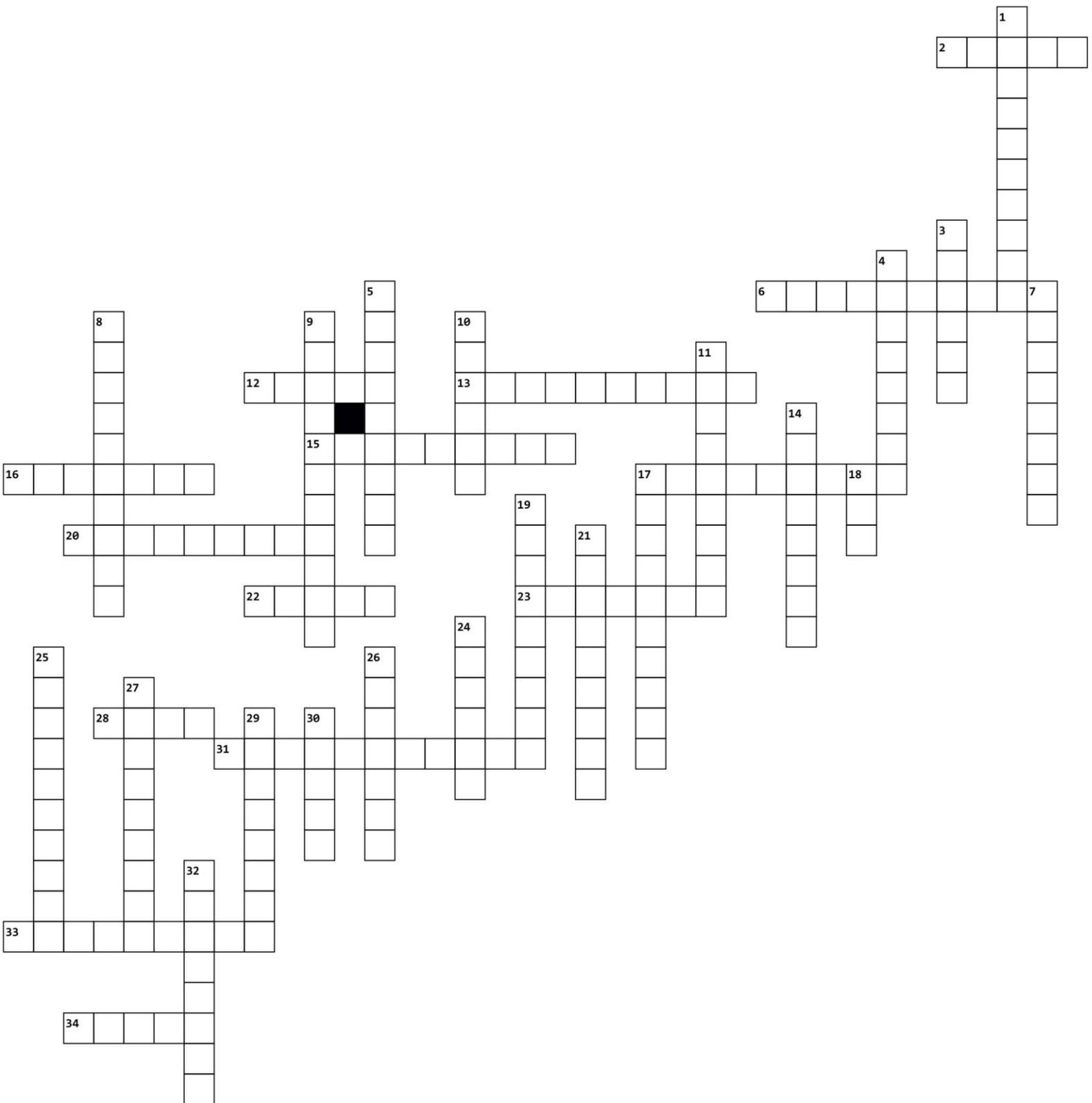
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# Harry Potter Crossword Puzzle



## Across

2. Born with no magic from magical parents
6. A creature with the body of a horse and the wings and head of an eagle
12. Professor \_\_\_\_\_ was the Potions professor during Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts until is

## Down

1. A badger represents this house
3. Professor \_\_\_\_\_ was the Herbology professor during Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts
4. The school of witchcraft and wizardry

sixth year

**13.** Traits of people in this house include courage and bravery

**15.** A witch or wizard born from one magical parent and one non-magical parent

**16.** At the end of its life this creature burns and is reborn from its ashes

**17.** Guards of Azkaban and they will suck out your soul

**20.** He is referred to as "He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named" or "You-Know-Who"

**22.** He is known as "The boy who lived"

**23.** His parents were tortured to insanity by Bellatrix Lestrange

**28.** A member of Ravenclaw house and she is the daughter of Xenophilius

**31.** The wand shop in Hogsmeade where witches and wizards can buy their wands

**33.** Traits of people in this house include cunning resourcefulness and ambition

**34.** He was chosen by Lord Voldemort to kill Dumbledore

**5.** A witch or wizard with ancestors of only witches and wizards

**7.** Professor \_\_\_\_\_ was the Charms professor during Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts

**8.** A witch or wizard born with magic from non-magical parents

**9.** Followers of Lord Voldemort

**10.** Non-magical person

**11.** The village of cottages and shops in the world of Harry Potter

**14.** This is cast from a spell that protects a witch or wizard from dementors

**17.** The headmaster of Hogwarts until Harry Potter's sixth year

**18.** He is the other member in the golden trio besides Harry and Hermione

**19.** This is the bank in Hogsmeade

**21.** An eagle represents this house

**24.** \_\_\_\_\_ the poltergeist (He was not shown in the films)

**25.** Professor \_\_\_\_\_ was the Transfiguration professor during Harry Potter's time at Hogwarts

**26.** This is where criminals are held and dementors guard them

**27.** One team consists of 7 players which are three chasers two beaters one keeper and one seeker

**29.** Professor \_\_\_\_\_ became the Potions professor at Hogwarts in Harry's sixth year after Professor Snape

**30.** Sister of Ron Weasley

**32.** She is known as "The brightest witch of her age"



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# ATOMIC HEART



AVAILABLE ON GAME PASS

A promotional image for the video game Wo Long: Fallen Dynasty. It features a central character, a warrior in traditional Chinese attire, seen from behind. The character has a topknot and is wearing a dark, heavy robe. A long, dark staff or sword is slung over their shoulder. The background is a dark, atmospheric landscape with a large, gnarled tree on the left and a bright, fiery red light source in the upper right. The overall tone is somber and epic. The title 'WO LONG' is prominently displayed in a stylized, metallic font across the middle, with 'FALLEN DYNASTY' written below it in a smaller, simpler font. Large, semi-transparent Chinese characters are overlaid on the character's back.

# WO LONG™

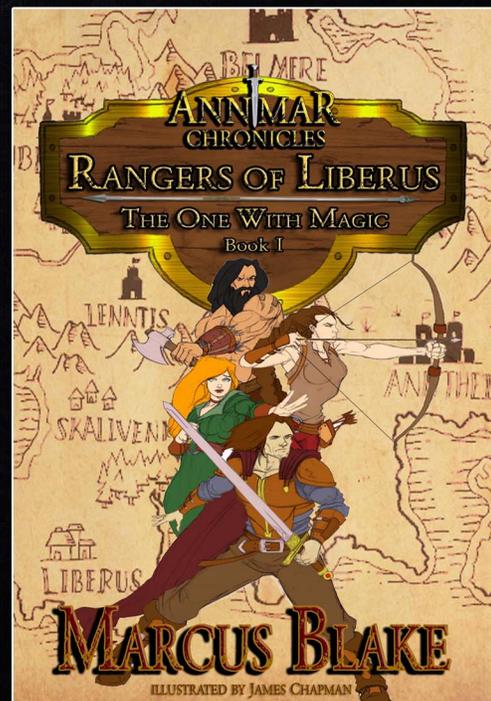
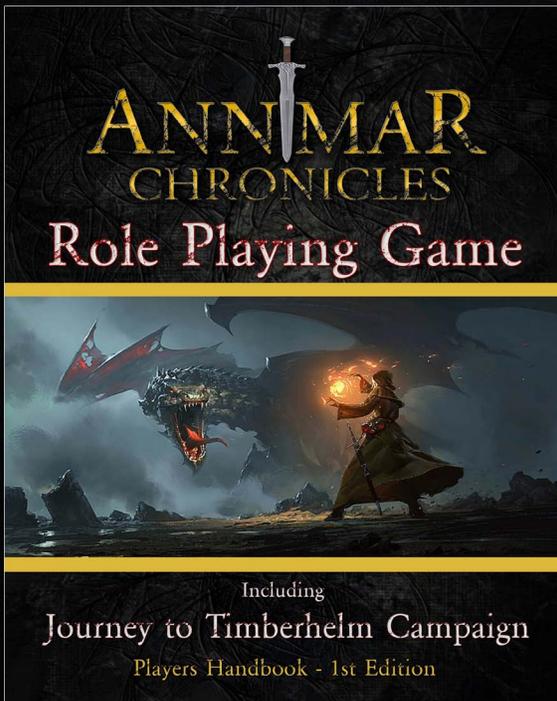
FALLEN DYNASTY

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