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MONTHLY



November / December 2022

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**"A Message From
Your Squad Leader!"
CALL OF DUTY:
WARM FARTS 2**
by Omri Uí Néill

2022 IN REVIEW



SPACEWAR!

The 1st Video Game and How It Started a Gaming Revolution

BY MARCUS BLAKE



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TOP 10 SHOWS OF 2022



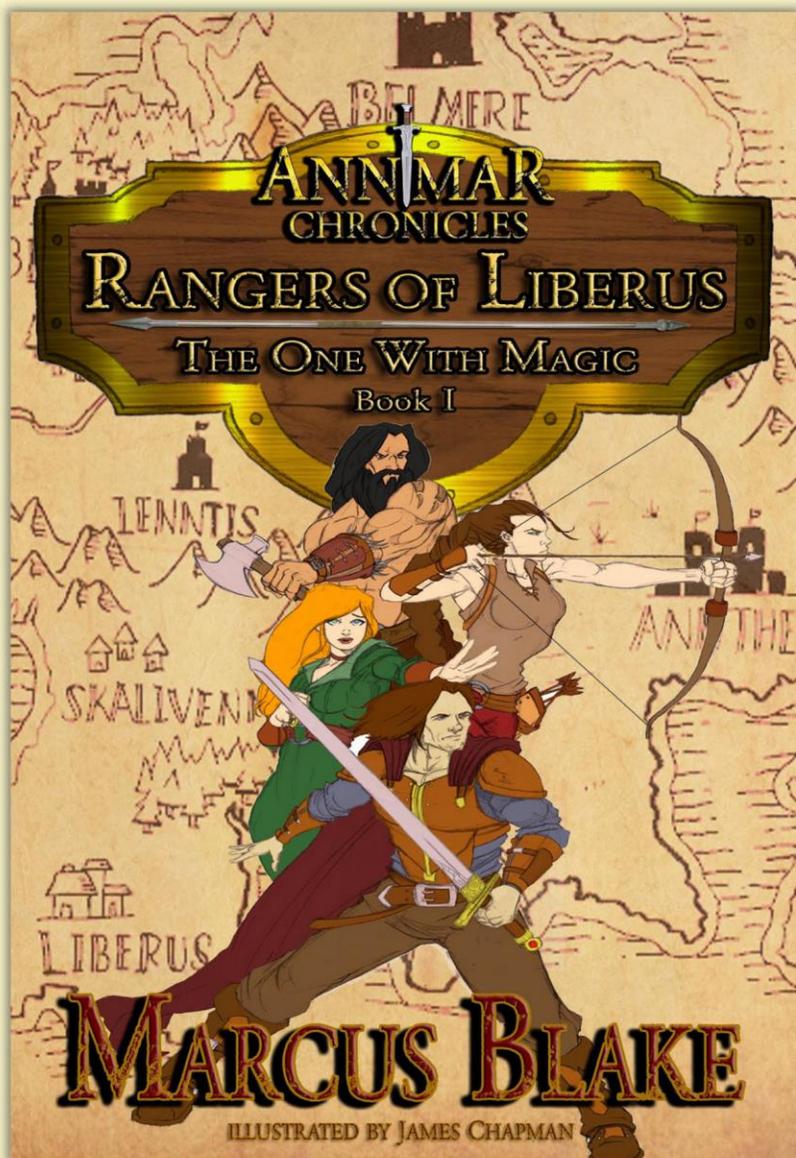
MOVIE OF THE YEAR
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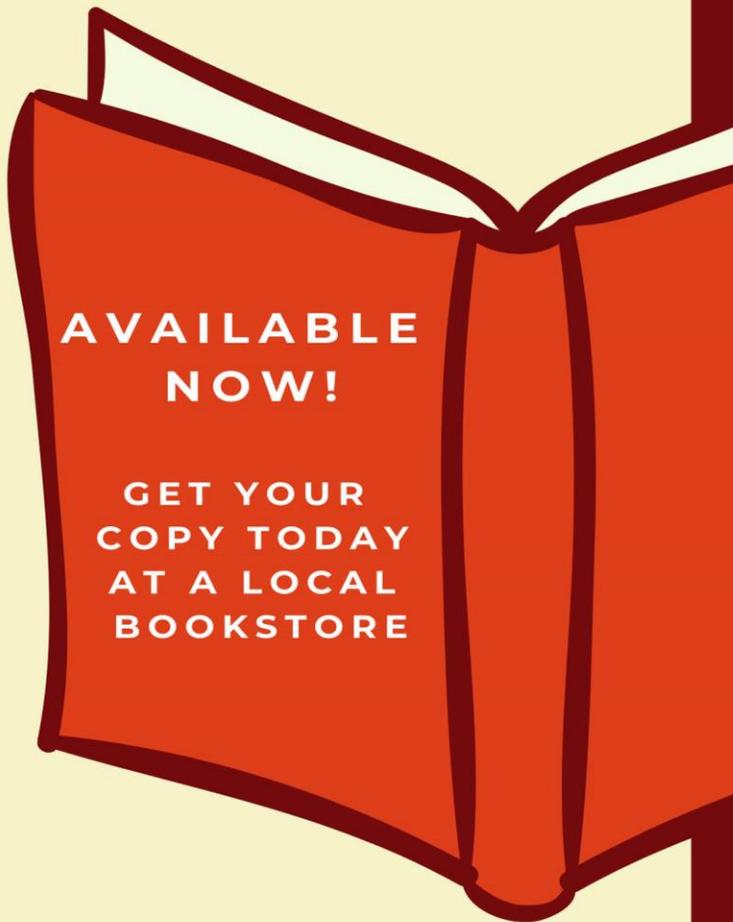
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SPACEWAR!

The 1st Video Game Ever Created and How it Started a Gaming Revolution

By Marcus Blake

As we close out 2022, it has been a year of some significant anniversaries. James Bond turned 60, Firefly turned 20, and it's been 45 years since the first Star Wars movie hit theaters. But there's one more significant anniversary. The very first video game was created in 1962! Believe it or not, the first video game did not come on a home console or in the form of an arcade. The game is called Spacewar! And it was created on a computer at MIT. There have been some significant inventions created at a university that would go on to change the world. In the last 60 years, two of the most significant inventions or the early code for the Microsoft operating system and the invention of Facebook. But for us nerds, for the gamers in all of us, there's one significant event that started a gaming Revolution. A bunch of students created a game that could be displayed on a computer monitor in the computer lab of one of the most prestigious schools in the world. Not only is it the first computer game, it's also the first video game that spawned many variations and allowed people to use an electronic interface to play a game.



It was a simple flying game of two spaceships trying to kill each other with simple controls that allowed users to fly, thrust, and shoot. When gamers jump on a console or their computer to play any kind of video game, the birth of this industry comes from students with such incredible programming skills that they created a game that can be operated on what now seems like an ancient computer. The game

was never a success commercially, it was only played in computer labs and universities across the United States, but the technology created the gaming industry that we know today. The story of how it happened is just as interesting as the original game itself.

In September 1961, a Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) PDP-1 minicomputer was installed in the "kludge room" on the 2nd floor of Building 26, the location of the MIT Electrical Engineering Department. The PDP-1 was to complement the older TX-0, and like it had a punched tape reader and writer, and additionally accepted input from a panel of switches and could output to a cathode-ray tube display. Over the summer before its arrival a group of students and university employees had been pondering ideas for programs that would demonstrate the new computer's capabilities in a compelling way. The three of them—Steve Russell, then an employee at Harvard University and a former research assistant at MIT; Martin Graetz, a research assistant and former student at MIT; and Wayne Wiitanen, a research assistant at Harvard and former employee and student at MIT—came up with the idea for *Spacewar!*.

They referred to their collaboration as the "Hingham Institute" as Graetz and Wiitanen were living in a tenement building on Hingham Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Steve Russell said, "We had this brand new PDP-1. Somebody had built some little pattern-generating programs which made interesting patterns like a kaleidoscope. Not a very good demonstration. Here was this display that could do all sorts of good things! So, we started talking about it, figuring what would be interesting displays. We decided that probably you could make a two-dimensional maneuvering sort of thing, and decided that naturally, the obvious thing to do was spaceships."

Russell, Graetz and Wiitanen developed the basic *Spacewar!* concept in the summer of 1961, in anticipation of the PDP-1 being installed. According to Russell, he had been

reading the *Lensman* series by E. E. "Doc" Smith and thought the stories would make a good basis for the program. He has been quoted as saying "His heroes had a strong tendency to get pursued by the villain across the galaxy and have to invent their way out of their problem while they were being pursued. That sort of action was the thing that suggested *Spacewar!*. He had some very glowing descriptions of spaceship encounters and space fleet maneuvers."^[5] Other influences cited by fellow programmer Martin Graetz include E. E. Smith's *Skylark* novels and Japanese pulp fiction *tokusatsu* movies.



It took Russell, with assistance from the other programmers—including Bob Saunders and Steve Piner (but not Wiitanen, who had been called up by the United States Army Reserve)—about 200 total hours to write the first version of *Spacewar!*, or around six weeks to develop the basic game. It was written in the PDP-1's assembly language. Russell had a program with a movable dot before the end of January 1962, and an early operational game with rotatable spaceships by February. The two spaceships were designed to evoke the curvy spaceship from Buck Rogers stories and the PGM-11 Redstone rocket. That early version also contained a randomly generated background star field, initially added by Russell

because a blank background made it difficult to tell the relative motion of the two spaceships at slow speeds. The programming community in the area, including the Hingham Institute and the TMRC, had developed what was later termed the "hacker ethic", whereby all programs were freely shared and modified by other programmers in a collaborative environment without concern for ownership or copyright, which led to a group effort to elaborate on Russell's initial *Spacewar!* game.

Beginning in mid-1962 and continuing over the next few years, members of the PDP-1 programming community at MIT, including Steven Russell and the other Hingham Institute members, began to spread out to other schools and employers such as Stanford University and DEC, and as they did they spread the game to other universities and institutions with a PDP-1 computer. As a result, *Spacewar!* was perhaps the first video game to be available outside a single research institute. Over the next decade, programmers at these other institutions began coding their own variants, including features such as allowing more ships and players at once, replacing the hyperspace feature with a cloaking device, space mines, and even a first-person perspective version played on two screens that simulates each pilot's view out of the cockpit. While it may be credited as the first video game to be played on a computer monitor, the game was never really seen outside of the universities that had the PDP-1's that it could be played on. But *Spacewar!*'s legacy is seen in the video games that it inspired and could eventually be played on a home console.



Spacewar! became extremely popular in the small programming community in the 1960s and was widely recreated on other minicomputer and mainframe computers of the time before migrating to early microcomputer systems in the 1970s. Just as it was during development, the game was public domain and the code was available to anyone with access to it or who contacted Russell; no attempt was made to sell it commercially, as the programming community was too small to support any commercial industry. It spread initially both by people bringing copies of the code to other installations as well as by programmers recreating the game with their own code.¹ Early installations

included the PDP-1 at Bolt, Beranek, & Newman, which also recreated the gamepads; an installation by Russell on a PDP-1 at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory of Stanford University in 1963; and the University of Minnesota, where MIT graduate Albert Kuhfield in 1967–68 recreated the game for the CDC 3100, and submitted a description to *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, published in 1971. The Stanford installation was so popular that in 1966 the researchers created a special "Spacewar mode" for time-sharing computer resources on their PDP-6 so that games could be played on it while research programs were also being run.

It took many years after the initial development of the game for it to spread to other universities; while there are early anecdotes of players and game variants at a handful of locations, primarily near MIT and Stanford, it was only after 1967 that computers hooked up to monitors or terminals capable of playing *Spacewar!* began to proliferate, allowing the game to reach a wider audience and influence later video game designers—by 1971, it is estimated that there were over 1000 computers with monitors, rather than a few dozen. It is around this time that the majority of the game variants were created for various computer systems, such as later PDP systems, and in 1972 the game was well known enough in the programming community that *Rolling Stone* sponsored what became known as the "Intergalactic *Spacewar!* Olympics." Before there were eSports, there was the "Intergalactic *Spacewar!* Olympics." The event was held on October 19, 1972, at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory using a variant of *Spacewar!* on a combined PDP-6/PDP-10 that supported five players, and was the first ever video game tournament, with an account published in the December 7, 1972 issue of *Rolling Stone*.

Spacewar! has a connection to Atari! It's true because before Nolan Bushnell created the company Atari, which just celebrated its 50th Anniversary, he created one of the first arcade games called *Computer Space*. He and his partner created the cabinets and sold them to

places like laundry mats and pizza parlors. *Computer Space* is a variation of *Spacewar!* and many gamers consider it *Spacewar! 2.0*, an improved version of the underground hit that spread throughout college campuses in the 1960s Bushnell discovered *Spacewar!* in 1964 when he was a student at Stanford University, one of the first colleges to get *Spacewar!* He knew that if he could put a coin slot on that game, he could make money. He did and eventually created the Atari Home Console, called the Atari 2600, which by 1978 would have a cartridge-based version of the game. In to *Computer Space*, *Spacewar!* had long-lasting effects, inspiring numerous other games, include *Orbitwar* (PLATO network computers, 1974) and *Galaxy Tome*, The arcade game *Asteroids* (1979), designer Ed Logg used elements from *Spacewar!*, namely the hyperspace button and the shape of the player's ship. Products as late as the 1990 computer game *Star Control* has drawn direct inspiration from *Spacewar!*

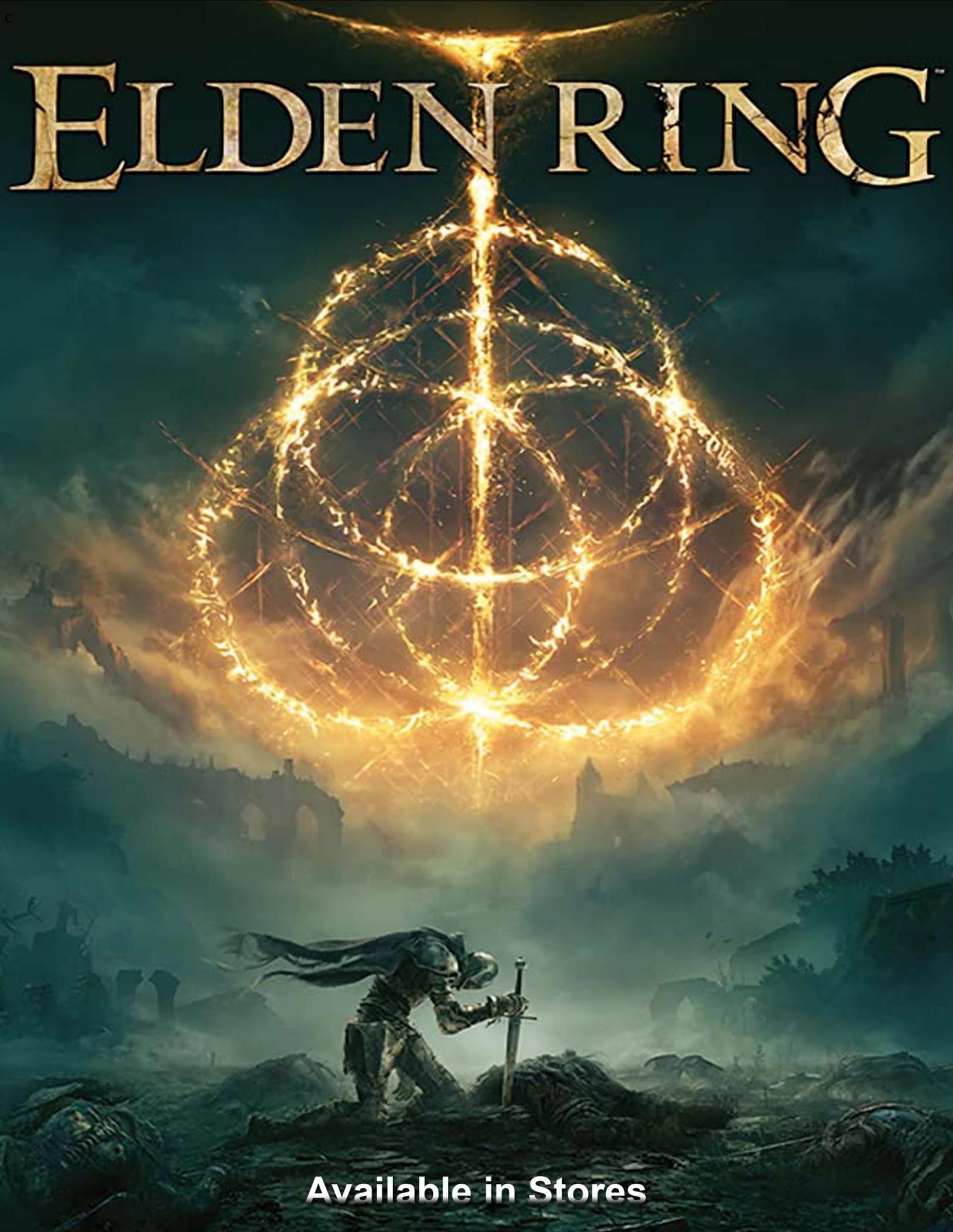
Everything has a beginning. It's easy to assume that video games started in the arcade, but it was engineering students would create the very first video game in a computer lab. *Spacewar!* is so simple, but the simplest games most often not, turn out to be the best games. Pac-Man and Galaga are simple games and we still play them today. Gamers may never get a chance to play *Spacewar!* the same way that those MIT students did back in 1962, of course, there's a simple version of *Spacewar!* on those Atari flashbacks that you can get for \$30 or \$40 and it's fun. Outside of maybe the National Video Game Museum in Frisco Texas, you won't find anything like this ever again. However, its Legacy is seen in every video game you play especially flying games. For me, anytime I'm playing X-Wing squadrons or Microsoft flight Simulator. or even one of the *Ace Combat* games, I know that it started with a simple computer game called *Spacewar!* The video game industry has come a long way in 60 years. The industry survived the video game Crash of 1983. We are on our 9th Generation of consoles if you can believe it. Most games are played online where gamers are networked together. Who knows where this industry might have ended up if it weren't for those engineering students who saw the potential of one of the earliest computers and a computer screen? Yes, computers have changed our lives for the last 80 years, we use them for education, we use them for business, we use them for other forms of entertainment, but it made it possible for us to play games where we don't need a physical board. Out of all the anniversaries we've had in 2022, perhaps the most significant is the 60th anniversary of the very first video game ever created. Just think about that next time you jump on your console or your PC and you're playing a video game whether by yourself or playing online with friends.

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TOP 10 MOVIES OF 2022

1 - Top Gun: Maverick

Review by Marcus Blake



It's finally here, the long-awaited sequel to the '80s cult favorite, Top Gun. If you're like me, you were probably apprehensive about a sequel to one of the greatest '80s movies ever. How could they capture the same old magic! Well, Top Gun Maverick is actually good. This is no joke, it's a worthy sequel that doesn't take away from the original film and in a lot of ways makes it better by hitting every emotional and nostalgic note that you would expect from a great sequel. I don't know if it's a better movie than the original Top Gun, but it's at least just as good and for different reasons. Personally, I never expected I would say that in a review because I do love the original film and very, very rarely can you make a sequel that's just as good if not better. And one of the reasons this sequel works as well as it does is because in the original film we saw Pete "Maverick" Mitchell at the beginning and height of his aviator career, young and cocky, and one of the best pilots in the Navy, but with the sequel, we see a legendary pilot at the tail end of his career wrestling with the ghosts of his past but still trying to be on top as one of the best pilots in the world. You get two very different pilots who are in a lot of ways the same. This makes for a great story and at the very heart of this sequel, you'll find a great love letter to aviators who have gone through the same thing. They have been the best when they were young and still trying to hold on to that edge while their career was winding down. They captured that beautifully in Maverick. More on that later.

After 30 plus years of service, we see Maverick still flying, but this time he is a test pilot, which seems very appropriate for somebody of his caliber. He is still a Captain even though he should be an Admiral as pointed

out by the Ed Harris character we have seen from the trailer who is about to ground him for doing what Maverick always does best, breaking the rules and pushing the envelope as an aviator. We find Maverick in his element as he is attempting to become the fastest pilot alive, a modern-day Chuck Yeager and then he has called back into service to train Top Gun pilots for the riskiest combat mission known to man because there's only one man who can truly do it. And as you find out there's still one man in the Navy that believes in Maverick and points out that the Navy still needs a pilot like Maverick. I'm not going to give away spoilers, but only talk about things that you already know. Yes, the man I'm talking about is "Iceman" who is like a three-star admiral and commander of the Pacific Fleet at this point. So, you basically get these two iconic pilots at the end of their careers, but still the old dogs who can teach those young pilots new tricks. And then to add to the emotional weight of the story, one of the pilots Maverick has to train is none other than Bradley Bradshaw, the son of Goose who has a very contentious relationship with Maverick as you can imagine. Nobody really believes that Maverick is the right man for the job except Iceman because he would know, he's the one pilot that knows Maverick's true potential and knows that Maverick really is the right man to train all of these young hotshots for the most dangerous mission that they've ever seen because he has the most experience, especially in combat. As I mentioned before, this story is about the main character wrestling with his past, especially with the weight of keeping the son of his best friend who tragically died, alive

So, what really makes this movie worth watching? Yes, it is one of the best action movies that you're going to see and all of the aerial footage goes above and beyond and exceeds what we saw in the first film. It makes it even better that they used practical effects and very little CGI. The way they filmed all the aerial shots with cameras in the actual planes brought the intensity level 10-fold and it will keep you on the edge of your seat. This is definitely the kind of movie you want to see in an IMAX theater. It was beautifully shot and although it might feel like a Mission Impossible movie, but with jets, you can't help but be amazed at how they shot this film. That alone would make this a fun movie to see in the theater, but there's so much going on with the story, especially the juxtaposition of Maverick from the first film to what he's dealing with in this film that makes this movie more emotional. It's not hard to connect to the characters. I think in a lot of ways I connected more to these characters than I did in the first film, especially Maverick because of all the weight that's on his

shoulders as a pilot. He's having to be a father figure to Bradley Bradshaw and reconcile the past where he feels responsible for his father's death even if it wasn't his fault. But you add more to that emotional weight with the type of mission they're going to have to fly. Now, I won't tell you what the mission is, you're just going to have to go see the movie and find out. I will say that it's very different from the dog fights we saw in the original movie. Warfare isn't exactly the same anymore, so they're training for how we would fight in the modern age, especially when planes are used to bomb enemy sites. I still like the original movie better in the sense that you knew who the enemy was and it was a straight-up old-school dogfight with a very clear enemy. One of my critiques of this film is you don't really know who the enemy is, but it also kind of makes sense who the enemy is and why America is at that war with them. That's all I can really say without spoiling anything. Whereas the original movie was very much an 80s Cold War film, this is very much modern warfare and part of what all the pilots are dealing with is knowing that they are kind of obsolete, that technology is so advanced that you can pilot an airplane without the pilot. However, the story addresses the fact that there's a reason we still need pilots who have good instincts and are trained in dogfighting, especially with an enemy that has Superior planes. Sometimes an aerial battle comes down to the man in the "box" and who has the better skills.

The advertisement features a background image of a person's hands writing on a notepad. A large red banner with white text says 'HOT DEAL'. To the right, a red circle contains the text 'AS LOW AS 1/2¢ PER WORD to 1¢ PER WORD'. Below the image, the text reads 'EDITING AND PROOFREADING SERVICE'. At the bottom, it provides contact information: 'CALL: 888-901-4665 TEXT: 469-708-9954'. A small image of a typewriter is also present. A list of services includes: 'WE HELP YOU EDIT' followed by 'Books and Novels', 'Academic Papers', 'Business Documents', and 'News Articles and Reviews'.

Tom Cruise did an amazing job! I actually liked his performance as Maverick better in this film because he does show a character with much more experience and also wrestling with his past as well as knowing that the end is in sight as a pilot. He's very much aware that this is probably his last mission and plays the role of the old pilot who knows more than the young pilots he's training. He's essentially the "Viper" character from the original movie. Really, the entire cast was great. Glen

Powell did an amazing job playing in modern-day version of Iceman, the cocky pilot who knows he's the best. And for those of you who might miss Charlie as the love interest for Maverick from the first film, you will quickly forget her with Jennifer Connelly's performance as Penny Benjamin. It's not really a spoiler thanks to imdb.com, but she is playing that Penny Benjamin that's mentioned in the first movie, the admiral's daughter. She plays a character that clearly has a long history of an on and off again relationship with Maverick. You can say that she's Maverick's true love and somehow, they always come back to each other. Jennifer Connelly was great and in some ways better than Kelly McGillis. It's very easy to connect with her as the love interest and nothing against Kelly McGillis, she was great in Top Gun even if it wasn't her best movie... I still think Witness is her best movie. But the performances truly drive the emotional part of this story and make this a film much more than just a great action movie with jets. However, if there is one performance, one scene that makes this film worth it, it is the reunion of Val Kilmer and Tom Cruise playing Maverick and Iceman in a scene together. Their scene is even more emotional knowing that Val Kilmer lost his voice due to throat cancer and I have to commend the writers for how they cleverly dealt with that issue. But everything that we love about Val Kilmer as an actor is all in that scene. If it doesn't bring you to tears, then you have no connection to the original movie and you're probably not a Val Kilmer fan even though you should be.

Sometimes I hate being a critic, but I have to be one with this film even though I loved it. Even though it's a movie that you will want to see a few times in the theater, it isn't perfect. Beyond all the tugs at those emotional strings, you will to the original Top Gun movie, there's still some problems with it. Are they enough to make you not watch the movie, hell no, go buy your tickets now! But here are some of the things that I would have loved to have seen from this movie. I always talk about pacing in movies and sometimes movies can either be too long or not long enough. This is one of those times where I feel like an extra 15 or 20 minutes would have made this movie perfect. Here's why. Because it's such a great action movie with all of the aerial footage, especially the training sessions at Top Gun in the first half of the movie, the film moves so fast that sometimes it's hard to catch your breath. Yes, all of these scenes are great, but this sequel is over 30 years removed from the original that we have to get to know Maverick again. What happened with his career over 30 years. Yes, it's brilliant to have him be a test pilot at the beginning of the movie and see where he's ended up, but we really don't know anything of his career except for some very quick conversations with Penny Benjamin. We also get a very brief description of their history as well as how Maverick has watched Bradley

Bradshaw while trying to direct his career. Between all the action scenes we get these little glimpses where I feel like, if the film would have been a little bit longer, we would have gotten more story and it would've slowed everything down so that the movie doesn't feel so rushed because of the action. In the first half of the movie, it feels like one big action movie with some quick comedic scenes between these characters you're only getting to know again. It isn't until the scene between Iceman and Maverick that the movie slows down before its climax with the final mission. That's where that extra time in the movie could have helped because pouring over the history of these characters and how they've ended up at this point is just as important as all of the action. But I feel like it's that one scene that finally slows the movie down to where you aren't so rushed and when you get to the end of the film with Maverick and Rooster having to work together to complete the mission, well, it makes the emotional connection between these characters much more vibrant. I loved all the action, but I don't want to watch a Top Gun movie that really just feels like a Mission Impossible movie with jets and unfortunately that's kind of what the first half did. I'm not saying it's bad, I'm just saying they could have done a better job to make this movie perfect.

My other major critique and it's kind of minor, but it really goes into my nostalgia for the original film, it's the soundtrack. I think for people who grew up with the original film and it's soundtrack will find it hard to disagree with me. Nothing against Lady Gaga and her *Hold My Hand* song that seems to be the anthem for *Top Gun: Maverick*, but the original soundtrack was so much better and her song doesn't hold a candle to *You've Lost That Loving Feeling*... I'm sorry, but it just doesn't. The soundtrack is okay and of course, having a nice nostalgic moment where Bradley Bradshaw is playing Great Balls of Fire in a Bar is cool, but let's be honest, we aren't going to remember the soundtrack to this movie as much as we will with the original film 30 years from now. There's just too many iconic songs from the original movie that could have been played again in the sequel, after all, the movie starts off with Danger Zone just like in the original and it works. So, with that said, we can't have a beach scene with the song, *Playing with the Boys*. You can't put *You've Lost That Loving Feeling* in this movie and have modern-day pilots sing it just like pilots from the '80s, you're telling me that it still wouldn't work... Nonsense! Maybe these are all just minor critiques, but I do feel like they're important enough that would have helped make the movie perfect.

The bottom line, Top Gun Maverick is a masterpiece of a sequel... It may not be as good as the original, but I think it's just as good and with a great story. The action in this movie does improve from the original because technology has allowed filmmakers to do more than they could have in the 80s with the aerial footage.

It's a hell of a ride that should be seen in an IMAX theater to get the best experience of this film, but because there are so many emotional connections to the original film with these characters, it makes it much more than just an action movie. I think its more than just a summer blockbuster. As I said before, it's a great love letter to aviators even if the aerial footage is over the top and can't really be done... That's not the point! It's still a fun movie and will remind you why we still love Pete "Maverick" Mitchell! This movie reminds us why he is still the best fictional pilot on the big screen. He's the old dog that we still love and plays a great father figure to the son of his best friend. There's a lot of emotional parts to this movie that can bring you to tears if you love the original film. But for the newcomers, it's just a fun movie and it's not so over the top and silly that it makes you feel like you're watching a Fast and the Furious movie with jets and you just roll your eyes at the absurdity. It's the perfect sequel to a movie that probably didn't need one, but it works in every possible way and brings the story of Top Gun full circle. No, I won't give it a perfect 10, but this movie is so good that I can't be over-critical because I have to admit, I loved it and can't wait to see it again. And I bet once you see it, you'll agree with me. *Top Gun: Maverick* is a winner and it was worth the wait despite two years of delays. Maybe that's the true success of this movie that despite all the delays, it's still one of the best movies that you should see in a movie theater. And yes, *Top Gun: Maverick* is one of the best sequels ever made right up there with, dare I say, *The Empire Strikes Back!*

2 – Everything, Everywhere All at Once

Review by Chloe James



It's certain that everyone (especially myself) gets into that depressing existential mood, and starts having the thought: what could my potential have been if things were just a little different? If I had only made a different choice

that one time, would my life be better now? Am I living out my darkest timeline, or is this just one of countless mundane possibilities for who I could have been? I'm probably opening with way too heavy of a thought right of the bat, but the way the world's been lately, who could blame some of us for musing about the possibility for other versions of ourselves, of reality itself?

Thankfully, I lightly touched upon my fascination with time-travel stories in my recent review for *The Adam Project*. After all, time travel and multi-verse tropes go hand in hand—often intersecting one another depending on how meddlesome with the past some time travelers are. But while time travel has been thoroughly explored in fiction for over a century now, multiverse stories are just now beginning to scratch the surface of possibilities for what they can achieve. I completely understand why. As I've said before, time travel is tricky to write because of the very easy possibilities for plot holes being created by not following your own rules you set in place. But time travel usually just explores a singular timeline, maybe the more adventurous plots would venture into a second or third timeline being created as a result of irresponsible said time travelers are. Multiverse stories however...well not only do they have their own self-contained rules they must follow, but now must be faced with the responsibility of endless possibilities before them. By presenting us with multiple realities, we the audience will naturally react as "Cool, I expect my mind to be blown, my concept of existence challenged, my imagination expanded."

Over the past decade or so, there's been more multiverse media up to the task. Absolute props to both *Spider-Man: Into the Spiderverse* and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* for giving us wonderful cross-reality stories while still being great superhero films. (Though something tells me this is just a tiny taste of the awesomeness we'll see in *Multiverse of Madness*.) I also want to give a special shout out to the series *Community* for giving us one of the best explorations of multiple timelines in the episode "Remedial Chaos Theory" — no small task in a less-than half hour segment. And of course, animated series such as *Futurama*, *Space Dandy*, and even *Rick and Morty* have been triumphing the genre long before most live action would dare.

I'm kind of awestruck that I didn't have to wait for *Multiverse of Madness* to be released to watch the most ambitious multiverse film to date. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is one of those films that kind of came out of nowhere for me, but is absolutely unforgettable. Starring Michelle Yeoh as Evelyn Wang, a middle aged Chinese immigrant laundromat owner, who is struggling to get her taxes filed. At the same time she has to deal with her rocky relationship with her lesbian daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu), her judgmental elderly father (James Hong) visiting from China, and her strained marriage

with her agreeable husband Raymond (Ke Huy Quan.) Things start getting a little weird when a Waymond from another universe possesses this universe's Waymond at the IRS office, and tells Evelyn she may be the only one who can save reality itself. I really don't want to divulge into too many details about the plot, but it involves multi-universe jumping in all of it's glory.

I sorely regret not having seen any of director duo's Daniel Scheinert and Dan Kwan's (collectively known as "Daniels") films. Their directing style hearkens back to so many of my favorites. The vivid imagination of the Wachowskis, the clever and fast paced cuts of Edgar Wright, the quiet inner character struggles of Ang Lee, the tightly choreographed fight scenes of John Woo, and some hilariously irrelevant humor of James Gunn. I realize that's quite a lot to compare a single film to, and it's already sounding way overhyped, but these were my genuine thoughts while watching it.

Usually my favorite films have an impressive ensemble cast, and this one is no exception. I of course expected Michelle Yeoh to do a brilliant job, as she always does, and am especially happy she got a role that allowed her to show off a bit of her comedic acting chops. My favorite surprise was the triumphant return of Ke Huy Quan, whom many of us grew up knowing him as "Short Round" from *Temple of Doom* and "Data" from *The Goonies*. In his long absence from western media, he learned quite a lot of new acting and martial arts tricks, while maintaining the charm we all love him for. It's not been mentioned it yet, but Jamie Lee Curtis also plays a prominent role in the film as Deidre Beaubeidra, the staunch IRS agent in charge of Evelyn's case. I can't speak on her behalf, but Curtis looks like she is having the time of her life while making this film, reminding us of how fun of an actress she is to watch when she's not being chased after by a psycho killer.



The reason I'm calling *Everything Everywhere All at Once* one of the best and most ambitious multiverse films to date is the amount of sheer possibilities it not only hints at, but actually shows us. I think many of this genre don't quite want to go on the level this film did, not only for budgetary purposes, but for fear of confusing their audience and compromising the plot. I get it. Writing a multiverse film is

probably the creative equivalent to herding cats. Yet the Daniels were just crazy enough to pull it off—while not alienating those of us in the audience who didn't study chaos theory in grad school. Don't get me wrong, this movie is still intelligent, and presents us with a fairly well thought out science fiction plot. But instead of being over saturated with pretension like it so easily could have, *Everything* invites as many of us as it possibly could to enjoy it, to find our own meaning. And its meaning is one of its most beautiful attributes. Besides being a science fiction, martial arts, comedy, and fantasy, *Everything* is at it's core a family drama. I found myself once again balling in the theater because of a Michelle Yeoh film.

The one thing I regret about *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is that after seeing it, I'm going to be expecting a lot from *Marvel's Multiverse of Madness* plot arc in the years to come. After all, if this independent film that came out of nowhere can master the genre, Marvel should be able to as well. I expect myself in the meantime to watch *Everything* again and again, as there will probably be tiny details that will take me years to discover. And hopefully, because of this film, I can find myself a little less nihilistic when that existential feeling starts possessing me.

#3 - The Batman Review by Marcus Blake



"The Batman is an exhilarating movie that takes the dark knight back to a noir detective style of storytelling like the comics old and puts it in a modern setting. With breathtaking visuals, it will slowly draw you in and keep you on the edge of your seat. But the film is too long and can't hold onto the narrative as in previous Batman films, and just doesn't measure up to previous stories of the iconic superhero"

Batman is such an iconic superhero that it's hard to make a great movie. We've had so many different versions of Batman through

movies and even glimpses of him in TV shows that what we consider the best Batman will vary. But because DC Comics have multiple universes or different earths, we get to see different versions of Batman and because of that maybe it's not about finding the best Batman, but as an audience finding what we like about each version. In the latest Batman movie starring Robert Pattinson as the Dark Knight there is certainly a lot to like about this person, but I won't go as far as to say that it's the best for my personal favorite. However, what impressed me about this movie more than anything is that it takes Batman back to his detective roots by giving us an old-school noir theme that we haven't even seen in the comics for many years. Yes, Batman is a superhero, but at his core, he is the ultimate detective using his superior knowledge and investigative skills to defeat villains and that is what Matt Reeves the Batman reminds us as fans. That is what I most enjoyed about this film even if it isn't my favorite version.

What makes this film great is that it doesn't rely on ridiculous superpowers for Batman to defeat any villain. Much like the Christopher Nolan movies, we see that Batman is still human and it's his fighting skills and custom weapons that almost makes him invincible, but not quite. Like I said he is at his very core a detective so Batman movies don't feel so much like a superhero movie as they do feel like a true-crime thriller. That's what this movie gives us as Batman is trying to figure out who is killing politicians and ultimately meets the Riddler. Robin Pattinson makes a great Batman, he is dark and brooding and full of rage. We see Batman in year two of what he refers to as the Gotham Project. He's relatively new to being Batman and still doesn't know if he's making a difference. And since it's basically the beginning of Batman in Gotham City, we also get introduced to some of Batman's main villains like the penguin and the main antagonist, The Riddler. For those who were worried about the casting, the casting is one of the strongest points of *The Batman*. Robert Pattinson is great as Batman. Nobody should judge his performance in the *Twilight* movies and think that he couldn't be a good Batman because all of the darkness and the rage that Batman carries with him is there in his performance. Colin Farrell does a pretty good job as the Penguin and he is for the most part unrecognizable. He plays the part as a waddling street thug that serves as the right-hand man to the mob. And I have to give credit where it's due to Zoe Kravitz, who plays a great Selena Kyle. She is sexy and fierce and also has the vulnerability that comes with the character and makes her likable even though she's a criminal. But if there is one standout performance in this movie, it is Paul Dano who plays the Riddler. He does not play the character as some criminal buffoon much like Jim Carrey did in Joel Schumacher movies. He is dark and creepy,

with a sick sense of humor that's easily seen in his riddles.

We've never really gotten a true adaptation of the Riddler that we have seen in the comics and I think for the first time we've gotten that with Paul Dano's performance. The Riddler is not a cheesy character and shouldn't be played like that. He's a psychopath more in line with Hannibal Lecter, who taunts his prey and sends them on a wild goose chase is just for sport. And that's exactly the kind of Riddler, you need in this kind of Batman movie where it feels more like an old-school noir detective film. The style of this film is fantastic and it provides the right kind of balance between a good detective story and a true comic book story. If there's a nexus between Christopher Nolan's Batman movies and Tim Burton's vision of Batman then it's this movie and it works brilliantly. A Batman story should always be dark because that's the essence of the character. A true Batman story takes place in the scourge or underbelly of society. Also, what really makes this movie stand out is you're seeing how Batman is introduced to all of these villains without having to do a whole new origin story for Batman which we've seen time and time again. I appreciate *Batman Begins*, it probably is the ultimate origin story of Bruce Wayne and Batman, but we don't need to rehash that. Having a story take place where you're in year two as Batman protecting Gotham is a perfect place to start and Robin Pattinson pulls it off nicely as a young man full of rage still trying to figure out how to be Batman and be the knight in shining armor so to speak that Gotham needs. I love the style of this film and I love the casting, but even with all that, it still isn't the best Batman movie in my opinion. It has a lot going for it, but it also isn't as good as previous Batman films.



This is what really keeps *The Batman* from being the best Batman movie ever made. First, it's too long. We don't need a 3-hour Batman movie. If you wanted to make a series about how Batman was getting started, I'm all for that. A serialized Batman story is always good and the Animated Series back in the early '90s proves that. I completely understand that if you're going to have an old-school noir theme for the film that has a slow

burn which, slowly brings the audience into the story, it can work, but if it takes you too long to get to the action and your audience gets bored. The action doesn't really start picking up until about halfway into the movie. We get glimpses of Batman in the first half, but it's like this slow walk up to the stage where all the action is going to happen. The last half of the movie is great, but it took too long to get to the parts of the movie that made it great. I honestly feel this movie could have been told in 150 minutes. As good as Robert Pattinson is playing Batman, he doesn't play a good Bruce Wayne. The best thing about the character is the duality of Batman and Bruce Wayne. As the Dark Knight he has to be fearless and full of rage to take on criminals. But when he's Bruce Wayne he has to be the Playboy Billionaire who doesn't really understand the company he owns and parties with supermodels.

Or he can be a shrewd businessman. Bruce Wayne has to be the opposite of Batman so people can't figure out his alter ego. Robert Pattinson didn't display any of that. He played Bruce Wayne as if he was some depressed teenager exploring the goth scene. I'm not saying that Robert Pattinson can't play the right Bruce Wayne, but I do question the filmmakers if their instinct is to have a brooding and depressed Bruce Wayne that seems devoid of all emotion, you know like a teenager that's hates everything in life. I don't know if he's the perfect actor to play Batman and Bruce Wayne, maybe he is, but the filmmakers obviously didn't allow him to reach his full potential with the character. Another criticism is the fact that Batman seems way too chummy with everybody and doesn't mind letting people see him. That's not the character at all, he lives in the shadows. He moves like a bat. He's not going to show up and knock on the door of a mob-owned club dressed as Batman asking the doorman if he knows who he is. If Batman wants to get into a building, he's usually breaking into it without people knowing he's been there. That was the one thing the Christopher Nolan movies got right and maybe it's because they explored the backstory of how Bruce was instructed by the League of Shadows. If you're Batman, the purpose of a true warrior is to not be seen...like a bat, you live in the shadows.

Despite my criticisms, this version of Batman is good and worth seeing. It's a version that we have not seen on the big screen and only really read in comics. But I don't think this is the best version of Batman. Having the noir feel in the film is great and all, but the filmmakers don't truly understand that your lead actor not only has to be good playing Batman but also a believable Bruce Wayne. Christopher Nolan and Tim Burton both understood that when creating their own version of Batman. As good as Robin Pattinson is as Batman, he is outshined by Paul Dano as the Riddler, especially in the end. Paul Dano's performance as the Riddler is what makes this film better than it should be. He is brilliant. He gives us a version of The Riddler

that we have never seen before and makes this iconic villain even scarier than the Joker. I don't know if I would recommend seeing the movie theater because 3 hours is a long time to watch a Batman movie, but it definitely should be watched more than once when it hits HBO Max. It is worth the price of a movie ticket, but there's a slow burn to the first half of the movie before the action picks up and this is where you should have a comfortable if you do see it in the theater. Matt Reeves and Robert Pattinson craft a great version of The Batman and bring the character back to its detective roots. They make us see that Batman is not so much a superhero compared to the rest of the Justice League, but the world's greatest detective who uses his intellect to take down villains. But if this film has one more thing going for it, then it's the action sequences, which are fantastic and as good as any other Batman movie. While the Christopher Nolan Batman movies didn't feel like comic book movies, Matt Reeves takes a modern version of Batman and makes him a true comic book character in film, much like Tim Burton did in 1989 and that I can definitely get behind, even if this isn't my favorite Batman film. However, it is a good film and certainly worth seeing even if this wouldn't be the perfect Batman for the Justice League. I always thought Ben Affleck got a bad rap because he played not only a great Bruce Wayne, but a good Batman that can hold his own with the rest of the Justice League. However, if you want to see Batman as the lone avenger watching over the city that he loves, then this is one of the best Batman films ever made and I will certainly watch it again. You'll probably do the same.

4 – The Whale Review by Alex Moore



Where do I begin? I guess it would be five years ago, when I saw “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri.” At the time, it was the best movie of the year (in my opinion) and I was fairly confident it would take home the award for Best Picture... at least at the Academy Awards. I was wrong. Since then, I

have watched the Oscars with pretty mixed feelings, as many of us do, I am sure. At some point, you realize that your favorite and what you think will win do not always line up. Furthermore, it is possible to say, “I liked this one the most, but THIS one is probably the best.” However, the past couple of years have been less than thrilling. COVID made the process of watching all the big award bait movie pretty challenging and the overall quality of the movies has not been what it was prior to everything shutting down. However, this year, I believe we have turned a corner.

Over the past month or so, I have seen a lot of films and although some of them have not been great, many of them have, at least, been very good and a handful of them, across multiple genres, have been excellent. I raved about “The Menu” not long ago and would have been fairly content had I not seen anything better before the year wrapped up, but much to my pleasant chagrin, that turned out not to be the case.



When was the last time any of you remember watching Brendan Fraser in anything noteworthy on the big screen? For me, it had been quite some time ago and in the more recent years, the coverage of this man had become slightly mixed and somewhat negative, based purely on his so-called physical appearance. I would challenge you to consider the world in which an actor lives, though, and come up with any profession where one's physical looks are scrutinized any more closely. Perhaps, we judge too harshly or unfairly, at times, but the upside for those in the industry who land it big far outweigh the shortcomings.

When I first heard word about “The Whale,” rumors had already begun about Fraser's acting performance and I was intrigued. Like most other occasions, I walked into the theater with minimal expectations. Be prepared for a major shock to the system shortly after the lights fade and the film has begun. However, beyond the opening moments of intense panic and discomfort, the story settles down, slowly, like the racing of a heartbeat cooling down after an exercise routine. From there, the story is thin, by design, though not weak, and the depth of all the characters involved dig and dig until you almost journey toward the center of the earth.

Charlie is a stay-at-home English/literary professor. Shamed by his current physical condition, he keeps his camera turned off to his students and merely teaches them through an audio feed. When he is not grading papers via email connection, he is struggling to stand up or sit down so that he can eat large amounts of food and endure the most basic activities of human life. Outside the dark and dreary home, Charlie has a nurse (who is also an old friend of his), named Liz, played by Hong Chau (“The Menu”). She visits him routinely and perpetually instructs him to get to a hospital as soon as he can or he will die very soon. Charlie has no wish to follow her instructions and seems unable and/or unwilling to make any changes at this point in time. Joining Charlie for these apparent final days are: Ellie, played by Sadie Sink (“Dear Zoe”) and Thomas, played by Ty Simpkins (“Where's Rose”). Ellie is the long-lost daughter of Charlie, who agrees to spend time with him if he will “help” her with her homework and Thomas is an awkward missionary, attempting to “save” Charlie before he bites the dust. Ellie's Mom makes a brief appearance later on and there is also a pizza delivery man who stops by most days to drop off food.

Each character has a purpose and a motive for another, whether it is perceived to be good or bad. I cannot think of too many other movies where I enjoyed the dialogue as much as I did in this one. Nothing felt forced or contrived for the sake of the story and it was all very genuine and life-like. You might imagine having very similar conversations at some stage of your own life and the process is wonderful to see and hear unfold, throughout. Sooner or later, the details in the exchanges begin to connect to each other and the timing of whether you fully understand what the pay-offs are do not seem to matter to the full extent of the story. To me, it all made sense and SHOULD make sense to most viewers.

I think it is important to address the elephant in the room: fatphobia. Almost immediately after I saw “The Whale,” I was seeing comments from other critics, claiming this story is dehumanizing to fat people and is perpetuating anti-fat stereotypes. Firstly, Fraser is “fat.” He still had to put on a body suit and add makeup to look like he was 600 pounds, but what else was there to do, unless the movie were to simply not be made? 15 years ago, I watched a documentary, entitled “Super Size Me.” The purpose was to address the obvious obesity problem in the United States and figure out who was to blame. Somewhere between the release of that film and now, society decided it was wrong to address this issue any further and better to subscribe to the new philosophy of “healthy at any weight.” I am pro-choice. So I would never presume to tell others what to do and I would never advise the government to coerce people into specific lifestyle choices, but to say nothing and pretend that there is nothing wrong is also a disservice, in my estimation.

Darren Aronofsky has had some recent low points as a filmmaker, but in my view he has risen to new heights; maybe even greater than when "Black Swan" was released. As a person who was once very overweight, but has dropped to nearly "normal" weight, I found nothing offensive about this story or any of the portrayals in it. Sure, there are some jabs taken at Charlie concerning his physical condition, but that is nothing short of reality, is it? I can STILL enjoy the movie for everything that it is, a masterful piece of moviemaking and even laugh at some of the jokes (within the context of the story), but still sympathize with everyone and, in some cases, empathize, as well. This is what real life is all about. We know that there are objectives which are black and white, but that there are a million shades of grey, in between. This is a very dark, grey movie and I am happy to announce that it is my choice for the best picture of 2022, sink or swim. Brendan Fraser deserves all of the accolades which are sure to come his way and I look forward to hearing what he has to say in the aftermath. Hong Chau should not be overlooked, either. Credit should be noted for the screenplay and the makeup effects, as well. Do NOT miss this movie if you can help it.

#5 - Violent Night

Review by Marcus Blake



What if John McClane from Die Hard was Santa Claus? Seriously, what if John McClain became Santa Claus and had to save the day from criminals who were taking people hostage? It's not that far-fetched in the world of fiction and that's essentially what you have with the movie *Violent Night*. David Harbour who plays Santa Claus and is delivering presents on Christmas Eve, essentially becomes John McClane and saves a family from ruthless terrorists. Santa Claus shows that he is not a pushover and is pretty much a badass. I can't describe this movie any other way except to say that it's Die Hard, but with Santa Claus, and you know what, that's okay because this movie was glorious. It's not going to win an Academy Award, but it is a fun Christmas movie where

Santa Claus kick some ass. In fact, I already see a Christmas Eve double feature with Die Hard and Violent Night, that sounds like a great Christmas Eve movie fest.

Santa Claus is a bit of a drunkard in this film. He stops off to have a few pints as he's delivering presents when he lands at a rich family's compound and gets caught up in a kidnapper's plot to steal money from the family. Santa has to spring into action and save the little girl who still believes in him and kill the bad guys. Yes, that's essentially the plot. Simple and a bit absurd, but a lot of fun. It almost felt like watching Hot Fuzz lampooning action Christmas movies. I feel like this film is kind of Lampooning Die Hard as a Christmas movie, but so what if it works! And honestly, who doesn't want to see Santa Claus kick some ass. David Harbour was brilliant at Santa Claus and if you were disappointed in his take on Hellboy then you won't be disappointed with his take on a violent Santa Claus. In a lot of ways, I feel like this is the role he was meant to play when it comes to a Christmas movie. I mean screw doing some cheeky Christmas Hallmark movie where the plot is so implausible with everybody falling in love and everything working out when you can play a Santa Claus version of John McClain and save a nice family from terrorists. The leader of the terrorists is played by John Leguizamo who channeled the worst person in the world to play the villain, Steven Seagal. Is he as good as Alan Rickman who played Hans Gruber, no, but that doesn't matter he's good in his own right and he makes it work. He makes a good villain. The movie is funny. You get the right amount of action and comedy. The satire and the one-liners work on all levels. It's just a fun movie that doesn't have to be taken too seriously unlike other Christmas movies. Did I enjoy it, absolutely and I highly recommend it.

I really don't have any complaints about the movie because it knows what it is. It's just a violent action movie where Santa Claus Saves the Day and not in the traditional way of delivering presents to every child. Santa Claus gets beat up, he kills the bad guys. He's got great one-liners, what else do you need? The performances by everybody were great including Beverly D'Angelo who played the patriarch of the rich family. Where she's nice and loving in National Lampoon's A Christmas Story, she's a bitch in this one but she is so funny as an actress that she just makes it work. You get a little bit of Santa Claus's backstory of how this particular guy became Santa Claus 1100 years prior. While I will not spoil it, it was an interesting take on the legend of Santa Claus, and I did want to know more than just a few scenes explaining who he was. That's probably my biggest complaint, you create this story of how people come along and become Santa Claus or how they're chosen, and you don't really explain enough. Knowing more of the mythology would have been good, but it's a minor complaint when it comes to the comedic genius of the movie. They have Santa Claus

basically being John McClain from Die Hard it's brilliant. To show that he is not Jolly Old Saint Nick and to show how he drinks and complains about children, it's funny. The movie doesn't take itself seriously, this is not Miracle on 34th Street and that's why it's a good movie.

If they had tried to make some dark dramatic movie that shows the truth of humanity, then the story would have been wasted. For example, if Michael Mann had made this movie, it would have been terrible. You don't need a fun action movie about Christmas that has some social message about consumerism and how people don't appreciate the meaning of Christmas anymore. The story is a perfect satire and the cast does a wonderful job portraying characters that you really just despise. And nothing against other portrayals of Santa Claus who are more wholesome and family-oriented. This is not that Santa Claus. He is kind of a terrible Santa Claus. Buddy's the type of Santa Claus you would love to have a beer and complain about life with. No, it won't win an award, but it will entertain you and that's all we really need during Christmas. What other movies have some great social message, this movie gives us the Santa Claus we really want the drinks too much and kills all the bad guys while still delivering all the presents on Christmas Eve. I can't wait to watch it again and I think you'll feel the same way.

#6 - The Banshees of Inisherin

Review by Marcus Blake



A dark Irish comedy is always full of laughs, whether you get the humor or not. It's the best kind of humor because even in tragedy, you can find humor to lighten the mood. The Banshees of Inisherin is the perfect dark Irish comedy. And it's in this film that Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell are at their best. Directed by Martin McDonagh, who directed the two Irish stars in a film called *In Bruges* makes another great film with Gleeson and Farrell. Like many of his stories, there's a

lot of emotional sensibilities and humor lying beneath the film's main theme of tragedy. The characters are very flawed and insecure, which truly shows their humanity, but it shows their beauty. The story is about two friends who have the same routine every day in a small Irish village until one day one of the friends decides he's wasting his life and doesn't like the man who used to be his best friend. This shakes up the small Irish village and breaks up the routine and monotony. The friend who is being shunned and played by Colin Farrell can't understand why he's being shunned so ensues, one tragic circumstance after another until the main characters come to terms with who they really are.



On the surface, this film seems very light-hearted, but beneath the surface, we see the tragic sensibilities of the main characters where one wants more out of life than the other doesn't. They are bound to each other through friendship and in the end, realize that their connection will never change. What really makes this film endearing is the comedy behind the two friends fighting and the one who is doing the shunning while getting the entire village in a tizzy. Mixing the story with a little Irish folklore about spiritual signs and death and you've got a great dark comedy. Everybody is fantastic in the film, but it is Brendan Gleason and Colin Farrell, who truly make this film worth watching. As I watched the film, I swear, the conversation between the two main characters are the same conversations I've heard in Irish pubs before.... especially the drunken conversations.

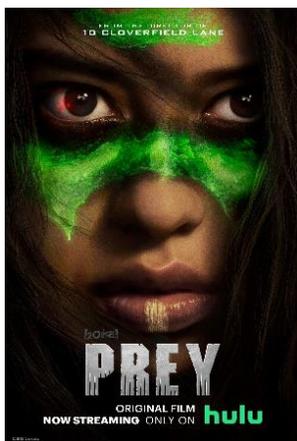
The film is a great study of human nature, the part of ourselves that is satisfied with the way life is and the part of ourselves that always wants more. The two main characters represent duality and human nature. As you can see it's more than just two friends fighting. But the film is a beautiful, haunting portrait of humanity. In a lot of ways, you feel as if you're watching an Oscar Wilde story. What really adds to the film is also this beautiful scenery where the small Irish village is a character unto itself. It's a place locked away from the rest of the world's problems, where it's inhabitants only have each other and are connected by their tragic

relationships. The film will keep you laughing despite its theme.

Honestly, there is not much to complain about with this film. I loved it very much. But I don't think it's absolutely perfect. It isn't a film without its problems. I do complain about the pacing a little bit and drawing out scenes for dramatic effect. Sometimes the stillness and sometimes it's not. The films don't always need scenes where nothing is really going on in an attempt to build up the intensity to a great dramatic scene. I felt there were a few scenes that made this film longer than it should have been. And sometimes there are unnecessary characters that are used to drive the plot. However, despite some minor criticisms, everything comes together to make it a very wonderful film with two great performances by Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleason. The film is a portrait of our tragic flaws as human beings and shows how even the darkest comedy can have a lighter mood and even change our perception for the better. The local pub is the epicenter of this community just like in all Irish communities and the film perfectly portrays all the human interactions that happen in a pub. The film shows the ultimate truth of how we need to be connected to one another in a community and we can't escape connection. But despite the film's dark theme, comedy among all of the characters within this village will keep you laughing and make you realize that no matter what part of the world we're in, we're all the same. It's A beautiful film. Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleason are at the top of their game and definitely have great chemistry together. That's what makes this film almost perfect!

7 – Prey

Review By Marcus Blake



Finally, a Predator movie worth watching since the original. This week the movie *Prey* premiered on Hulu. It's an origin story of The Predator in the world the Comanche Nation 300 years before. It was before America settled the west and the only

Europeans here were French fur trappers. When a young female Comanche warrior faces her right of passage to become a warrior she encounters a Predator, that's the basis of this fantastic story. So, imagine having to kill a Predator with axes, bows and arrows, and a colonial powder pistol where you only have time to load one shot. Can the Predator actually be defeated? Let me just start off by saying that as much as I like the original Predator movie where even with machine guns, soldiers were still unequipped to kill the Predator, the odds are even worse for a young Comanche Warrior and that makes for a great film.

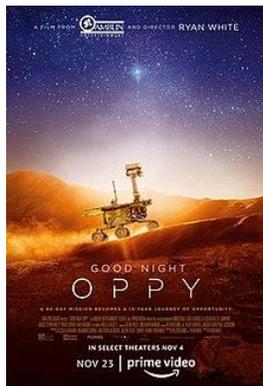
This movie was great. The action was phenomenal. However, this movie is really made by the performances of Amber Midthunder and Dakota Beavers who play commence brother and sister. But the stand-out performance is from Amber Midthunder who we've seen in shows like the Roswell, New Mexico. She is a force to be reckoned with in this movie. Her character is also the only one who understands how the Predator operates and it's that knowledge that will help her defeat the predator. Yes, that's a bit of a spoiler, but the Predator is always defeated in these movies so not really. What makes the stories worth watching is how Naru, Amber Midthunder's character, takes down the predator. In this film, it's her cunning and sheer will to live that makes her the ultimate warrior. No offense to Arnold Schwarzenegger in the original Predator movie, yes, he was great, but she is better in this film.

The basic story is about Comanche Indians going out on a hunt and the men not thinking she is capable enough, but she is the last survivor that not only traps the Predator but is able to kill it with its own technology. This is more than an action film. It slowly draws you into the rituals that help make lawyers in the Comanche Nation so you're getting that mystique and mythology. You get a true hero's journey with the character of Naru. The movie is not very long, it's only about 90 minutes, but it doesn't feel like a short movie at all and the action doesn't overtake the drama among the characters, especially between the brother and sister. Absolutely loved the pacing all the way up until the end. I wasn't bored at all.

There isn't really anything to complain about with this movie. It works on so many levels. It's a great action movie. You get this great mythology about the Comanche Nation. I feel like in a lot of ways they pay tribute to the nation and didn't paint them as stereotypical native Americans as in some films. It makes you want to know more about that Nation, kind of like *Dances with Wolves* makes you want to know more about the Sioux Nation. If I have one minor critique, there should have been more backstory with the main characters and the tribe. We should have seen more of the everyday life of this Comanche tribe and how Naru becomes the warrior we see by the end of the movie, but at the same time, you get just enough to make

you connect with them and the main characters. Overall, having Native Americans battle a Predator and hunt it down while not being it's Prey is a brilliant idea. When it comes to an origin story, this one is perfect. It's sad that some of the characters have to die, but that's typical in any Predator movie. However, it doesn't take away from the fantastic action. This is a movie that should be watched if you're a fan of the Predator movies. But if you're just a fan of a great action movie where a young warrior hunts the "hunter" then check it out. It's a great movie for Hulu, but this is movie would have been a great one to see on the big screen and maybe they'll make a sequel. Amber Midthunder gives a fantastic performance and makes you want to see her more in action movies. She was perfect casting. This is a movie worth watching, not just once, but a few times. I honestly have to say this is the best Predator movie since the original. And as a gamer, I would want to play this story in a video game.

8 – Goodnight Oppy



Goodnight Oppy tells the inspirational true story of Opportunity, a rover that was sent to Mars for a 90-day mission but ended up surviving for 15 years. The film follows Opportunity's groundbreaking journey on Mars and the remarkable bond forged between a robot and her humans millions of miles away. One of the best Documentaries of the year. Of course, it's one of our favorite movies of 2022.

8 – The Northman



Prince Amleth is on the verge of becoming a man when his father is brutally murdered by his uncle, who kidnaps the boy's mother. Two decades later, Amleth is now a Viking who raids Slavic villages. He soon meets a seeress who reminds him of his vow -- save his mother, kill his uncle, avenge his father.

#10 - Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness

Review by Julie Jones



I have seen the first Doctor Strange plenty of times, though I am not well versed in the canon. It's one of the better Marvel movies. Having a surface-level understanding is what's best with Marvel movies so that you don't go crazy analyzing what is "wrong" or different from the comics. And, really, if they are the same as the comics they are considered boring and unoriginal; if they are too different they are picked apart by vultures. You just can't win, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the Marvel movies.

The storyline follows Dr. Strange as he tries to help America Chavez, a teenager who exists singularly and not in every multiverse. She has a power that is sought after by Scarlet Witch, so there is an army of conjured demons and monsters sent to retrieve her. This means a lot of "universe" hopping and seeing a few different Dr. Strange' along the way. It also lends to a very "who can you trust" kind of vibe through the film, as we see so many characters from the previous movie and the What If universe. While it is the sequel to Dr. Strange, so much time has passed in the timeline that they aren't really connected very much especially post Endgame It's really just a way for Marvel to focus on him and move forward after the movies we've already seen.

The story overall is a good one. There is plenty of conflict and the constant distrust and unease will keep you on your toes for a lot of the movie. While I think it can come across as

"all over the place" or jarring, it is meant to be that way. If you jumped to another universe that is how it would feel, landing in another universe like ours is unlikely. The aesthetics were a good play for the movie. While they weren't innovative, they were something that you don't see often; especially in Marvel movies. It lent to the feel of the movie, and I thought it was a good mechanism to try to tie everything together where it could. It certainly kept my attention.

The direction wasn't anything we haven't seen before, but it was very different for a Marvel movie. Sam Raimi decided to take a page from horror films in a lot of the scenes, it seems. That's not a bad thing, especially if you are a fan of Sam Raimi. Anyone who watches horror movies will recognize a few frames that are homages to movies as far back as the seventies. It definitely gives it a creepier tone and made it almost feel like you didn't know where they would take you. This also works really well with the cinematography displayed. The balance and framing were done so well that I think it was a great catalyst to not only the story, but the actors. I was glad to see Raimi work with someone who was a catalyst to his vision and how it worked out, unlike in Spiderman 3, which I'm sure all comic book fans would like to forget.

The acting was good, although it could have been better in parts. I had no problems with any of it, I just thought that with such a capable cast we could have gotten a little more in some scenes. Still, it was good and way better than the acting in a lot of other movies. The palette isn't something I get to talk about a lot, but I think that a lot of people will agree that it is a great tool for mood manipulation. And I think this is a good example of that. It really gave a darker and spookier vibe. I think that the darker colors and brighter hues toned down really added a great emphasis to the story.

Overall, I thought it was a good movie. I would pay the regular price to see it, but I wouldn't walk in expecting it to be Endgame. If you decide to wait until it streams on Disney +, I think it would be a great movie to enjoy when you feel like a horror movie, but nothing too severe. Or you want one of the darker Marvel movies. I didn't think it was the best ever, but I thought it was a great addition to the Marvel universe and I liked how it furthered Doctor Strange's evolution in the canon like with the Illuminati and what leads to Marvel's Secret Wars. It's definitely worth a watch, if nothing else so that you can see my girlfriend in a vignette during the credits!

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Henry Cavill To Star In & EP 'Warhammer 40,000' Film & TV Franchise As Amazon Studios Acquires Rights To Games Workshop Brand



Amazon Studios has made it official, confirming that it has secured global rights to the *Warhammer 40,000* game from Games Workshop for [Henry Cavill](#) (*Man of Steel*) to star in and executive produce the franchise across all Amazon Studios productions. The agreement encompasses rights to the universe across TV series, film and likely games and animation. Since launching nearly 40 years ago, the Warhammer brand has expanded through GAW's miniatures, sourcebooks, tabletop games, animations, novels, a wealth of licensed material and video game *Warhammer 40,000*

is set in the far future, where humanity stands at the edge of what might be its brightest future, or its darkest age. The threats to humankind's empire are many: traitors driven by the fires of ambition, alien empires sworn to reclaim the stars and the corruption of reality by malevolent gods.

"*Warhammer 40,000* has captured the imagination of fans of all ages, from all walks of life, and all over the world," said Jennifer Salke, head of Amazon and MGM Studios. "We are excited to work with Henry, Vertigo Entertainment, and Games Workshop across our Amazon entertainment businesses on this brilliant, immersive franchise for our global customers to experience for years to come."

Vertigo Entertainment's Roy Lee and Natalie Viscuso (the *Lego* franchise) partnered with Cavill to secure the *Warhammer 40,000* IP before taking it to Amazon Studios. Vertigo will executive

produce with Cavill and GAW's Andy Smillie and Max Bottrill alongside Amazon Studios.

"I have loved *Warhammer* since I was a boy, making this moment truly special for me," said Cavill. "The opportunity to shepherd this cinematic universe from its inception is quite the honor and the responsibility. I couldn't be more grateful for all the hard work put in by Vertigo, Amazon Studios and Games Workshop to make this happen. One step closer to making a nigh on lifelong dream come true."

Cavill, who just [exited his DC role as Superman](#) following a cameo in *Black Adam* and also [left his starring role](#) in Netflix's *The Witcher* after three seasons, has Matthew Vaughn's globe-trotting spy thriller *Argylle*, the upcoming reboot of *Highlander*, Guy Ritchie's *The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* as well as Season 3 of *The Witcher* all coming up. reported by [deadline.com](#)



New 'Superman' Pic In The Works With James Gunn Penning, Henry Cavill Not To Star; Ben Affleck In Talks To Helm A Future DC Pic



DC bosses Peter Safran and James Gunn tonight officially made known their plans for their first movie under their regime: It's *Superman*, a script that the latter is currently writing about the Man of Steel's early days. It's not an origins story, but a new actor will be sought to play Superman. As for Henry Cavill — while the DC bosses, would like to work with him, he's been informed he's not part of the next iteration of Superman given its new direction. The actor later confirmed that, saying, "My turn to wear the cape has passed."



Meanwhile, we hear from sources familiar to the scene that Gunn and Safran are in talks with Ben Affleck to stay in the DC universe, but as a director. He is set to reprise his Batman role in *The Flash*, which opens on June 16.

Gunn and Safran plan to unveil their full DC plan in January but are taking meetings with various talent connected to the universe to share their vision as they sort out a more cohesive plan for the comic-book brand stretching across all mediums. In a tweet, Gunn writes: "Peter and I have a DC slate ready to go, which we couldn't be more over-the-moon about; we'll be able to share some exciting information about our first projects at the beginning of the new year. "Among those on the slate is Superman. In the initial stages, our story will be focusing on an earlier part of Superman's life, so the character will not be played by Henry Cavill. "But we just had a great meeting with Henry and we're big fans and we talked about a number of exciting possibilities to work together in the future."

Superman has appeared in eight Warner Bros feature movies during the box office era going back to Richard Donner's 1978 original starring Christopher Reeve. Together those pics, including *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *Justice League*, have grossed \$3 billion at the global box office, unadjusted for inflation.

Studio insiders emphasized tonight that Cavill didn't go rogue in posting in October about his return as the Man of Steel. It was a plan hatched by the previous

regime before Safran and Gunn to their exec seats at DC. There still is a chance that Cavill could be involved in the DC universe. The town was shaken up last week as news leaked that the new Safran-Gunn DC administration had thumbed down Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman 3*. However, that decision was made in conjunction with other Warner execs who were providing notes to Jenkins. The *Wonder Woman* filmmaker tweeted Tuesday that she "never walked away" from the project. "I was open to considering anything asked of me," tweeted Jenkins. "It was my understanding there was nothing I could do to move anything forward at this time. DC is obviously buried in changes they are having to make, so I understand these decisions are difficult right now." Gunn replied on Twitter, "I can attest that all of Peter [Safran] and my interactions with you were only pleasant and professional." Reported by deadline.com



TOP 10 SHOWS OF 2022

1: House of the Dragon: Season 1

Review by Chloe James



If you're any kind of Game of Thrones fan like I am, these past few years may have seemed...empty. Whether you agree with the majority that the last season was a disappointment, or you are in the quieter last season defender minority like myself, there's definitely been something missing in our lives since the series' wrap-up. Many of us have found some decent ways to fill that fantasy craving void, such as the excellent Witcher series, the ok-ish Wheel of Time adaptation, or the wonderful, yet tragically canceled after one season Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance. These have all given me a great deal of fantasy nerd serotonin to be sure, but not quite the same way of watching a new episode of GoT, with a giant glass of wine in hand and a box of tissues on the ready. Sure, HBO had teased us with a number of spin-off series set in the world of Westeros, and when one finally got greenlit, I allowed myself a tiny allowance of cautious excitement. Not too much excitement, though, as I'm sure nothing could beat out the original for me.

Minor Spoilers Ahead

Well, the first season of House of the Dragon is finally over. And with it, I can finally say, that empty void left in me is finally filled once more. Taking place about 186 years before the events of Game of Thrones, this series focuses on the Targaryen royal family during their golden age of rule and dragons were still numerous in the world. When peaceful King Veserys (Paddy Considine) loses his wife and son to childbirth, he makes the difficult decision to name his beloved only daughter Rhaenyra (Milly Alcock and later Emma D'Arcy) as heir to the throne. Problem is, Westeros isn't woke enough to accept a woman ruler just yet. Things start getting complicated when Rhaenyra's bestie Alicent

Hightower (Emily Carey and later Olivia Cooke) marries Veserys and starts having male offspring with him. Adding to the drama, Rhaenyra's growing sexual tension with her uncle Daemon (Matt Smith) springs her to do some less than trustworthy actions that further alienate her from her subjects. This is just the start, as this season spans over the course of a couple of decades, culminating into the beginning of one of Westeros' bloodiest wars: The Dance of Dragons

Where do I start in describing how happy watching this has made me? I guess it would be easier to get the tiny criticisms out of the way before I delve into the goodness. For those of you who felt thrown off at the pretty fast pacing of seasons 7 and 8 of Game of Thrones, I got bad news for you. Season 1 of House of the Dragon goes so much faster. Don't get overly attached to any particular character in this one, because some of them will die off way faster than you expect. I know I know, that goes without saying with anyone in this universe. Still, I'll admit I was a bit disappointed with characters I was just learning their names and liking to unceremoniously be killed off a couple of episodes later. I get it. This season, from what I understand, is mostly elaborated backstory to a much bigger one. It was an attempt to show a lot of key events that resulted in the war to come, so it had to be done at breakneck speed. At the same time, they wanted to give us much context behind these character's motivations as possible. So yes, a lot of characters that are set up to be "important" are killed off rather quickly as that is what happens to their book counterparts. This is a small price to pay to have well fleshed out characters overall.

casting of Matt Smith as Daemon Targaryen. I could tell within his first scene that he was going to be a fan darling of this series. Daemon didn't have the most lines out of anyone, but his physical acting alone told us everything we needed to know. I know I should be picking between "Team Green" or "Team Black", but in reality, I could never pick between how much I love Emma D'Arcy's Rhaenyra or Olivia Cooke's Alicent. The fact that such playful, charming actors (with now meme worthy chemistry with each other behind the scenes), can transform into such nuanced characters on film.

Most of all, I am absolutely blown away by Paddy Considine's performance as King Veserys. If I could sign a petition just so this series is eligible to win Oscars (even though it's very much not in the movie category) I would. Considine's performance wasn't just Emmy worthy. It's Oscar worthy. While we are on the subject, his best performance came from my (and I'm sure many other's) favorite episode of the season, Episode 8: "The Lord of the Tides". This one may beat out even some of my top favorites for GoT. Episode 8 really highlights what this show does better than GoT, the character's relationships with each other. In its core, this series is about a family and the families they married into. Episode 8 may be the most tragic of all because it shows so much of what might have been had egos not been too big, feelings not stayed hurt, or misunderstandings smoothed over. It shows that the war to come will be completely unnecessary.

An advertisement for 1st STOP PRINT. The ad features a white SUV with a car magnet on the side. The text reads: "1st STOP PRINT Car Magnet Package 5", "Text Us: (469) 708-9954", "Call Us: (888) 901-4665", "I PAIR (18 x 24 inch)", "2 Car Magnets", "Full Color", and "\$75".

Speaking of characters, once again the casting department has outdone itself. This is one of the most talented series cast I've seen since...well, Game of Thrones, I guess. There were some naysayers initially doubting the

An advertisement for Dr Pepper Zero Sugar. The ad features a bottle of Dr Pepper Zero Sugar with a red and black label. The text reads: "BETTER PERFECT THAN NEVER." and "BUY NOW".

While I greatly anticipated this series as my replacement Game of Thrones fix, I have already grown to love House of the Dragon in its own right. At times, it does feel a bit like a soap opera set in a medieval fantasy backdrop (nothing wrong with that!) Yet, there's something about it that seems more down to Earth, more human than its predecessor. Ironic as the main cast are

platinum haired royalty who ride on dragons. I have a feeling the action is going to be much more intense in the seasons to come, so buckle up your dragon saddle friends, we're in for a bumpy ride!

#2 Stranger Things: Season 4

Review by Julie Jones



I've loved Stranger Things from the beginning. I always thought it was cute, but also had a great layer of mystery and horror that made it work well with the Dungeons and Dragons references and Sci-Fi elements. Really, it's the entire combination that makes it a hit. It wouldn't work without that balance, as we have seen in some seasons since. While there were times it seemed like they might have lost what made Stranger Things compelling, I think this season they might have found it. We are only getting the first 5 episodes on May 27th. The other half of the Season 4 will drop in July. So far, the first half reminds us why we love Stranger things.

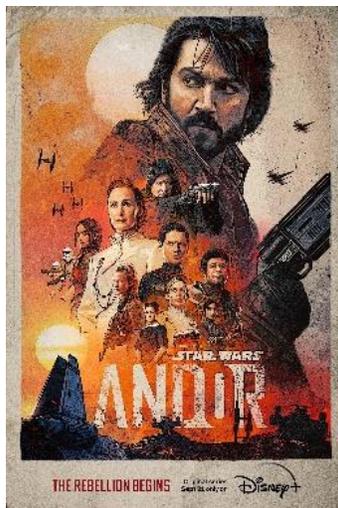
This season we see all of our favorite characters again, trying to move on with their lives and find some normalcy. Whether it's Eleven trying to be comfortable as plain Jane or Lucas trying to fit in with the jocks, there is plenty of "square hole, round peg" to go around. The only question is will it work and how does their past come back to bite them in the ass. We all know it will. The cinematography and direction are the same as in previous seasons. But it definitely feels more like the first season than seasons 2 and 3. The frames and placement reminded me of how things started, which I'm sure is by design. In the first half of the season, the characters are in separate places as they face off against a new threat or the same threat that has been there all along. It seems that there has been one big threat from the beginning and now these characters have to face it. Probably the most important part of season 4 is seeing what happened to Jim Hopper. As you have seen on the trailer, he is in a Russian prison, and the first half will focus on how he gets home. Probably the best part of the first half was Joyce and Murry

working together to get Hopper home. Winona Ryder is fantastic as always...Joyce and Murry should have a spinoff show!

The acting is the same as always, though the situations are new. There are some moments that I didn't think it was good, but sometimes you have to remind yourself they are playing kids and all the actors are young. The first half of the season does move a little slow as it build up the finale. However, The color palette and mood manipulation are a little darker and more neutral, again bringing it back to the beginning season. Of course, it went well with the show and even accentuated memories and flashbacks. Overall, I would say that the first half of the season is great. I think so far, it's definitely worth checking out. Even if you didn't like other seasons, this might help get them back on the track they were on before. There are a lot of questions answered and some new ones that arise. However, everything is answered in the final four episodes and the season ends on a high note. Season four was great and that's why it's our #2 show of 2022. We can't wait for the final season.

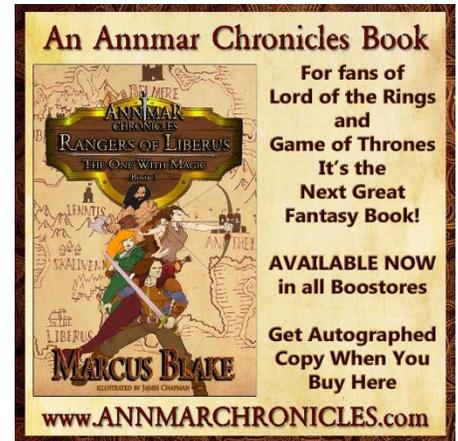
#3 - Andor: Season 1

Review by Marcus Blake

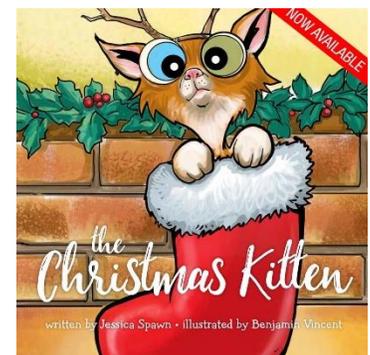


Andor: season 1 just might be the best Star Wars television show on Disney +. Maybe not, but it is definitely right up there with Mandalorian. Starring Diego Luna, it is the backstory of Cassian Andor and how he got involved with the Rebellion. There are no lightsabers, no Force users, essentially this show is about the birth of the Rebellion without the Jedi. It's pretty much an Espionage show, which is not hard to believe considering the writers also wrote for the show, The Americans. If it weren't for season 1 of House of the Dragon, Andor might have been our # 1 show of the year. It had a phenomenal cast and really showed us all of the political intrigue and intelligence gathering that went into the Rebellion. It's a spy show and it works on all levels. The biggest complaint we had is they tell kind of a short story over the

course of 12 episodes. They didn't really need 12 episodes to tell this particular story in season 1, but you definitely get to know the main character a lot more especially what drives him. You get to see many of the faces behind the scenes in the Rebellion, It doesn't have any connection to the Skywalkers or Jedi. Some of the best stories in Star Wars have been about the Rebellion. The stories that lead up to episode 4.



The Obi-Wan Kenobi series was a great series that showed some of the beginnings of the Rebellion with people helping Jedi Escape, but the story is really connected to the Skywalker Saga more than anything. The first season of Andor gives us characters that are just as important to the Rebellion and who really kickstart it five years before episode 4. In a lot of ways, they're more interesting than the Skywalkers and Obi-Wan Kenobi. It may not be as popular as the Mandalorian or Obi-Wan Kenobi, but if you're a Star Wars fan, you should definitely check out the first season. Cassian Andor is one of the most fascinating characters in Star Wars and we only got a glimpse of that in the movie Rogue one which turns out to be the best Star Wars movie Disney has ever made. But what the show really proved is there's so much more to the Rebellion than the Skywalker Saga and if we're being honest there are much better stories. Star Wars Rebels started to show us that, Andor: season 1 just confirms that fact. Yes, it was one of the best shows of 2022 and we have no doubt that season 2 will be one of the best shows of the year it comes out.



#4 - Cobra Kai: Season 5

Review by Alex Moore



With its inception, back in 2018, the spin-off series, “Cobra Kai,” has set itself a standard that reaches pretty high. The fact that Season 4 is probably considered the weakest, thus far, and is still “pretty good,” comparatively, speaks volumes. However, it DID have me wondering about the future of the series. Could things continue to devolve? Yes, they could, but they could also reach new heights, as lofty as that might seem. I discovered, recently, that I was not alone in thinking Season 2 was the strongest installment up to this point. I am, still, fairly certain that most fans prefer Season 3, above all, and they are not mindless for thinking so, either.

So, what is the key to not only turning things around, but also lifting oneself from the mat and succeeding? Well, in the context of THIS series, it begins with how the new season touches off. One of my biggest gripes about Season 4 was that there seemed to be far too much exposition, from the outset. Did they try to give too many characters their “fair share” of screen time? Perhaps, but let us compare that to Season 5: the first two episodes place us in Mexico, as Miguel Diaz (played by Xolo Mariduena) searches for his long lost father, but is also, in turn, being searched for by his potentially-surrogate father, Johnny Lawrence (played by William Zabka). He has, also, enlisted the support of his biological son, Robby Kane (played by Tanner Buchanan). Through a series of unfortunate events, no reference intended, Miguel loses most of his money and is nearly beaten down by some Mexican hoodlums, NOT associated with his actual father. Johnny is hot on his trail, but gets some slightly different results. What can we say about Mr. Lawrence? You can take the man out of the fight, but you cannot take the fight out of the man, right?

Meanwhile, back in California, Chozen Toguchi (played by Yuki Okumoto) has made himself at home with Daniel LaRusso (played by Ralph Macchio) and his family. All I will say is that various people have their own ideas about where the line is drawn when you “make yourself

more comfortable” and it can lead to some humorous results, although Amanda LaRusso (played by Courtney Henggeler) is not amused by the situation.

As Miguel stumbles upon his true father, Mr. Diaz (played by Luis Roberto Guzman), another family, of sorts, is greatly expanding: Cobra Kai. Terry Silver (played by Thomas Ian Griffith) has “taken care of” John Kreese (played by Martin Kove) and put his evil aspirations to good use. We see the editing of what family means to various characters and it tells the story quite well. So what is the plan, going forward, to try and halt the future of Cobra Kai?

As it so happens, Daniel has decided to end Miyagi Do and focus, squarely, on infiltrating the lair of his nemesis, which is no longer Johnny, interestingly enough. Chozen has, too, decided to aid Daniel in this venture, but there seems to be a slightly off-putting vibe coming from Chozen. It made me wonder if he would merely be an infiltrator to Cobra Kai or wind up actually joining them. Could someone involved meet their demise, as well? Only time can tell...

Episode 3, ‘Playing With Fire,’ resurrects another character from “The Karate Kid Part III,” Mike Barnes (played by Sean Kanan). I could see the misdirection from a mile away, but it was still funny and had a number of references that any fan could understand, if you know the movies well enough. At this point, I was already thinking that the new season is better than the previous entry, but could it rise above Season 4’s predecessor?



As it turns out, the next three episodes are the best in the season, with Episode 5, ‘Extreme Measures,’ being the ultimate standout. There are montages connected with fine, ‘80s memories and the animosity between Daniel and Terry is growing to a feverish pitch. We can see the devilish masterminding of Terry as it takes over an entire room, captivated by his wealth and charisma. Daniel can seemingly do nothing to slow it down, as even his wife falls prey to Terry’s charms and manipulation. If you were a fan of Raymond “Stingray,” get ready, cause he is back and as great as ever. There is almost nothing as satisfying as watching a loser parade around as though he is a winner, especially when he or she has still not won at anything, truly to

speak of. Sometimes, playing the system is good enough to be rewarded and is all a specific person is looking for. Stingray is a shining example of that kind of guy. You might be surprised to see a dynamic, if brief, behavioral switch. Between Daniel and Johnny. Believe me, it is totally appropriate and fun to watch unfold, even if we have seen this before, in smaller doses. At this stage, Terry has turned into something of a James Bond type of villain. I would love to see a scene in which homage is paid to this observation, Maybe some other time, huh? Is it alright if I bring up Tory Nichols (played by Peyton List)? Her character development continues to intrigue me. The inner conflict is perpetually written all over her pretty face. Not only is she still at odds with Samantha LaRusso (played by Mary Mouser); she has also struck a cord with Robby and it has caused some friction in their young romance. Tory, apparently, has maintained a quiet contact with John while he is in prison. I still wonder what motivated this, to begin with. Could there still be a hidden agenda, later on, that will “wow” us as an audience? The theme of John’s re-entry into the story continues, thematically in Episode 6, ‘Ouroboros.’ Is he finally wrestling his inner demons, as he reflects on his past, important connections? Again, only time will tell.

Unfortunately, from my perspective, the following episode is the weakest of the season. My personal, fan-based loyalty for Eagle Fang Karate appears to be all for not and the notion of making Cobra Kai a worldwide brand comes off as kind of silly, within the context of the story, at least for now. We shall move on to better things now, yes?...

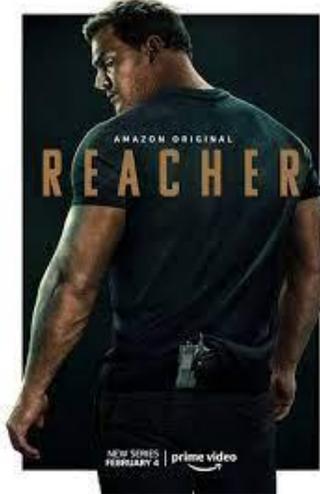
If you are a fan of “Rocky 4,” you will enjoy the various references to it over the next couple of episodes. It is now, yet again, Cobra Kai versus Miyagi Do. Eagle Fang really only exists under the umbrella of Miyagi and presents a secondary style that is included within the same school, if that makes any sense. Now, Daniel, Johnny and Chozen are working together, yet separate, all in the name of stopping Cobra Kai from “worldwide domination.” Who knew that Johnny could form such a natural bond with the man in charge, in order to slow down their common nemesis? If I may call on Eli “Hawk” Moskowitz (played by Jacob Bertrand) now, please. He is still among my favorites. What would it take to hook HIM up with Tory? Nothing else has worked for either of them, after all. I must say, I expected better things for this young man, but there was an ugly surprise, involving Kenny Payne (played by Dallas Dupree Young), who has really taken a turn for the worse, between last season and this one. At least he is not as annoying as Kyler Park (played by Joe Seo). That much has NOT changed. I have one say thing to ask: if Miyagi Do and Eagle Fang Karate must unite as one martial arts school, could we settle on Bonzai Kai as the new name of the school? You could even change the “o” to an “a” and show an eagle swooping down in front of a bonzai tree. Thoughts?

The closure of the season picks up right where the previous episode left off. Certain characters attempt to resolve their problems, but do not always meet up with positive outcomes, initially. “Stingray” is approached by several Miyagi Do members and is cleverly coaxed into sharing his secret, through the use of a Dwarven Monk (a Dungeons & Dungeons reference). My boy, “Hawk” was the one who knew how to get to him. Some of my curiosities about the ultimate outcome for certain characters apparently came true, which I was okay with, only for them to be turned by a near 180 degrees. Is the series too in love with specific characters to let them go or what? The use of music and cinematography in certain fighting scenes is the best I have seen out of this series and I would appreciate it if it garnered some level of notoriety later this year.

The development of Chozen is one of the things that surprised me the most, in a good way, for this season, but I do not know how much more we can expect to get out of him in the future. Terry is, surely, not done, either, but neither is John, of course. Maybe some of them SHOULD have been done, but that is only my personal opinion. I look forward to the inclusion of characters from “The Karate Kid” universe. So far, none of the rebirths have been a disappointment. I would, also, like to assume that we will have a new lead villain, or should I say villainess, played by Alicia Hannah-Kim as Kim Da-Eun. I refer to her as the “Dragon Lady.” Yes, she IS that scary, but I digress. Overall, the series has continued to strike a nice line between nostalgia and substance. However, my colleagues and I pretty much agree that this series is reaching the end of its course. There is one little detail from this season which usually indicates that a story is running out of new ideas and it has been a staple of television series for years upon years. I will not say who, but someone is about to have a new baby. Netflix, we thank you for keeping a great thing going, but do not let it go on for any longer than that. It needs to. I was ready to proclaim Season 5 of “Cobra Kai” as the best season since Season 2. It might be even better than that, due to a little bit of recency bias. What the hey, Season 5 IS the new king of “Cobra Kai,” but it is pretty close and it is not a bad problem to have.

5 - Reacher: Season 1

Review by Marcus Blake



It’s about time that we finally have a Jack Reacher show where the actor playing Reacher is the right size. It’s sad to say that, but the character is 6’5” and played by an actor who is actually that tall. Sorry, Tom Cruise! Nothing, against the Tom Cruise movies, they’re entertaining and all, but I’ve always felt that a good Jack Reacher story should be told in multiple episodes. Now, we finally have it and it’s great! I can go on and on about how much I enjoyed the Reacher series on Amazon. I feel like this is the way it was meant to be when telling a Jack Reacher story. And even better to start at the beginning because the first season is based off the first Jack Reacher book that came out in 1997. Sure, anytime you adapt a book into a movie or TV series, it’s never going to be perfect. I mean, the Jack Ryan Series on Amazon proved that, it borrowed many elements from different books to tell the first two seasons, but it takes more than a 2-hour movie to really flush out a good story and the best thing they did with this series is to tell Jack Reacher’s first story over 8 episodes. We don’t need 20 episodes to tell the story or a 3 – 4 hour movie, a streaming series is perfect. Honestly, that was one of my first impressions. When I sat down to watch it, I couldn’t stop and finish washed it all the way through over 8 hours. Now the other thing that producers got right was finding an actor who not only had the physicality to play Jack Reacher, but the charisma as well. I can honestly say that Alan Ritchson is perfect casting. Many actors had been mentioned to play Jack Reacher in a TV series. Even Idris Elba was mentioned at one time, but after watching the first season, I don’t think there’s anybody better than Alan Ritchson who could have played Jack Reacher while not only embodying the physicality, but Reacher’s sarcastic sense of humor that you get in the books. Of course, I can end this review by telling you that the series is awesome, but let me tell you why!

For those that are not familiar with the first Jack Reacher book, *The Killing Floor*, Jack

Reacher is 6 months out of the army and ends up in Georgia looking for his brother. It’s the first time we are introduced to this character, especially his family and upbringing through flashbacks, and what makes him such a great investigator. Also, let’s not forget his own moral code about always doing what’s right no matter the outcome or the adversity. I admit that I have not read all 25 Jack Reacher books, but I read the first one when I was in the Army 20 years ago and very much enjoyed it. Yes, I was entertained by the Tom Cruise movies, but in those stories, you meet Jack Reacher halfway through the novel series. As a storyteller, I feel like it’s important to be more linear when telling a story so of course, you should start at the beginning.

Why is Jack Reacher out of the army and why is he a drifter or a ghost living off the grid? It’s great to see Jack Reacher solve the major crime in this story and find out what happened to his brother, but I feel like it’s also more important that we get the backstory of who Jack Reacher really is through the flashbacks of his childhood. The character is basically a military brat, it’s all he’s ever known. He’s never lived a civilian life until he gets out of the army because he graduated high school on a military base and then went straight to West Point. Also important is in this first story you also get more of Jack Reacher’s background when it comes to some of the characters that he’s connected with that will help drive this story such as a former lieutenant under his command that’s basically a computer hacker and sniper. The pacing is done well and besides flushing out the story over 8 episodes, there’s great chemistry with the cast, especially that of Alan Richardson and Willa Fitzgerald who plays the female sheriff’s deputy and love interest of sorts. You really get to know all of these characters over 8 episodes that you wouldn’t be able to do in a 2-hour movie. That’s something I hated about the second Tom Cruise check Reacher movie, *Never Going Back* because you get a bit of a backstory with Jack Reacher and the fact that he might have a daughter, but because there’s so much action in the movie, the audience never has time to breathe, and you only really get to know the characters in small moments. That isn’t the case with a TV series. There’s plenty of action because Jack Reacher kicks ass, but they spend a great deal of time getting to know all of the characters and what brings them to the center of the story. The first season based on the first book is a great jumping-off point when getting to know the character of Jack Reacher, something I can’t really say about the Tom Cruise movies.

So, the series is absolutely perfect, but I only have minor critiques. And honestly, those complaints just have to do with some of the casting choices. I first want to say that Malcolm Godwin is a great actor, but I just couldn’t buy him as the character of Finlay. It might have been miscasting. It also doesn’t help that he’s not the most interesting character in the story. He’s a bit annoying and it shows in the series. But again, Malcolm Godwin is a great actor and we’ve seen

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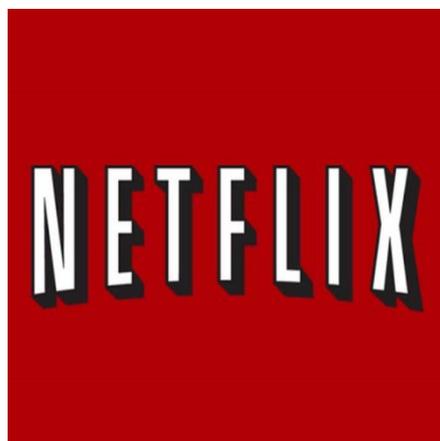
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him in movies like American Gangster and seen him in series like iZombie. The other miscasting has to do with Bruce McGill. Now don't get me wrong, I love him as an actor, and he was a fun interview years ago for the 40th anniversary of Animal House. But it's not believable that he is a bumbling fool masquerading as a southern mayor and henchmen. He's played great bad guys in the past. He also does comedy well. But I feel like it's kind of a waste of his talents and the role of the southern mayor... It's not a character we should care about and anybody can play that kind of bumbling fool. But I'm the one hand I always enjoy anything with t Bruce McGill because he can make any scene better so maybe it's not a total waste. I also have to commend Kristen Kreuk from Smallville fame, she did a great job and she's turned out to be a better actress than she used to be when she was young, experience has a way of doing that and better writing. Anyway, Not every episode of Smallville with her was that great. Kristen Kreuk is great in this series. As I said, my complaints are only minor.



Overall, Reacher is a winner for Amazon Prime. And if you're looking for a good cop show to replace Bosch now that its finally over, then Reacher is definitely for you. We need another cop show where the main protagonist has his own moral code... Jack Reacher is the perfect character for that. And more importantly, it helps to have the perfect actor who embodies the true character of Jack Reacher. Alan Ritchson is superb! Season 1 of Reacher proves that 8 to 10 episodes is perfect when adapting a Jack Reacher book so the story can be properly fleshed out! The first season of Reacher is a high-octane thrill ride that not only gives the perfect introduction to the character, but gives the audience a more believable Jack Reacher than Tom Cruise playing the character. I love the character of Jack Reacher and feel like Amazon is giving us the perfect adaptation. I'm already "jonesing" for season 2 and I'm pretty sure you will be as well when you finish season 1. There's a lot to like and anything you hate about the first season, you'll quickly forget about it by the time you get to the end. I highly recommend Reacher on Amazon and Alan Ritchson does not disappoint. In fact, after watching his performance you'll be asking

yourself, "Tom who?" Season 1 of Richard is so good that you'll probably start over and watch it again!

#6 - Jack Ryan: Season 3

Review by Marcus Blake



Jack Ryan is back. Season 3 just came out on Amazon Prime and they totally redeemed themselves from a very lackluster season 2. The sophomore season of the Jack Ryan series was not very good so we were all a little worried that the series was just going to be a one-hit wonder with season 1 which was amazing. But season 3 was great. Following story elements from Tom Clancy's the Cardinal of the Kremlin and the sum of all fears, the main antagonist in season 3 are Russian radicals intent on bringing back the old regime and starting a nuclear war. And don't worry folks, this story is done much better than the Ben Affleck Jack Ryan movie. John Krasinski has been one of the better actors to portray Jack Ryan. It usually comes down to good writing and maybe he shines better than most of the actors who have played the character because they're doing a series instead of trying to tell a thousand-page book and a 2-hour movie. I'm not saying Chris Pine was a bad Jack Ryan, but the movie he did was terrible and not even Kevin Costner could save it. In season 3 we will see Jack Ryan go on the Run trying to prove his theory about the Russian radicals trying to start a nuclear war with a small country and restore the old Empire. With a great cast, this season shines and is full of non-stop action and typical Jack Ryan solving Mysteries that we have grown to love from the character. The only downside is anybody who ever develops a Jack Ryan story always wants to make him into a super spy. Jack Ryan is not James Bond.

He is still just an analyst that gets himself into trouble, but his greatest weapon is always solving a puzzle that nobody else sees when it comes to international affairs and staving off a War. Unfortunately, there's a little too much spy shit in season 3 that really isn't the character of Jack Ryan, but it can be forgiven because of the

strong story in season 3 and the fact that Jack Ryan still proves himself to be the best analyst in the CIA. Maybe this was the story we should have gotten in season 2, but better late than never, and as they gear up for the 4th and final season of John Krasinski's final run as Jack Ryan, hopefully, they have the momentum to go out strong. But this season of Jack Ryan definitely ended up in our top 10 shows of the year. It may not be as good as the first season of Reacher, but it's still in our top 10!

#7 - Obi-Wan Kenobi

Review by Marcus Blake



Obi-Wan Kenobi is one of the most beloved characters in "Star Wars". His story during the Clone Wars leading up to his famous duel with Anakin Skywalker, is one of the best storylines in the Star Wars universe! He has always been a tragic figure, but his story has always seemed incomplete. What did he do during the 19 years between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*? This is why we needed an Obi-Wan Kenobi storyline that details that time period. It's easy to think that having an Obi-Wan Kenobi story is purely for nostalgia's sake. But it's more than that. What made him into the character that we came to love in Episode 4! That is the man who would sacrifice himself and help Luke Skywalker on his hero's journey. How did Obi-Wan Kenobi deal with the pain of his best friend and former student going to the dark side? And then having to kill him?! So many stories are unfinished in the Star Wars universe, but I think sometimes it's necessary to revisit these main characters and see who they become later in life. With the creation of Disney +, Lucas film is able to tell more of these stories, especially what happened with characters at the fall of the Republic and the Rise of the Empire.

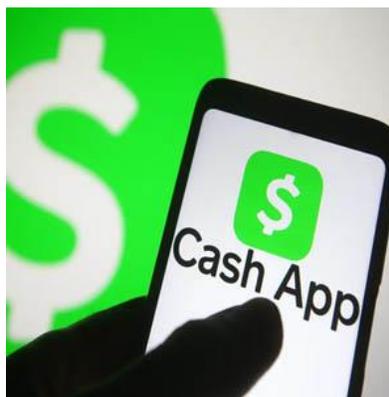
The six-part Obi-Wan Kenobi story is not perfect. I wish I could say that there aren't any flaws, but that would not be true. That isn't to say that I didn't love it. I like it for what it is.... something that's not as good as the original trilogy, (maybe not even as good as the prequel

trilogy), but a good story that helps bridge the gap between episode 3 and episode 4. There's been a lot of descriptions about this limited series, but perhaps we should look at it as a six-part epilogue to Episode 3 or a six-part prologue to the beginning of the rebellion. I find it interesting that we are setting this story exactly halfway between episode 3 and episode 4—so a lot is happening in the Star Wars timeline. But I think this particular point is important because you're seeing the Empire become the "Empire" that we knew in series like Star Wars Rebels and then the original trilogy. However, you're also seeing the beginning of what would become the "rebellion". We get to see various groups become the underground resistance towards the empire with the simple task of helping to rescue Jedi who escaped Order 66. The Solo movie is set 10 years after Episode 3, but you don't really get a clear understanding of what the world was like, except through the crime syndicates. The Obi-Wan story gives us a clearer picture of what it was like under the Empire's rule at that time.

What If We Didn't Get the Obi-Wan Kenobi Series?

Maybe we didn't "need" the series, but you have to admit that it's a great connection between the prequels and the original trilogy. For years LucasFilm talked about doing an Obi-Wan Kenobi movie because fans wanted to know what he did in the 19 years between episode 3 and episode 4. Did Obi-Wan really just hang out in the desert and watch Luke Skywalker grow up, having no connection to the rise of the Empire, or even see other Jedi who survived Order 66? Of course, Obi-Wan Kenobi had other adventures, his story didn't end with Episode 3 and his famous duel with Anakin, and then just pick right back up with Luke in episode 4. We know that he has a connection to Star Wars Rebels and that Ezra Bridger found him, leading Darth Maul to Kenobi so they could finish their story arc. That was a great episode but there's so much more to Obi-Wan Kenobi than what we saw in Episode 3 and Episode 4. I think the best part about this series is we get to see a very different Obi-Wan Kenobi than what we saw at the end of episode 3. He's a Jedi living with PTSD. Yes, he is supposed to watch over Luke and even tries to get Owen Lars to let him train Luke as a Jedi. But we're also seeing a great Jedi Master having to live with his past. He killed his best friend (or so he thought). He's essentially a man on the run and living in the Shadows of the Empire. What's great about this series is another hero's journey presents itself to Obi-Wan Kenobi. We tend to think that heroes only have one journey, especially Jedi, and that's simply not true. The hero's journey is a continuous thing, and it doesn't happen just once. At this point Obi-Wan Kenobi is kind of pathetic; wallowing in self-pity and regret until he is called back into action with the rescue of none other than Princess Leia.

Some Star Wars fans might disagree that we didn't need this storyline because originally there was no connection between Obi-Wan and Leia except that she was seeking him out for help, which sets off the main story for Episode 4. But I think it lends more to his story that he has a connection to both children. Yes, his adventure with Luke hasn't come yet, but in going off to rescue Princess Leia, he becomes a Jedi again! He is given purpose and finds his strength in the Force again and that is brilliant storytelling. It's laughable to think that Jedi can't fall on hard times or have self-doubt. I think that's why a lot of people hated the movie, The Last Jedi, because they didn't want to believe that Luke could become that kind of Jedi exile himself. He's supposed to turn into a great Jedi Master and here we see him in exile living with self-pity and depression.



The truth is it's not the first time that's ever happened to a Jedi and that story kind of mirrors Obi-Wan Kenobi. Jedi are at their best when they find a purpose or are inspired back into action. Obi-Wan Kenobi is inspired to go and rescue Princess Leia. Rey inspires Luke to become the Jedi Master that she always heard about and he sacrifices himself for the new rebellion. It's a beautiful story, just like Obi-Wan's adventure in this series. But at the same time, they're both rooted in the same theme—someone who is one with the Force and overcomes their difficult past. And for Obi-Wan, it's a huge past, full of regret, to overcome. Especially when he learns that Anakin did survive and has become the man in the dark suit known as Darth Vader. Some fans might criticize how Obi-Wan Kenobi found out that Vader survived and how he wouldn't have figured it out after 10 years in exile. It doesn't really matter, it's minor nitpicking because the way they presented it in the Obi-Wan Kenobi series is more dramatic and shows a man who is heartbroken that he left his friend to die. Then to learn that instead he survived and became this mechanical monster that strikes fear throughout the Galaxy, was truly horrifying for Obi-Wan. We needed an Obi-Wan Kenobi series to see who Obi-Wan had become after Episode 3 and the adventure he went on that turns him into the Jedi Master we know in the Original Trilogy.

I'm not going to say that the Obi-Wan series was perfect and didn't have problems. There's a lot to criticize, but overall, it was a great series, especially having him reconnect with Anakin who has become Darth Vader. To have them face off against each other not only once, but twice and then have both of them reconcile what had happened in the past, that's what great storytelling does! It adds a deeper narrative to both characters. As an audience, we connect to both of them, but it also makes each character sympathetic. Even Anakin Skywalker / Darth Vader because he's a tragic figure. We get to see him beneath the mask, the burnt shell of the man he used to be. More importantly, I think it was necessary to tell the story to help solidify some of the things that we may not have quite understood in Episode 4: A New Hope. There's a lot of history that we didn't really know when we first saw Episode 4 and the Prequel Trilogy was able to tell that history, but there was still a lot of story left untold. We didn't really know what happened with these characters between Episode 3 and Episode 4. We didn't understand the meaning behind certain phrases. This six-part series helps the audience understand a little bit better how old the characters in Episode 4 are truly connected.

How did the Obi-Wan Kenobi Series Make Episode 4 Better?

Some fans might ask, did we really need a series to add more backstory to Episode 4? Instead of asking that question, what about asking, "Why Not?" This series helps to explain some of the things that didn't make sense in Episode 4. How did Obi-Wan Kenobi come to what he called "a certain point of view?" He explains in Episode 6 when talking to Luke about how Darth Vader used to be Anakin Skywalker and how Anakin was seduced by the dark side and then ceased being Anakin Skywalker thus becoming Darth Vader. Or as he puts it in an Episode 4 "betrayed and murdered your father." It makes more sense now when Anakin at the end of their final fight in Part 6 of the Obi-Wan Kenobi series, tells his former master, "I am not your failure." You did not kill Anakin, I did." Darth Vader is telling him, right there, that Anakin was murdered by Darth Vader, he killed that part of himself that used to be Anakin Skywalker. And now Obi-Wan can walk away after saying that "his friend is truly gone." I loved this scene because not only has Obi-Wan found his strength in the Force and weakened Darth Vader, but he doesn't have to feel guilty anymore, he didn't kill Anakin, Darth Vader did that. He can live with the fact, knowing that his friend is truly gone. This is the part where Obi-Wan Kenobi has reconciled and overcome his past and now he will become the Jedi Master that Luke Skywalker will need in Episode 4. It was a beautiful scene seeing the face of Anakin beneath the cracked mask and hearing him talk in a mixture of Anakin's old voice, but with Darth Vader's voice now. It was hauntingly poignant.

Another criticism is why should Obi-Wan meet Leia and help rescue her? They didn't need to know each other and if you watch Episode 4, she makes you think that she's never met him. Yes, you could have a story where they've never met and they wouldn't change the original trilogy, but it also lends a little bit more weight to her desperation to find Obi-Wan on behalf of her father because she knows what he's capable of and she has a connection to him. If you watch the scene where Obi-Wan Kenobi plays the message in his hut, Leia is saying very specific lines. "General Kenobi, years ago you served my father in The clone Wars, now he begs you to help him in his struggle with the empire." After she explains how she put the Death Star plans in the Droid then she says, "this is our most desperate hour, help me Obi-Wan, you're my only hope." She starts off by saying this is our most desperate hour and then she makes it more personal by saying help "me" Obi-Wan Kenobi you're "my" only hope. Why would she say it like that if she didn't have a personal connection to Obi-Wan Kenobi? It's true that you can attribute it to a screw-up in how Carrie Fisher delivered the dialogue. And it's not like George Lucas had a clear plan about where he was going at the time of making the first movie because he didn't know he was going to get to make the next three. Things certainly changed, but I do find it interesting that Princess Leia does say "help me obi-wan, you're my only hope!" The writing for Obi-Wan Kenobi has already been criticized by some Star Wars fans. They compare it to the original trilogy or the Mandalorian and think that it's lazy writing and treading more on nostalgia than actual storytelling. That's not true. Perhaps the writers understood based on that line that she might have had a connection to Obi-Wan and this is that story. The six-part series solidifies that particular statement and she understands why she must go and get him even if it's a request of her father. Of course, it's also a great line at the end of Part 6 that if she ever needs help from a tired old man, all she has to do is call or come find him. Another thing, when Vader uses the line right before he's about to face off with Obi-Wan in episode 4, "you should not have come back," couldn't that mean they had met at some point between Episode 3 and episode 4. Again, this is that story. The basis of the Obi-Wan Kenobi series is about him finding out that Anakin is still alive and facing him as Darth Vader. Everything else are minor stories. They may be good stories, but they're minor to what the overall is. It was about Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin facing each other again and reconciling their past. Some might criticize we didn't need a six-part series just for that to happen, a movie would have been fine. Maybe, but there's a lot more that happens in a 6-part story. We get to see how Obi-Wan watches over Luke from afar and how he interacts with Owen and Beru Lars. We see Obi-Wan being connected with what essentially is the resistance that will turn into the Rebellion. It starts with helping Jedi escape. Not only that, this is Leia's first encounter

with the Rebellion. As I said before, you can look at this story as a great epilogue Episode 3 or a really good prologue to a series like Star Wars Rebels and the Original Trilogy. Too much time passes between Episode 3 and Episode 4, 19 years is a long time so of course, there's a lot going on and we need those stories that connect the Prequels to the Original Trilogy. It's true that if you want to tell a story about the rebellion, Star Wars Rebels is probably the best series for that, but the Obi-Wan Kenobi story is just as important as a connection to the past and to the future which will become the original trilogy.



Some Parts of Obi-Wan Kenobi Could Have Been Better....

Not every part of the Obi-Wan Kenobi series is great. Sure, 10-year-old feisty and fearless Leia is cute. She has some wonderful moments. Criticizing a 10-year-old Leia at this point is probably unnecessary as well. But one storyline that could have been better is with one of the Inquisitors. Star Wars fans got introduced to Inquisitors through Star Wars rebels. They're basically Darth Vader's henchmen who hunt down Jedi. It's also the first time we got to see the Grand Inquisitor in live-action and Rupert Friend did a great job as short-lived as his story was in Obi-Wan Kenobi. For Star Wars fans that were worried his story would be retconned after the second episode, don't worry he's still alive and you will see him in Star Wars Rebels, fans worried for nothing. However, fans were introduced to a new character by the name of Reva. The Third Sister Inquisitor who is looked down upon by the other Inquisitors. She's important because she is the one that hatches a plan to draw Kenobi out. She wants to capture Obi-Wan Kenobi because he's the big prize and it will incur favor with Lord Vader. She's an interesting character, dedicated, maniacal, powerful, and has all the makings to be a Sith Lord. Sadly, her story could have been delivered better, and unfortunately, it takes a back seat to the overall story of Obi-Wan Kenobi having to face Darth Vader. There's nothing wrong with having a villain experience a redemption Arc. It's obvious from the first episode that her character will have some kind of redemption because she is

so devoted to hunting down Jedi. It's a weak narrative because there's no mystery surrounding her redemption story. And, then you find out that she was once a former Padawan who barely escaped Anakin's wrath at the Jedi Temple. No one is really surprised that this is her past. So now her entire story is about revenge, she wants to get revenge on Darth Vader. She wants to be the one to kill Darth Vader, even to the point of drawing down on him when his back is turned as if he couldn't feel the danger or see through her obvious plan. Unfortunately, it was telegraphed and everybody knew what was going to happen, no surprises that she was not going to win. And even when she somehow survives, after hearing the message left for Obi-Wan from Bail Organa that mentions Luke on Tatooine, her first instinct is to hunt and kill the child out of revenge as if Darth Vader even knows about Luke.

It's lazy writing because someone who we are supposed to believe is still a Jedi but was only infiltrating the inquisitors to kill Vader, she turns to revenge and is willing to kill a child only to complete her redemption Arc by not doing it at the last minute and realizing that she is becoming the dark side version of Anakin Skywalker who killed children. While these scenes provide nice moments on Tatooine and give us some great moments with Owen and Beru Lars, all of this could have been done better. Why couldn't this part of the story be one of the other Inquisitors who hates her, hearing this message about a force-sensitive child and they go to Tatooine to hunt him down, then she arrives and saves the day. And to make that story even better, Owen Lars still finds out that she is looking for him and doesn't know who she really is, so he prepares to defend the homestead against her while not realizing that the other Inquisitors have come to harm Luke. If Reva shows up, kills the other Inquisitors, and then saves Luke, isn't that a much better Redemption Arc. Obi-Wan Kenobi can still feel Luke through the force and arrive on time only to find her battling the Inquisitors and sees Reva saving Luke. That's when he recognizes her redemption and with some clever dialogue, it makes it more emotional. The real problem about Reva's story is six episodes isn't enough time to really develop her story arc, it's done too quickly and we don't have time to emotionally connect to her and feel sympathetic to her past. If the Obi-Wan Kenobi series had been 8 to 10 full-hour episodes, even one episode could have been about her backstory becoming an Inquisitor thus showing her true intentions, this would have made her character better

The Obi-Wan Kenobi series is a good chapter in Star Wars, sure it has its problems. It's certainly not perfect and I don't think we as fans should have expected it to be. But most of the criticisms are unwarranted. Unfortunately, fans still expect too much from Star Wars. Fans expected to be just as good as the Original Trilogy and every show to live up to their memory as a child when they first fell in

love with Star Wars. We've talked about this before at That Nerd Show, nothing will ever be as good as the original trilogy and if you really look at those three movies, they're kind of silly in their own way. Yes, Empire Strikes Back is a Masterpiece, but it's not perfect. All we can really get from Star Wars is hopefully good stories that entertain us. They don't have to be as good as the Original Trilogy. Some may disagree but even the Mandalorian series is not as good. No matter how much we like any series that Dave Filoni has done from the Clone Wars to Star Wars Rebels, they're still not as good. Everything else is good enough. If we are entertained, then Star Wars has done its job. But to expect any Star Wars series to be perfect or just as good as the Star Wars from our childhood, it's just wishful thinking. What the Obi-Wan Kenobi series did was connect us from the Prequel Trilogy to the Original Trilogy and gave us a deeper story about iconic characters such as Obi-Wan, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, even Bail Organa. We understand these characters better during the rise of the Empire which will explain them better in Episode 4. And if you really think of it, the Obi-Wan Kenobi series sells a lot of mysteries in episode 4 in New Hope and even Episode 6. After seeing the final fight between Darth Vader and Obi-Wan Kenobi, we now know how Vader got the scar on top of his head. Obi-Wan cracks the left side of his helmet with his lightsaber and the cut was clearly so deep that not only did it crack the helmet, but it left a scar on the top of Vader's head. Maybe it didn't need an explanation, but how he got it is more interesting now making it a better narrative. As I explained before, we now know Leia's true connection to Ben or Obi-Wan Kenobi and why it's more personal and that's not a bad thing.



We find out how Luke ends up with the little ship that he's flying in episode 4 when he's cleaning up the droids, that's a nice callback. But there are other mysteries that add different layers to the story in Episode 4. When Grand Moff Tarkin blew up the planet Alderaan even after Leia told him the truth, all we see the first time we watch episode 4 is that he's a sadistic Imperial Officer. But there's meaning to

why he does it and shows his power over Princess Leia. We know that Bail Organa will be instrumental in the rebellion, it's easy to see how he is pulling the strings when it comes to things like stealing the Death Star plans, his own connection to Obi-Wan Kenobi, and why he trusts Leia so much with those stolen plans and why it's important to find Obi-Wan Kenobi again. There's a reason that Tarkin blows up Alderaan, strategically it's the right thing to do to help quell the rebellion with the Empire's new All-Powerful weapon. One of my favorite little nods to the original trilogy and Prequel trilogy is the gift that Obi-Wan Kenobi gives layout, the holster. Not only does it show where Leia will eventually learn her skills with a blaster, but it's also similar to The holster that her mother wore during the Clone Wars. It's a nice call back to how Leia is like Padme and then I'll be one explains how she is the best of both her mother and father. Another great explanation is how Luke knows of Ben Kenobi even if he doesn't know that he is a Jedi or his true connection to his father, but they have met before. Even though Obi-Wan Kenobi has a series is not perfect, it does make Episode 4 better. I will always love Episode 4 as a movie, it's my favorite right after Empire Strikes Back, but in the grand scheme of things, it's a very short movie. It's three short acts that allow the central characters of the original trilogy to meet each other and go off on their adventure, but there are a lot of unanswered questions.

If you watch it for the first time you have to take things with a grain of salt because there's a lot of history that isn't truly explained. Yes, the Prequel Trilogy and the Clone Wars explain a lot of it, but those are stories that simply tell the story of Obi-Wan and Anakin as great Jedi knights fighting during the Clone Wars and who Luke and Leia's mother really was with that story ending with Anakin's fault at the dark side. The first time you watch Episode 4, you're not exactly clear what Obi-Wan Kenobi is talking about when it comes to Vader betraying and murdering Luke's father, he's essentially talking in hyperbole. The Obi-Wan Kenobi series clears up a lot of mysteries that I think makes Episode 4 and the original trilogy a better story, even more than the Prequel Trilogy or the Clone Wars series ever did. But more importantly, we see two things that truly connected to the characters of Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader in episode 4. We see how Obi-Wan will become the Jedi that directs Luke on his hero's journey. We also see how the final remnants of Anakin Skywalker are gone and he has truly become Darth Vader. Both characters reconcile their past and become the characters we come to know.

Their final confrontation is important for shredding the skin of who they used to be in order to become who they will be by the time we get to Episode 4. Obi-Wan Kenobi has a series could have been done better, there could have been more episodes to add more layers to the story, and there's many different directions that the writers could have taken, but the truth is

every story could be done differently. Maybe there's things that make it better or there's things that make it worse. The Obi-Wan Kenobi series is good for what it is and adds a lot of emotional connection to the characters that we have grown up with in Star Wars. If nothing else that's why it was necessary to make this series and the Star Wars universe is better because we have this series. Of course, we are left to wonder what the series would have truly been if Jon Favreau and Dave Filoni had made it.... we like to think that it would have been better, but there's always the possibility that it could have been worse. Star Wars fans should enjoy this series for what it is because minor nitpicking doesn't make anything better. Maybe as a Star Wars fan, you'll never watch it again, but you have to admit, there are some really great scenes that have a fantastic connection to the Original Trilogy. Perhaps that's good enough! However, if that's not good enough to make you enjoy the series or watch it again then how about that awesome cameo with Qui-Gon Jinn. The Force ghost of Qui-Gon Jinn is one of the best things to ever happen in the Star Wars universe, am I wrong? It was great to see Liam Neeson suit up as the old Jedi again, even if it was just for nostalgia. Sometimes we just need that in the Star Wars universe. But it's also time to start exploring different stories like ones from the Old Republic or even the high Republic. As good as the Obi-Wan Kenobi series is, we don't need a season 2. We should say goodbye to Obi-Wan Kenobi and move on to other characters. And if you're not ready to say goodbye to Obi-Wan Kenobi, you can always go back and watch this series on Disney + as well as The Clone Wars, the Prequel Trilogy, and his fantastic episode in Star Wars Rebels. We have plenty of great Obi-Wan Kenobi stories without having to make more. His story is over and that is where LucasFilm should leave it. But for this 6 Part Series, if I have to give it a grade, it's a solid 8, Yes, it's that good!

#8 - Moon Knight

Review by Chloe James



Moon Knight was one of the most surprising shows of the year. It's only a limited series so we're not going to get a season 2, but do we

really need one! Starring Oscar Isaac as the Egyptian god/superhero, this limited series told the story of one of the minor Marvel characters. But it is a great way to introduce this particular character that we may see again. Marvel has been using these limited series on Disney Plus to tell the backstory of characters or do a continuation of their stories in between the movies for the streaming Channel. To be honest, we didn't know much about Moonknight and this was a great way to introduce the character. Plus it's not often that we have Ethan Hawke play a villain. With a great cast and spectacular action, this show proved to be one of the better shows of 2022.

As we have debated that there is too much superhero content and the market is oversaturated now with just average shows and movies that don't spark the same gravitas as the infinity war movies, this show added something unique. Oscar Isaac seems to have been born to play a superhero and Moonknight was perfect for him. He and Ethan Hawke pretty much carried the show and gave fans of Marvel stories something fresh that we desperately needed especially since phase 4 has been pretty lackluster in its storytelling. Maybe it's because this is the first time we've seen this particular character and let's face it origin stories always seem to be better when we don't know much about the characters, but bringing something fresh to audiences is what made the show be one of our top 10 shows of 2022. It's too bad that we won't get to see Oscar Isaac again unless this character pops up in a movie, but this six-episode limited series is worth the watch on Disney Plus.

#9 - Winning Time: Season 1

Review by Alex Moore



I have been a first-love basketball fan for almost 30 years now. I can recount the precise moment as if it just occurred yesterday. The beauty of accessing nostalgia through not just the brain, but also sites such as YouTube, makes it so easy to enjoy the past. Of course, it is not always chipper, either. Some moments are not as fun to relive, although they have just as much of a place in history as the good times. Do you ever wonder what it is like for those in the spotlight? Could it

be that those of greater fame AND infamy experience even greater emotions when they are faced with reliving the past? Well, where there is a will, there is a way...

November 7th, 1991 was a day marked by shock to the sports world. Earvin "Magic" Johnson announced his immediate retirement from professional basketball due to a recent test, which told him that he had come down with HIV. Although he made brief comebacks for: the NBA All-Star Game in 1992, the Barcelona Olympic Games that same summer and a short stint with the Los Angeles Lakers in 1996, his life was never really the same. However, I can think of few people who have conquered their challenges with greater dominance and I can say with complete conviction that his life after basketball has been every bit as successful, if not more successful, than at any other time in his life. I have said all that so I can now say this...

"Winning Time" is the latest offering from HBO and this channel has not lost its form. It opens with the news that Magic received, two days prior to his big announcement and then quickly flashes back to where it all began, for him: in the state of Michigan, during the late 1970s. Historically-speaking, he did something that has rarely, if ever, occurred. Try to imagine winning a championship at three, elite levels in successive years. First, the high school state championship; second, the NCAA Division 1 championship; third, the NBA world championship. Yes, it REALLY happened!

The strong casting begins with Quincy Isaiah as Magic Johnson. He looks like him and he portrays that trademark smile perfectly. Truthfully, though, the real star and focal point of the series, at least for now, is none other than John C. Reilly ("Licorice Pizza") as Jerry Buss. Yes, he has his looks and mannerisms down pat, as well, but he also provides emotional layers and context to the likes we have never seen anywhere else. I, personally, connected with Dr. Buss and felt an array of emotions as he traversed his first year of ownership with the storied Lakers franchise.

At this stage, I think I should mention that several of the real life people being portrayed in the show have criticized the authenticity and reliability of the details displayed. It is not surprising, but the show does not claim to be 100% accurate, either. It has long been the role of anyone in the process of making a show or movie to suspend reality or exaggerate facts in order to make things more interesting or entertaining for the viewing audience. Nothing has changed in that aspect, as far as I am concerned. That job, in this case, went to co-creators Max Borenstein ("Godzilla vs. Kong") and Jim Hecht, plus a bevy of additional writers and directors. That list includes: Adam McKay ("Don't Look Up"), Jonah Hill ("Richard Jewell"), Rodney Barnes ("Wu-Tang: An American Saga"), Damian Marcano, Tanya Hamilton ("Godfather of Harlem"), Payman Benz and Salli Richardson-Whitfield ("Playin' for Love"). Clearly, the talent was not just limited to the actors. I would be

remiss if I did not mention the stellar work by cinematographers Todd Banhazl and Mihai Malaimare Jr. ("The Harder They Fall") and the vast editing team, which includes Hank Corwin ("Vice").

The opening episode is very strong and entitled 'The Swan.' Right away, the style is established and it remains consistent throughout the season. As much as I know about the history of professional basketball, I was surprised to learn that there were still some things I did not know about some of these players and so forth. Of course, some of those details might not be historically accurate, but as Dr. Buss said, "Who's measuring?" Along with Magic and Dr. Buss, several, other primary characters are established early on: Jason Clarke ("Silk Road") as Jerry West, who comes across as an intense individual with a very short fuse; Sally Field ("Little Evil") as Jessie Buss. She is the matriarch of the Buss family; Adrien Brody ("The French Dispatch") as Pat Riley, which seems like an odd choice on paper, but actually fits nicely in action; Gaby Hoffman ("C'mon C'mon") as Claire Rothman, a stubborn and enterprising secretary. That leaves us with Jason Segel ("Windfall") as Paul Westhead, Hadley Robinson ("Moxie") as Jeanie Buss, DeV Vaughn Nixon ("Prom") as Norm Nixon and Tracy Letts ("Ford v Ferrari") as Jack McKinney.



By the time I finished the second episode, 'Is That All There Is?', it was obvious, to me, that this series would be more about the behind-closed-doors side of basketball and less about the actual game, on the court. I sensed a drop off from the opening episode, which was about as good as a debut can get, but from there, it was, pretty much, all uphill.

'The Good Life' introduced a side of the legendary broadcaster Chick Hearn, played by Spencer Garrett ("Survival Skills"), that I never would have expected before. I, also, thought that he sounded more like Brent Mussburger, personally. The cuts between modern film and vintage film have, as well, become very prevalent and I question if they need to be there as often as they are. Regardless, the engaging story arcs and casting choices continue to impress. With the following episode being directed by the same person, I would like to clump them together and point out that this might well be the strongest two

episodes in the series. The rest of the basketball team is coming along, including the likes of Solomon Hughes (in his acting debut) and Delante Desouza as Michael Cooper, who happens to be my favorite player of the "Showtime" era. I could not help but be intrigued by his presence and arc within the show. One other thing: I wonder if anyone else thinks that Coach McKinney is starting to sound like Herb Brooks. It was around the same time as the "Miracle on Ice," so who knows?

The following two episodes are 'Pieces of a Man' and 'Memento Mori.' There is nothing bad here, but nothing astounding, either. Continuity is key for a series and these two parts do that job just fine. I was eager to learn more about the real Kareem and I think there is much we STILL do not know. As you might know, he was born Lew Alcindor and changed his name when he converted to Islam during the early 1970s. I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction between he and his Imam, which shed some light on the real man, even if it was not something that truly took place. I would add that often times what we fear is from the unknown. If you allow yourself to get to know someone or something, you might find that it is not as scary as you imagined. As we get to know Dr. Buss and Magic a bit better, we see that they were connected by their love for their Moms and their undying lust for women. The new coach, Westhead, seems to lack the where-with-all to be an NBA coach and relies upon unorthodox phrases to get his messages across to his players. I wonder, again... did Michael Jordan make it big with Nike in the mid-1980s because Magic turned them down for Converse, or what?

If I were to pick another, strong set of episodes, to compete with the former, it would be these two. 'Invisible Man' draws upon the inner workings and influence of Coach Riley before he was the head man. He had a drive and assertiveness that Westhead seemed to lack. It becomes clear that Magic and Larry Bird, played by Sean Patrick Small, were most definitely keeping an eye on each other's games and looking to one-up each other at every opportunity. Bird probably was not quite this outspoken, but for effect, it is fun to see unfold. The attention to detail on clothing from the period and the recreation of the famed Boston Garden are spectacular. By Episode 8, 'California Dreaming,' I was fully enthralled with the primary characters and their outlooks on life, especially for Dr. Buss. I found it inspiring and

relatable. Perhaps, some of you will, too. All I will add is that you remember to be good to your mother.

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The series closes out well with the 1979-80 NBA season unfolding in a familiar way for any basketball fan or historian. If you never knew about what happened to Spencer Haywood, played by Wood Harris ("Space Jam: A New Legacy"), it is tragic, to say the least, but can certainly be chalked up as an "acceptable loss." However, he laid the foundation seeking new avenues for many other basketball players who came after he did and they each owe him a debt of gratitude, including Jordan, by the way. 'Promised Land' ends the season and begins with a truly brilliant sequence. I cannot say enough about the way the basketball games were conveyed in this show. I did not know the process of how things closed for Magic, either, and I can only wonder if that is the truth, or not.

Truthfully, I was able to get past the criticism of the real-life people and just enjoy the series for what it is: a very good, if not great show. I will be awaiting the future award season with some interest and fully expect to see some accolades coming this way. I have never seen John C. Reilly give a better performance and the cinematography is really top-notch. Maybe some of the details are repetitive, at times, but the purpose for them is sensical, in my view, and I look forward to what season two can bring us, which has been confirmed, already. I do not expect things to continue to be as great, but I will be more than curious and it is all because of how well things started out.

10 - Wednesday: Season 1
Review by Julie Jones



I have always loved the Addams family. I will admit that I could never get passed Christina Ricci as Wednesday, and once I considered a recast for Gomez and Morticia I found I couldn't imagine anyone besides them, either. Still, you never know if you love something until you give it a try! The series is about Wednesday Addams being sent away to the same school Morticia and Gomez met at, hoping it will better cater to her eccentricities. But, of course, that would be too easy. And we not only learn a lot about the school but about the Addams family and Wednesday herself. The storyline was good, but not the best I had ever seen. It was tweedy, but not so much that an adult would be over it before the end of the first episode.

The film direction is nothing new, but it was done well. The acting was pretty good, though it wasn't anything exceptional to me. Although it has a Harry Potter feel to it, which is cool. In fact, if you like the Harry Potter movies, then you'll probably like Wednesday. Jenna Ortega was awesome in the title role! Overall, I thought it was ok. I wouldn't recommend watching it if it doesn't seem interesting to you. But, if it does then you will either find it acceptable or enjoy it. There doesn't seem to be much chance of you hating it if this is your thing. And I am being honest, it's a Harry Potter movie told from a Slytherin point of view, which is a cool way to tell a story. This is why Wednesday makes out Top 10 shows of the year.

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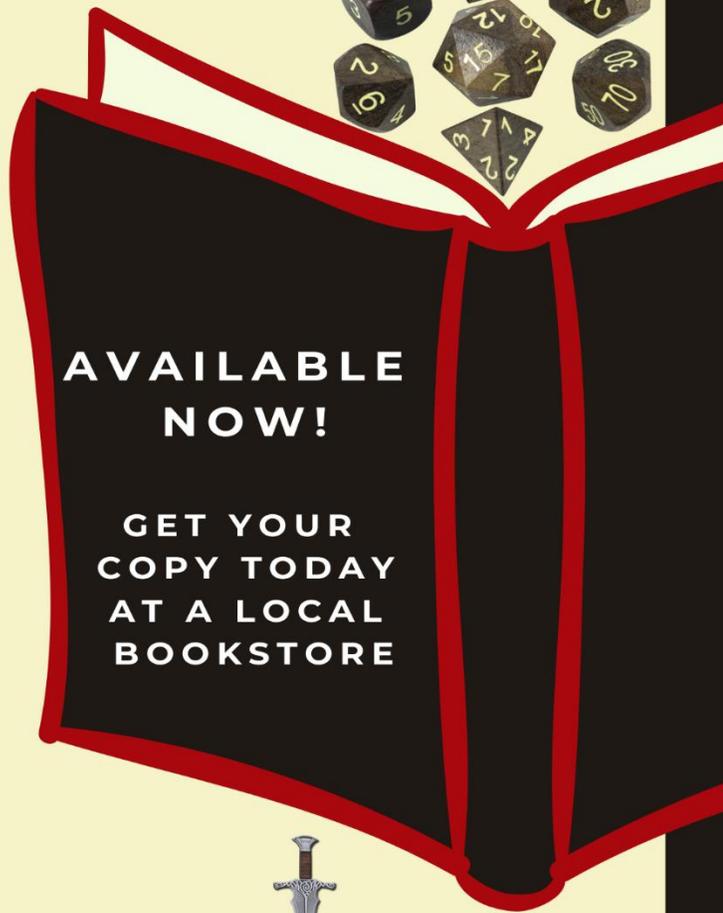


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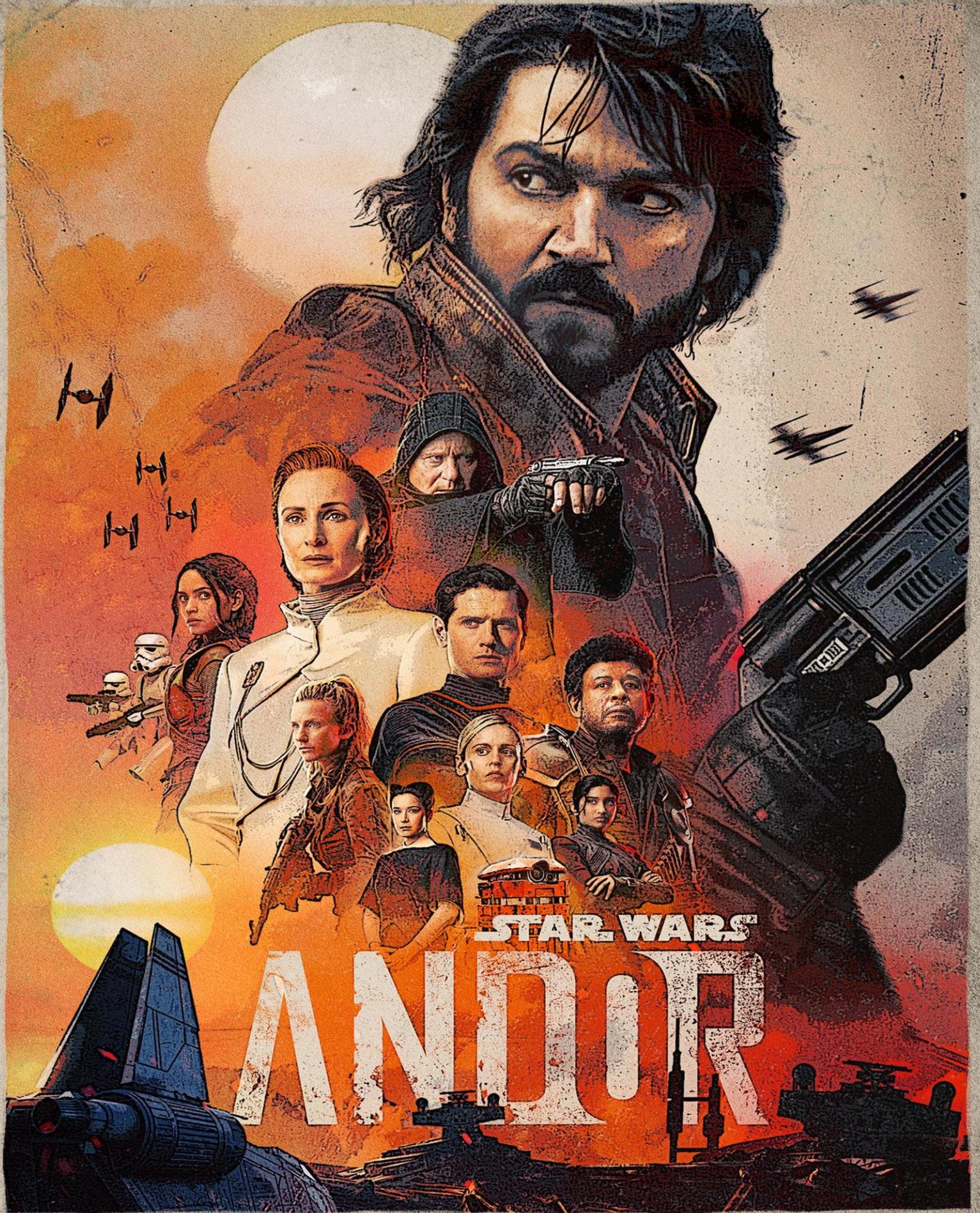
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GAMING NEWS

PlayStation Plus Monthly Games for January 2023

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Today we're happy to reveal the PlayStation Plus Monthly Games for January. Escape the Empire's clutches in single player adventure *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*, head into the wastelands with friends in online RPG *Fallout 76* and enjoy platforming action in *Axiom Verge 2*. All three titles will be available to PlayStation Plus Essential, Extra and Premium members on Tuesday, January 3. The PlayStation Plus Extra and Premium lineups for January will be announced soon. Let's take a closer look at the Monthly Games lineup.

Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order | PS4, PS5

Cal Kestis' story begins here. Ahead of *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* launching in March, find out how Cal Kestis' journey began in this original *Star Wars* story from Respawn Entertainment. Following the events of Episode III: *Revenge of the Sith* and Senator Palpatine's deadly Order 66 —

designed to destroy the Jedi order and pave the way for the Empire to rise — you are the last remaining Jedi Padawan and their last hope of survival. Pick up the pieces of your shattered past and complete your Jedi training, develop powerful Force abilities and master your Lightsaber on your quest to rebuild the Jedi. Fight to stay one step ahead of the Empire and its deadly Inquisitors, use your Jedi training to strategically approach every fight, and visit far-flung corners of the *Star Wars* galaxy, packed with new characters, creatures, enemies and droid.

Fallout 76 | PS4

Twenty-five years after the bombs fell, you and your fellow Vault Dwellers—chosen from the nation's best and brightest — emerge into post-nuclear America on Reclamation Day, 2102. Play solo or join together as you explore, quest, build, and triumph against the wasteland's greatest

threats. Explore a vast wasteland, devastated by nuclear war, in this open-world multiplayer addition to the *Fallout* story. Experience the largest, most dynamic world ever created in the legendary *Fallout* universe.

Axiom Verge 2 | PS4, PS5

Explore two connected worlds, wield ancient tech and question reality in this explorative platformer sequel, which expands on the universe with completely new characters, abilities and gameplay. Explore an alternate Earth-like world, replete with the ruins of an ancient, high-tech civilization. Hack machines, battle monsters and use your remote drone to enter the Breach, a parallel but connected reality that is filled with its own dangers. You'll want to search every inch for the hidden items and upgrades you need to survive

Darkwood, a Critically Acclaimed Survival Horror, is Now Available on Xbox Series X|S!



Darkwood, a new perspective on survival horror with no jumpscare, is now available on Xbox Series X|S. The cult classic indie game has been enhanced to utilize the full power of the console. Players who have already owned the game on Xbox One can [upgrade their version for free!](#) The game plays smoothly in native 4K resolution, and the players who have enjoyed the game previously on Xbox One are able to safely transfer their save files into the new version. Created by Acid Wizard Studio, a small 3-person team, the title has been brought to all major platforms by the console veterans from Crunching Koalas.

About Darkwood

Craft weapons, prepare traps, fortify hideouts—players explore and scavenge the eerie forests of the Soviet Bloc by day, then hunker down in their hideout at night. With nightmarish forces corrupting the woods, waiting—and praying—for the sun to come up the next morning. The world of

Darkwood is procedurally-generated, the locations and events will vary for each play-through and player. There's no linear path in these woods, and each decision will impact the players—and the inhabitants—of Darkwood.

Xbox Series X|S version was enhanced with:

- Native 4k resolution
- Xbox One save file import

Key Game Features:

- **Horror without jumpscare:** Darkwood is an atmospheric, psychological horror that creates a feeling of tension without the usual horror tricks. No creaking doors here!
- **Day and night cycle:** explore the world during the day and try to survive the night by hiding from evil forces in your shelter.
- **Randomly generated map and events:** the world will not change during your adventure with Darkwood, but it will vary for each play-through and each player.
- **Crafting:** scavenge for materials to create weapons, traps, health potions or your hideout upgrades.
- **Skills and perks:** learn new powers by extracting a strange essence from mutated

fauna and flora, and injecting it into your bloodstream.

- **No hand holding:** test your skills and figure things out on your own!
- **Impactful decisions:** decide on the world of Darkwood, its inhabitants and the story you experience.

Additional information:

- Xbox

Store: https://bit.ly/Darkwood_XboxSeriesXS_Store

- Press

Pack: https://bit.ly/DarkwoodXboxSeriesXS_PressPack

-

Trailer: https://bit.ly/DarkwoodXboxSeriesXS_TrailerYT

- Developer: [@TheAcidWizard](#)

- Publisher: [Crunching Koalas](#)

About Acid Wizard Studio

Acid Wizard Studio is a small independent studio from Warsaw, Poland, consisting of 3 people. The team was able to develop Darkwood thanks to a successful Indiegogo campaign which raised over \$57,000.

FB: <http://fb.com/AcidWizardStudio>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TheAcidWizard>

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Complete Edition Slays Its Way onto Next Gen!



CD PROJEKT RED announces the launch of the next-gen version of The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Complete Edition, now available as a digital download on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, Steam, GOG, and the Epic Games Store. Harnessing the power of next-gen hardware, the updated version of CD PROJEKT RED's trilogy-concluding role-playing epic comes as a free download for owners of the original release of the game, featuring a wide variety of visual and performance improvements.

These include real-time ray tracing for PC, Performance and Ray Tracing modes on PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X, and Performance and Quality modes on Xbox Series S, support for DLSS on PC and AMD FidelityFX Super Resolution across all next-gen platforms, faster loading times, and more. Furthermore, the next-gen version introduces content and quality of life additions: items and quest inspired by the The Witcher Netflix show, new camera options, quick Sign casting, Photo Mode, cross-platform progression, map and UI tweaks, a selection of community-created mods integrated into the experience — among many others. The Complete Edition also comes with all previously released content for The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt — the award-winning Hearts of Stone & Blood and Wine expansions, as well as 16 pieces of extra content.

The PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions of The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt have also received a new update today. It introduces a selection of the numerous quality of life additions coming to next

gen — more information can be found in the official patch notes. It will also come with all the new content inspired by Netflix's The Witcher — new swords and armor for Geralt, alternative looks for Dandelion and Nilfgaardian armor, as well as a brand new quest. This update is also coming to Nintendo Switch at a later date.

The next-gen version of The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Complete Edition is available for PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, and PC. Gamers who previously purchased any version of the title for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC can upgrade to the next-gen update for free via an update. A dedicated next-gen release for the game is also available for purchase digitally via PlayStation Store and Microsoft Store, with a disc version releasing at a later date.

For more information on The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Complete Edition and The Witcher series of games, visit the official website, as well as follow the game on Facebook and Twitter.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: REMAKE LIMIDEAD EDITION IS NOW AVAILABLE ON PLAYSTATION 4!



Forever Entertainment and Microïds are delighted to announce the release of The House of the Dead: Remake Limidead Edition today on PlayStation 4. Developed by MegaPixel Studio, The House of the Dead: Remake offers players around the world the joy to discover or rediscover this timeless arcade classic from SEGA!

Limidead edition content:

- Copy of the game *The House of the Dead: Remake*
- An exclusive box with lenticular
- Two character stands
- Sticker sheet

About The House of the Dead Remake

Shoot creatures like in the 90's with the remake of this cult arcade shooting game! Renowned biochemist and geneticist, Dr Roy Curien is obsessed by his lifetime project of discovering the nature of life and death. When he finally succeeds, it's time for his former colleague Sophie Richards to ask for the help of her friends at AMS; Thomas Rogan and agent G. Their mission is simple, end the doctor's macabre project and save all the employees of the lab. Play solo or with a friend and shoot hordes of undead and nightmare creatures in this fantastically gory and shameless arcade shooter!

- A state of the art remake with upgraded graphics, audio and new game modes for this arcade hit released in 1997!
- Solo and multiplayer.
- Nonstop action!
- Unlock the full monster encyclopedia to learn about them and their weaknesses.

House of the Dead: Remake Limidead Edition is now available on PlayStation 4. the

Xbox version will be available in January 2023!

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About Microïds

Microïds is a French video game publisher. Founded in 1985, Microïds' editorial strategy now focuses on 4 major areas: adventure games, racing games, retro gaming and games inspired by iconic titles. By collaborating with renowned studios and authors (Revolution Software, Pendulo Studios, Eden Studios, Benoît Sokal, Paul Cuisset, Philippe Dessoly and Pierre Adane), Microïds has become a major player in international video games. Taking inspiration from legendary titles, Microïds reaches a wide audience and creates original adventures which give gamers the chance to play as some of their most beloved characters.

WARHAMMER 40,000: DARKTIDE IS OUT NOW



Today independent developer Fatshark is proud to release the 4 Player co-op game Warhammer 40,000: Darktide on PC via Steam, Microsoft Store, and also through PC Game Pass and GeForce Now.

The Wait is Over. Welcome to Tertium

Darktide is Fatshark's love letter to the world of Warhammer 40,000 and all of the players that want to play in it. Enter the sprawling hive city of Tertium and slowly uncover its mysteries with your three teammates. There will be no reinforcements. There is no help – you are the last line of defense. Suffer together or die alone as rejects rise.

Your Character. Your Playstyle

Choose your class, and create your unique character with everything from hair, clothes, and tattoos to attitude and voice. Pick the weapon of

your choice to match your playstyle and create your perfect team.

The Future is Bright in the Grim Dark World

Launch is just the beginning. As players have experienced during the pre-launch beta, the desire to listen to feedback, improve and add to the game is paramount to the future of Darktide. The game will evolve and grow for years to come, with more frequent quality of life updates and a planned quarterly seasonal service model.

Devoted Rejects Pack

All owners of Vermintide or Vermintide 2 that purchase Darktide will receive the Devoted Rejects Pack for free on November 30. The pack consists of five unique facial customization cosmetics and tattoos that are inspired by the Vermintide heroes.

Warhammer 40,000: Darktide is available on PC today, with two versions available for purchase.

Warhammer 40,000: Darktide (\$39,99)

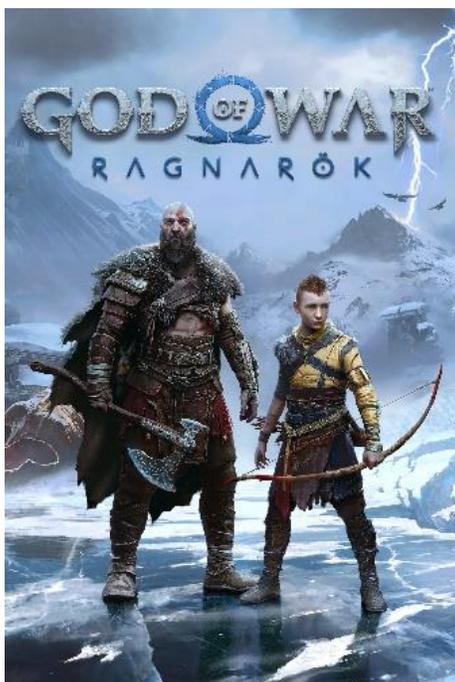
- **The Atoman Star Weapon Trinket:** A cosmetic weapon trinket awarded to those who answered in the hour of Atoma's need.
- **Vanguard of the Imperium Portrait Frame:** A cosmetic portrait frame reserved for those first to enter the fray and last to leave it.

- **The Warhammer 40,000: Darktide – Imperial Edition (\$59,99)**
- **Loyalist Pack:** Purge heresy in style with these 4 unique class outfits, 8 weapon skin patterns, one headgear, and an Ogryn body tattoo.
- **Mortis Veteran Portrait Frame:** A cosmetic portrait frame used to pay tribute to the fallen defenders of Tertium Hive.
- **Caducades Backpack:** A cosmetic backpack for human characters. Scavenged from the fallen troops of Cadia, this backpack has been repurposed to serve those still alive and fighting.
- **2500 Aquilas** (premium currency)
- **The Atoman Star Weapon Trinket:** A cosmetic weapon trinket awarded to those who answered in the hour of Atoma's need.
- **Vanguard of the Imperium Portrait Frame:** A cosmetic portrait frame reserved for those first to enter the fray and last to leave it.
- **Warhammer 40,000: Darktide Soundtrack** by Jesper Kyd (Steam Only)
Buy on Steam

TOP 10 GAMES OF 2022

Check out That Nerd Show's "Game of the Year!"

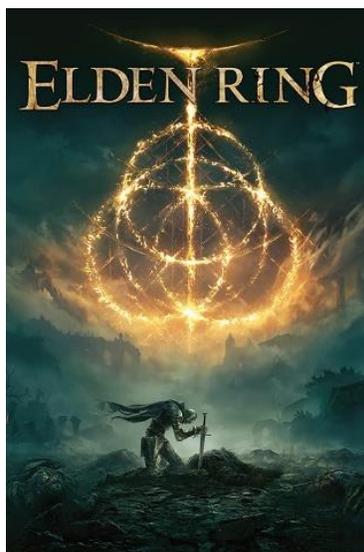
#1 God of War: Ragnarök – "GAME OF THE YEAR"



"From Santa Monica Studio comes the sequel to the critically acclaimed God of War (2018), the synopsis begins. "Fimbulwinter is well underway. Kratos and Atreus must journey to each of the Nine Realms in search of answers as Asgardian forces prepare for a prophesied battle that will end the world. "Along the way they will explore stunning, mythical landscapes, and face fearsome enemies in the form of Norse gods and monsters. The threat of Ragnarök grows ever closer. Kratos and Atreus must choose between their own safety and the safety of the realms."



#2 Elden Ring



The basics of the Elden Ring story are that the Lands Between were blessed by the Greater Will (a type of unknowable god obsessed with Order over Chaos), who sent down the Elden Ring – a magical object that changed the Lands Between according to its whims. The Elden Ring was housed within a giant, golden, spectral tree known as the Erdtree. With this power, the Erdtree was able to bless the land and its inhabitants with the grace of the Elden Ring, creating an incredibly orderly reality. The Lands Between were ruled over by Queen Marika the Eternal, a being chosen by the Greater Will, who acted as a guardian and keeper of the Elden Ring and had numerous children. She also purposefully altered it and removed the Rune of Destined Death, making anybody under the Grace of the Elden Ring immortal. All people were affected in this way, but the Elden Ring and Erdtree seemed to reject some of them, marking them as Tarnished who were sent into exile. They still couldn't die, but they had been marked as unworthy in some way.

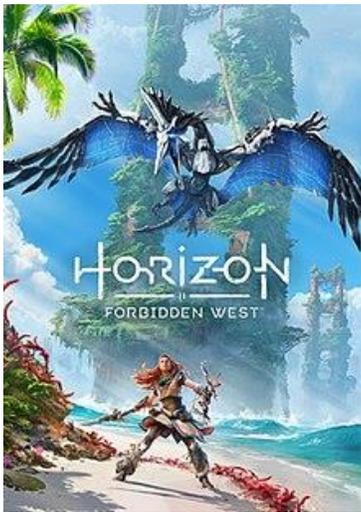
Marika had two husbands at different times during her rule: Godfrey, who became Tarnished himself and went into exile, then Radagon, the mysterious red-haired warrior. Both of these men became Elden Lords and gained much divine power through this union with Marika - in fact, while Marika is a supremely powerful being, her consorts, aka the

Elden Lords, seem to be almost as powerful as she is. However, the Elden Ring was later shattered into multiple Great Runes after an event called the Night of the Black Knives, where a clan of mysterious assassins killed several of Marika's demigod children. Among the surviving demigods, a terrible war broke out called the Shattering, caused when somebody attacked the Elden Ring and damaged it, altering reality further and compromising the Greater Will's vision of the world. Marika disappeared without warning and has not been seen since, with no clue or understanding by the wider world as to where she went.

The end result of the war was a stalemate between numerous factions - many grand demigods have Great Runes scavenged from the damaged Elden Ring, but none have properly risen to power to either replace Marika (which certain powerful demigods known as Emphyreans can do) or become the next consort, aka a new Elden Lord (which anybody could do). This pointless middle ground caused the Elden Ring's blessing to partially fade from the Lands Between, and centuries later, the Tarnished are being called back by the Erdtree to try and break the stalemate. The Greater Will doesn't like this tepid state of affairs, and by failing to rise to power, all the existing demigods have kind of proven why they're not worthy of becoming Lords, or even new Emphyrean vessels to replace Marika. And you're one of these lowly Tarnished. Elden Ring sees you play as an initially meaningless character in a world of monsters and demigods, all struggling for control over the Lands Between. It's your job to explore the world, grow in strength, and fight or ally with those you meet to bring about a new order by collecting the Great Runes. In doing so, you have a chance to repair the Elden Ring and become the new Elden Lord, changing the world to reflect the ideals and desires of whatever side you're working with.

Of course, there's a lot more to the story than that. Like previous FromSoftware titles, Elden Ring's story is shrouded in mystery, and part of your job is to piece together cryptic information from the environment, items you find, and characters you meet around the world to learn more about the bigger picture.

#3 Horizon Forbidden West



Horizon Forbidden West continues the story of Aloy half a year after the events of the *Zero Dawn*, a young huntress of the Nora tribe sent on a quest to a mysterious frontier spanning Utah to the Pacific coast to find the source of a mysterious plague that kills all it infects. On her journey across the uncharted lands of the Forbidden West, she encounters hostile regions filled with natural threats and ravaged by massive storms, dangerous enemies and deadly machines, both new and old. As Aloy attempts to explore the wider and deeper parts of the Forbidden West, she discovers a vast array of diverse environmental ecosystems, including lush valleys, dry deserts, snowy mountains, tropical beaches and ruined cities, both above and below the water.

"The land is dying. Vicious storms and an unstoppable blight ravage the scattered remnants of humanity, while fearsome new machines prowl their borders. Life on Earth is hurtling towards another extinction, and no one knows why. It's up to Aloy to uncover the secrets behind these threats and restore order and balance to the world. Along the way, she must reunite with old friends, forge alliances with warring new factions and unravel the legacy of the ancient past – all the while trying to stay one step ahead of a seemingly undefeatable new enemy. Uncover the secret behind Earth's imminent collapse and unlock a hidden chapter in the ancient past... one that will change Aloy forever."



#4 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's Revenge



Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Donatello, along with April O'Neil and master Splinter are watching the news on TV when it is interrupted by Bebop, who announces the Foot has returned and is taking over the Statue of Liberty. The turtles go to the Channel 6 building and find Bebop with the head of Krang's android body, but it is taken away while they were fighting Bebop. The team fight Foot operatives and other adversaries while pursuing Krang, finding other parts of his body being reconstructed. Their chase leads them to Dimension X, where they fight their way through the destroyed Technodrome, until they eventually reach their enemy's lair in Dimension X and face Shredder and Krang in his new body. This is a decoy to get them away from New York while they are turning the Statue of Liberty into the Statue of Tyranny, a robot controlled by Krang. The Turtles return to New York and defeat Krang and Super Shredder.

After the battle, the heroes return to their lair and watch the news as the city is being restored, but are disappointed to see that the credit goes to the Punk Frogs. That night the Turtles along with April, Splinter and Casey Jones celebrate their victory with pizza.



#5 Stray



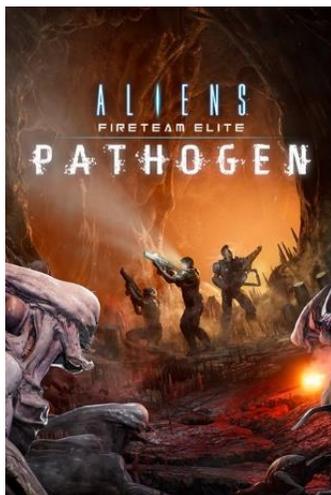
Lost, alone and separated from family, a stray cat must untangle an ancient mystery to escape a long-forgotten city. Stray is a third-person cat adventure game set amidst the detailed, neon-lit alleys of a decaying cybercity and the murky environments of its seedy underbelly. Roam surroundings high and low, defend against unforeseen threats and solve the mysteries of this unwelcoming place inhabited by curious droids and dangerous creatures. See the world through the eyes of a cat and interact with the environment in playful ways. Be stealthy, nimble, silly, and sometimes as annoying as possible with the strange inhabitants of this mysterious world. Along the way, the cat befriends a small flying drone, known only as B-12. With the help of this newfound companion, the duo must find a way out. Stray is developed by BlueTwelve Studio, a small team from the south of France mostly made up of cats and a handful of humans.

#6 LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga



LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga is a third-person action-adventure with an open world hub built in a brand-new engine. You are able to play through all nine films but none of the others such as *Rogue One*, *The Clone Wars*, and *Solo*, however, *Rogue One* and *Solo* characters are in DLC packs. Unlike previous *LEGO* games in which players had to advance through the story in a linear order, players can now choose to start the game from any of the main *Skywalker Saga* trilogies and complete them in any order they wish. Each episode has their own hub filled with planets featured prominently in each respective film that can be visited and explored. Each episode has five story missions each, a total of 45 levels. Once you have completed an episode you can replay the story of said episode in free play. There is also a free mode option which allows you to explore all of the hubs with any character you like.

#7 Aliens: Fireteam Elite: Pathogen – “Shooter of the Year”



The *Aliens: Fireteam Elite - Pathogen* DLC has arrived! Continue the AFE story with new environments, maps, cosmetics and a campaign that puts the crew of the *Endeavor* into their most perilous mission yet. A mysterious pathogen has evolved in the wilds of planet LV-895 and not even Xenomorphs are safe from its ravages. The crew of the *Endeavor* must venture into uncharted lands and face terrifying new enemies if they hope to discover the source of this mysterious new threat. The mysterious pathogen is mutating Xenomorphs and local wildlife on planet LV-895. It's up to you and your fireteam to battle through a slew of mutated enemies and eliminate the source of the corruption. The *Pathogen* expansion brings all new environments, maps, weapons, and more to the AFE experience. Explore Engineer ruins around the mystery of the infection, delve deep into enemy hives, and avoid the deadly hazards around each corner. Do you have what it takes to survive?

#8 Pokémon Scarlet and Pokémon Violet



In *Scarlet* and *Violet*, the player attends either the Naranja or Uva Academy. The academy has an annual "Treasure Hunt", in which students are encouraged to seek something they treasure by exploring the region. After encountering either the legendary Pokémon Koraidon or Miraidon, who joins and assists the player despite having lost its ability to battle, the player is encouraged to participate in three stories: *Victory Road*, *Starfall Street*, and *Path of Legends*.¹

In *Victory Road*, Nemona—the Champion-ranked trainer that rivals the player, frequently battling them throughout their journey—asks that they complete all eight of the Paldea region's Pokémon Gyms. After they defeat the leaders of each Gym, they can reach Champion rank by defeating the region's Elite Four and Top Champion Geeta. After becoming Champion rank, Nemona challenges the player to a final battle.

Starfall Street begins after the player helps the shy schoolgirl Penny stand up against Team Star, a group responsible for academy bullying, when Cassiopeia—the founder of Team Star and a secret identity of Penny—enlists them into "Operation Starfall", which aims to force Team Star to disband by defeating all five of its squad bosses, stripping them of their authority within the group. They are assisted by academy director Clavell, who is aiming to discover Team Star's origins while disguised as a student named Clive, and Penny, who wants to monitor the player in-person in addition to guiding them as Cassiopeia. They learn that Team Star was founded to counter bullying rather than cause it, and them confronting their bullies two years prior caused the bullies to drop out and several academy staff members to resign. After defeating all squad bosses, Penny meets the player in the schoolyard to reveal her identity and challenge them to a battle. After her defeat, Clavell removes his disguise and offers peace with Team Star, though he subjects its members to community service as punishment for several violations.

Arven, aiming to locate the five legendary Herba Mystica, asks the player to join them in the *Path of Legends* story. To obtain each Herba Mystica, the player and Arven must team up to defeat a "Titan Pokémon"—a large Pokémon powered up by the Herba Mystica. Arven wishes to use the Herba Mystica to restore the health of his pet Mabsostiff, who was injured by a Pokémon in Area Zero—the workplace of his parent, either Professor Sada or Turo. After defeating all five Titans and restoring the health of Mabsostiff and regaining Koraidon/Miraidon's lost powers, Arven and the player are called by the professor to go to Area Zero with either the *Scarlet* or *Violet* Book. However, Arven decides that they must recruit further allies before journeying to Area Zero.

After choosing Nemona and Penny for assistance, Arven and the player set out towards the Zero Lab, the professor's laboratory in Area Zero. Inside, they encounter Paradox Pokémon—biological relatives of extant Pokémon from either the ancient past or far future. After reaching the laboratory, the professor reveals themselves to be an AI substitute of the true professor, who was killed in a laboratory incident some time ago. The AI reveals that the original professor created a time machine to retrieve Paradox Pokémon and that the AI is to maintain it at all costs. The AI urges the player to shut down the time machine, though is forced by its programming to battle the player. After initially being defeated, the AI leaves the player with no option except for their Koraidon or Miraidon to defeat the AI's own. This causes the time machine to fail, and the AI travels to the alternate time to allow for the machines destruction, though apologizes to Arven for the professor neglecting him as a child before departing. Returning to the academy, Nemona, Clavell, and Geeta organize a Pokémon battling tournament between faculty and students. After evaluating all previous Gyms, the player emerges victorious in the tournament.

#9 FIFA 23 “Sports Game of the Year”



FIFA 23 is a football simulation video game published by Electronic Arts. It is the 30th installment in the *FIFA* series that is developed by EA Sports, and the final installment under the *FIFA* banner, and released worldwide on 30 September 2022 for PC, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S and Google Stadia. Kylian Mbappe is the cover athlete for the standard edition and legacy edition Kylian Mbappe and Sam Kerr are the cover athletes for the ultimate edition. Listed in Guinness World Records as the best-selling sports video game franchise in the world, the game is the final under the 29-year partnership between EA and FIFA. Future football games by EA are set to be named under the banner of *EA Sports FC*.^[3]

#10 Fortnite: Season 4



IN FORTNITE CHAPTER 3 SEASON 4: PARADISE, A MYSTERIOUS SUBSTANCE HAS APPEARED ON THE ISLAND. CHROME WILL CONSUME ALL, CHROME WILL BE ALL. EMBRACE THE CHROME BY TURNING STRUCTURES CHROME, MAKING YOURSELF CHROME, AND PROVING THE POWER OF CHROME WEAPONS. NOT EVEN WOOD, STONE, BRICK, OR METAL IS A MATCH FOR CHROME. AN ENEMY BUILT A STRUCTURE FOR DEFENSE? THROW A CHROME SPLASH AT THE WALLS TO MAKE THE WALLS PENETRABLE — JUMP RIGHT THROUGH THE BUILDING AND GET THE DROP ON YOUR OPPONENT!

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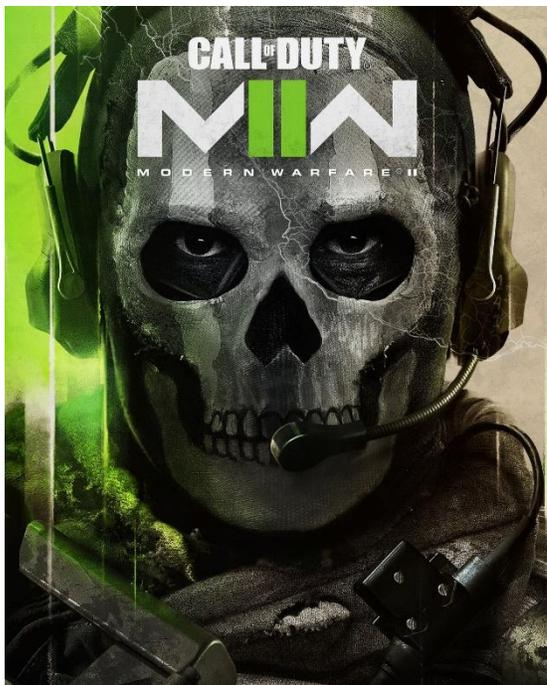


A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SQUAD LEADER!

By Omri Uí Néill

CALL OF DUTY MODERN WARM FARTS 2

“The Worst Call of Duty Game Every Made!”



Well, there is no kind way to put this Gamers, Activision tried to F@\$k one last time before Microsoft comes in to clean house. Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2 is by far the worst game to come out this year for games that fit into the barely work bracket of gaming. Now normally I do a bullet point break down of why something sucks but it Activision is going to release a 25% game than I'm only giving them the respect of a brief rant, So they didn't even really come up with anything new from the Original release of MW2 in the early 2000's, google it you will be sad you paid money for this disgusting sham of game title. Oh, wait they brought Soap in and.... Blah bah blah, Ghost is a loser compared to how he was originally seen in the original release and yeah he doesn't die, but WTF do I care about because he is just another limey doing the Queen's work. Speaking of the Queen's work why is it that the good guys are the British, CIA, and Mexican Special forces. The later of the three I am actually overjoyed and made for a few enjoyable moments slogging through the slimiest shit smear of a campaign I have seen since playing Army Man 3D from the 90's. Apparently the hire on real Military Veterans at Activision, but apparently all of them work in getting coffee or doing taxes rather than having any real say in how things look and work in these games. Campaign sucks with a capital F@*k myself in the eye with a screwdriver "F".

So whats next? The Horrible and I mean Horrible! Multiplayer that was so Gods awful bad that I almost walked out the door to join the Amish, yeah thats absolutely right! A multiplayer function so stale and boring, it almost made me forget my love of drugs, sex, and Rock'in Roll, had the clippers in my hand for a fresh bowl cut and a clean lip after paying the same 3 maps in any play mode they offered, but you know what they didn't forget?! All those BullSh!t micro transactions for stupid hero skins and crap in season passes, so save yourself the hassle and the heartburn, just don't play it.

Playing this game left me with the overwhelming need to give myself rot gut from drink the juice at the bottom of a baseball stadium dumpster in July, I would rather vomit and uncontrollably shit in my pants before I touch another Call of Duty game again in the next 10 years, just let it DIE!

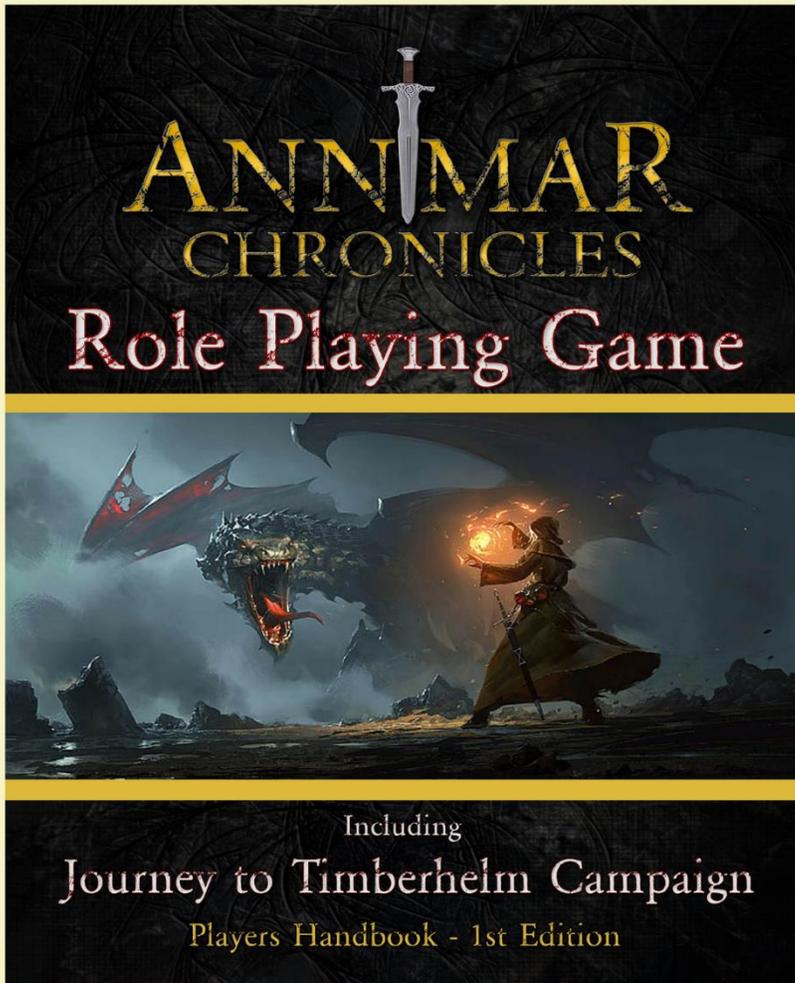
GOD OF WAR

RAGNARÖK



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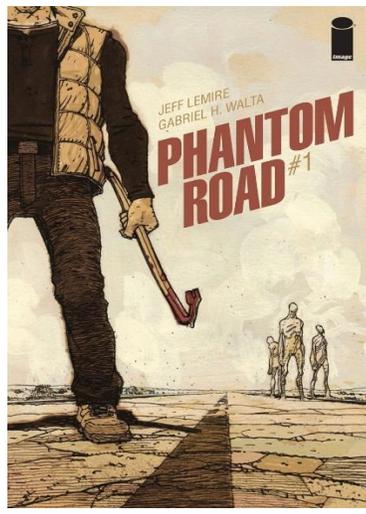


IN STORES NOW!



COMIC BOOK NEWS

PHANTOM ROAD: JEFF LEMIRE & GABRIEL WALTA GO FULL THROTTLE IN UPCOMING GRINDHOUSE HORROR SERIES COMING THIS MARCH



Eisner Award winning creator Jeff Lemire (*The Bone Orchard Mythos*, *Little Monsters*) and Eisner Award winning artist

Gabriel Hernández Walta (*The Vision*, *Hellboy and the B.P.R.D.: Old Man Whittier*) reunite after their *Sentient* success with a bold new series titled, *Phantom Road*. The grindhouse horror/fantasy mashup will hit shelves in March 2023 from Image Comics.

"As soon as I first worked with Gabriel on *Sentient* I knew he was a collaborator I needed to do more with. We began talking about a big creator-owned series at Image," said Lemire in an exclusive on the announcement with ScreenRant. "Something massive in scope like all the books we loved when we were getting into comics. Something with the scope of *Preacher* and *Sandman* and *The Walking Dead*. We began putting ideas together and *Phantom Road* is the result. A sprawling mash-up of sci-fi, horror and character driven road movie. We can't wait to share it with everyone."

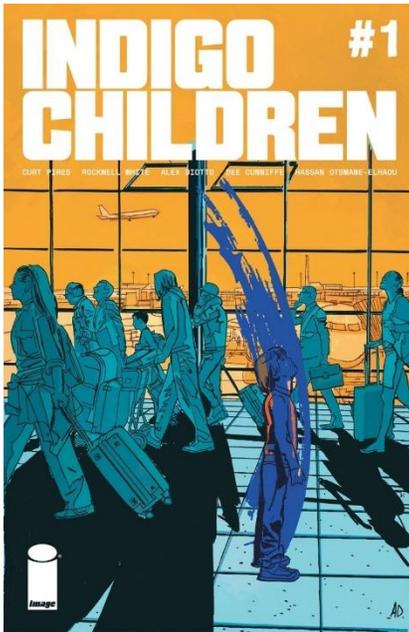
Walta added: "Working on *Phantom Road* is such a gift! Doing a creator-owned

book with Jeff is something I've been wanting to do for many years and having the chance to collaborate with Jordie, Steve, and Greg is a real joy. Also... seeing the Image logo in our book is just a blast!!"

Phantom Road follows Dom, a long-haul truck driver attempting to stay ahead of his tragic past. When he stops one night to assist Birdie, who has been in a massive car crash, they pull an artifact from the wreckage that throws their lives into fifth gear. Suddenly, a typical midnight run has become a frantic journey through a surreal world where Dom and Birdie find themselves the quarry of strange and impossible monsters. *Mad Max: Fury Road* meets *The Sandman* in this high-octane adventure wrapped in a dark fantasy aesthetic. *Phantom Road #1* will be available at comic book shops on Wednesday, March 8. *Phantom Road #1* will also be available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



NEW SERIES "INDIGO CHILDREN" LAUNCHES A PLOT-TWISTING MYSTERY IN MARCH 2023



The series has already been optioned for a feature film, currently in development from Alan Wake producer, Jeff Ludwig

From the critically-acclaimed creative team behind the smash-hit series *Youth*—Curt Pires, Alex Diotto, and Dee Cunniffe—and up-and-comer Rockwell White (*Wyrd*) comes an all-new, action-packed mystery/science-fiction series in the upcoming, *Indigo Children*. This ongoing series will launch in March from Image Comics. The new series will also feature a lineup of exciting variant covers featuring artwork by Tyler Boss, Tula Lotay, and Jenny Frisson and the series has already been optioned for a feature film, currently in development from Alan Wake producer, Jeff Ludwig. "I'm ecstatic to be back at Image Comics with *Indigo Children*—a book that's been meticulously crafted with my closest collaborators Alex and Dee and new members of the team Rockwell and Hassan," said Pires. "We've been working on this book for years—fine tuning and perfecting it and are excited to finally bring it to the world come March 2023."

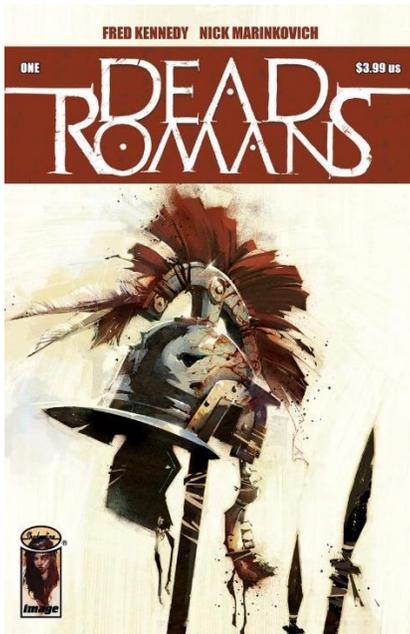
White added: "I'm incredibly fortunate to work alongside this creative team for my first long-form comic book. It has been a

surreal experience writing these characters and stories with Curt over the years and seeing them realized in such spectacular fashion." *Radiant Black* meets *The Department of Truth* in this epic new story that follows journalist Donovan Price as he hunts down the extraordinarily gifted Indigo Children after their mysterious disappearances fifteen years prior. "I'm thrilled to be back with Team *Youth* on this new project," said Cunniffe. "A weird little book which has scratched that *X-files* and Arthur C. Clarke's *Mysterious World* itch I've had for years!"

Diotto added: "I'm very proud of the work our team has done on this book, and I can't wait for readers to join us in this new adventure!" *Indigo Children #1* will be available at comic book shops on Wednesday, March 29. *Indigo Children* will also be available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



“DEAD ROMANS” - LOVE & WAR COLLIDE IN NEW SERIES LAUNCHING IN MARCH 2023



Up-and-coming writer Fred Kennedy and artist Nick Marinkovich team up for an

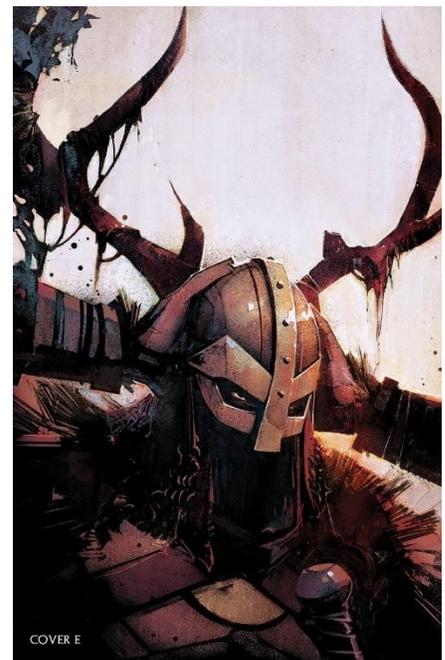
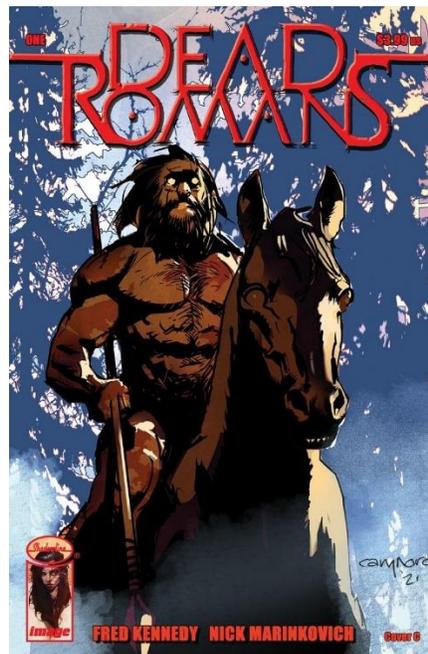
all-new historical fiction adventure in the upcoming *Dead Romans*. This six issue miniseries is set to launch in March 2023 from Image Comics. In *Dead Romans*, lush, beautiful illustrations bring to life a brutal tale of love and war from the birth of the Roman Empire. Arminius wants to make a queen of the woman he loves, Honoria, a fellow slave. Now, fifty thousand Romans will die to give her a throne she never asked for...or wanted.

"I was nervous about this book, because at its core it really is a love story. With the wrong artist that aspect could get lost amid the mud and violence," said Kennedy. "But Nick really understood the tone, and he brought that emotion to life. It's a brutal story, told with some of the most beautiful panels I've ever seen. I am VERY proud (and lucky) to have been part of this team." Marinkovich added: "This isn't a history lesson. It's therapy—the kind that reminded me why I was a fan before I ever picked up a brush—and Fred's a time traveler. He's

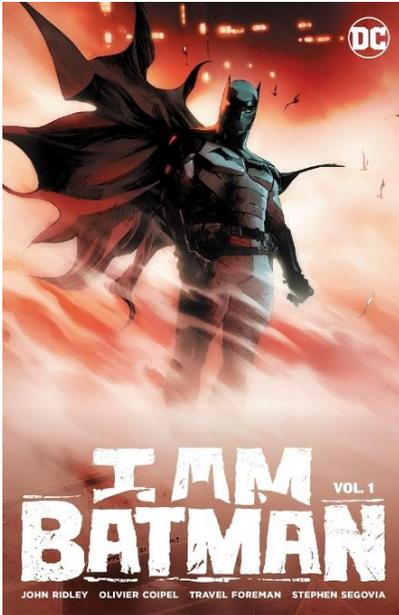
taking us back to a moment in time, and immersing us in the raw battle scars that went with it. It's a trip to be on board, and I'm just trying to keep up..."

Dead Romans #1 will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, March 29:

- Cover A by Marinkovich - Diamond Code JAN230037
- Cover B by Marinkovich - Diamond Code JAN230038
- Cover C by Cary Nord - Diamond Code JAN230039
- Cover D by Adam Gorham - Diamond Code JAN230040
- Cover E by Marinkovich - Diamond Code JAN230041
- Cover F Blank Sketch cover - Diamond Code JAN230042
- *Dead Romans* will also be available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



“I Am Batman” Vol. 1 Brings a New Kind of Justice to Gotham



There are a wealth of legacy characters in DC’s superhero world—heck, DC invented legacy characters! But with *I Am Batman Vol. 1*, the newest Caped Crusader isn’t an adopted partner of Bruce Wayne. In fact, he doesn’t really have anything to do with the Batman Family. Nevertheless, he’s a fierce defender of the citizens of Gotham from oppressors on both sides of the law. For this weekend’s comic, we’re going to look at one of 2022’s most acclaimed titles. Let’s talk about the series that made one of the DC Universe’s most interesting heroes in years out of Lucius Fox’s wayward son.

The Premise:

Jace Fox, firstborn son of Lucius Fox, C.E.O. of Wayne Enterprises, is the newest Batman after his family acquired much of the Wayne fortune during the Joker’s war on Gotham and the Scarecrow-driven “Fear State” that followed. This was a period of citywide curfews and lockdowns sustained by Simon Saint and his Magistrate program, which unleashed armed, militarized enforcers onto Gotham City to keep everyone in line. With the original Dark Knight missing at this time and presumed dead, Jace returns to his childhood home after years of overseas training determined to instill a fresh kind of justice. Armed with a suit fitted with non-lethal, but highly effective, combat gear and weaponry, Jace sets his sights on terrorist groups such as the Moral Authority and anyone who would do harm to the vulnerable in Gotham.

Let’s Talk Talent:

This series is written by the immensely talented and award-winning screenwriter John

Ridley. Fresh off of the heels of the spectacular *The Other History of the DC Universe*, Ridley turns his attention towards the concept of a Black Batman, and explores the possibilities and realities of a war-torn, crime-ridden city being fought for by someone who does not come from a traditionally privileged background. While Jace daylights as an up-and-comer in his father’s maintenance of Wayne Enterprises, at night he scours the city for all criminal activity with the help of his cyber-hacker ally Vol—activity which is often committed by the police.

Unapologetically political, Ridley takes the Batman franchise fearlessly into new territory with his concerns about meaningful justice and the complex questions that go into achieving it.

A Few Reasons to Read:

- *I Am Batman* focuses on the family of Lucius Fox and their perspectives on wealth, privilege and justice. More than just Lucius and Jace, we get to know Lucius’s wife Tanya and their daughters Tam and Tiffany. The Fox Family is caught up with the torrent of criminals and justice, just like the Bat-Family always is, only without special training or super suits. As a result, we learn more about what drives them and how they react when pushed to the edge of their convictions.

- Jace is an entirely unique character to Batman’s world. Compared to his father, Lucius, or even his brother Luke Fox, who operates as Batwing, Jace is a far more troubled and ambitious character. He openly resents the history of Batman and uses the hero’s image to change things in Gotham his way. He works to have the people of the city know he’s looking out for them, utilizing social media and encouraging word of mouth.

- Jace’s relationship with the police is tense and uneasy, but in a different way than the early days of Wayne and Gordon. Working with Detective Chubb, both see the other as complicit in the violence that threatens the innocent, despite their shared Black background and yearning for a better world. In Gotham, status and positions erase skin color and good intentions, or at least that’s the fear that Jace and Chubb work to conquer in themselves.

- In *I Am Batman*, Ridley dedicates much of the focus to the GCPD and the city’s attempt to reform the institution of the police. Anxieties about lethal force, racial biases and who wields power are experienced by not only Jace and his family, but also Commissioner Renee Montoya and Detective Chubb, who both have extremely opposed views of vigilantes. Lines become blurred when the police begin taking matters into their own hands regarding protestors, mob violence and general resentment of authority.

- This book works as a spiritual successor to *We Are Robin*, which was a series that examined the underclass’ approach to crimefighting and opposition from the police. The heroes of both series incorporate the image of the Caped Crusaders, deconstructing and rebuilding the good and bad of their legacy towards a fuller, more impactful future that doesn’t leave the vulnerable behind.

Why It’s Worth Your Time:

Over the last couple of years, people have started rethinking many elements of the superhero genre that have been taken for granted for decades. Questions like the existence of “good billionaires,” the true purpose of policing, the ultimate role of the vigilante and how it affects people of color aren’t often written about because frankly, there aren’t enough heroes or creators of color to go around. This makes *I Am Batman* an essential series for the world of today, and Jace Fox a much-needed new character. He has an entire universe to not only live up to, but to question, challenge and remake into his image...but first he has to master that image in his own work. Ambitious and subversive, *I Am Batman* is a terrific series from a master storyteller that’s more than worth escaping into.

I Am Batman Vol. 1 by John Ridley, Olivier Coipel, Travel Foreman and Stephen Segovia is available in bookstores, comic shops, libraries and on DC UNIVERSE INFINITE. Donovan Morgan Grant writes about comics, graphic novels and superhero history for DC.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@donoDMG1](https://twitter.com/donoDMG1).



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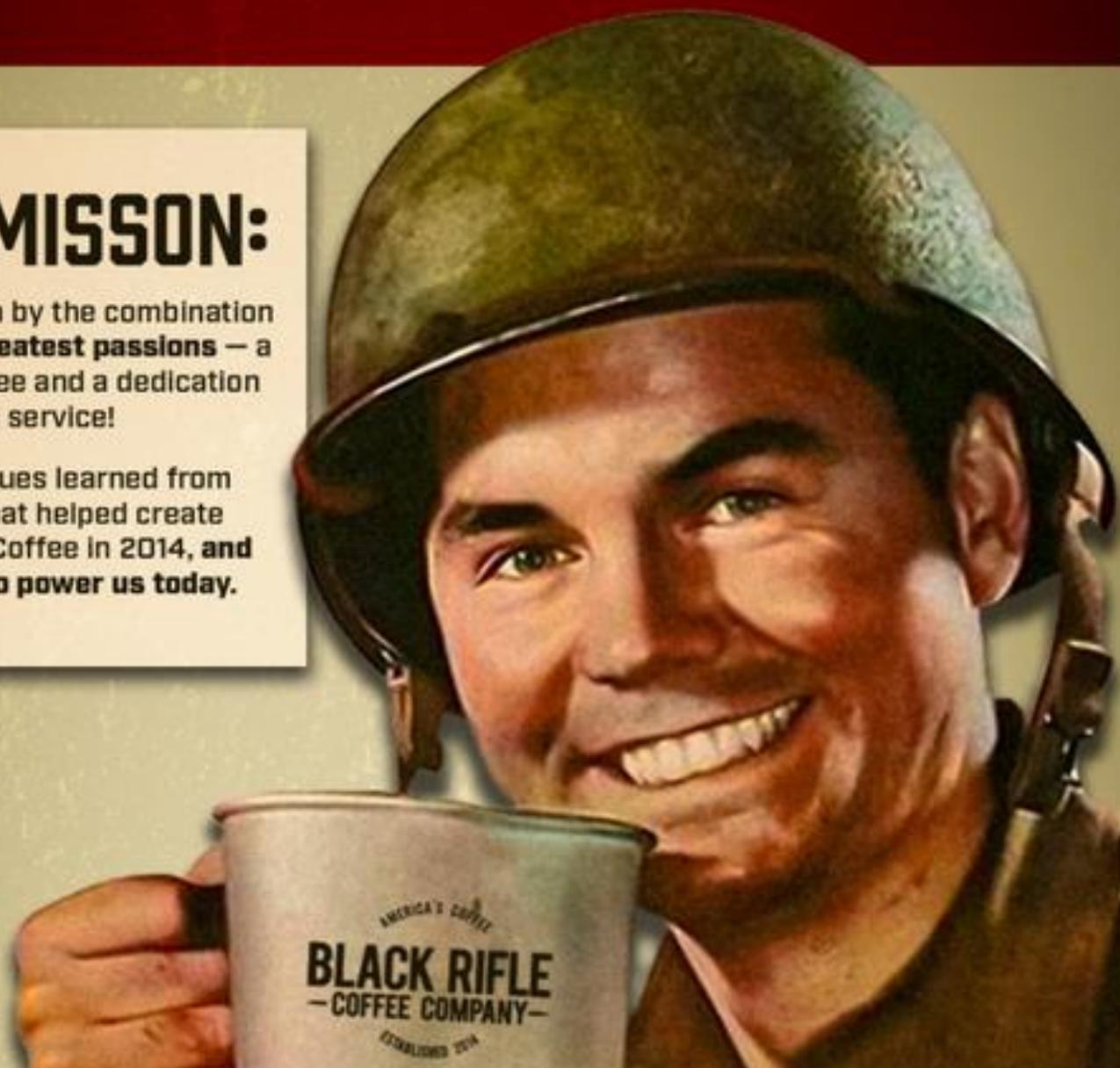
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Music News



Pearl Jam Guitarist Predicts New Album Will Drop in 2024



Pearl Jam fans might have to wait until 2024 for a new album. The 'Alive' group recruited producer to the stars Andrew Watt - who has worked with everyone from Justin Bieber to Ozzy Osbourne - to oversee their follow-up to 2020's 'Gigaton' after he worked his magic on frontman Eddie Vedder's recent solo LP 'Earthling'. And while the group have plenty of songs, they are in various stages, so it's likely they won't be ready to put out the record next year.

Speaking to Riff TV, guitarist Stone Gossard shared: "The plan is that we're gonna do some more recording, and we're gonna try to finish a record here pretty soon. There's songs that are getting close to being done and there's a bunch that aren't. And we're gonna do something here pretty soon. "We've got demos for days. Everybody writes in the band, so now it's really just trying to figure out what's something different for us and what's

something exciting. And we're working on that. I think we've got a good start on another record that will be hopefully good."

As for when fans can expect the LP, he added: "I bet it's gonna be 2024 before the record comes out, is my guess. But we're working on it." Earlier this year, Eddie teased: "We'll make a record with Andrew, I believe. We've already talked about it. "You know, the pandemic came right as we were leaving for a tour on the 'Gigaton' record. "And we had a lot of shows planned. "Then, in between, I think we'll be recording, because now we've got a healthy ambition to do so. "I think we'll move quick for a year or two, then I can see us slowing down for a little bit. "We have the ability to play better than ever, but also know what we want to maintain the health of the group and want to keep coming back."

The Weeknd Releases Song for Avatar 2 Soundtrack



The Weeknd has released his track from the 'Avatar: The Way of Water' soundtrack. The 'Creepin' singer has shared

the epic tune, 'Nothing Is Lost (You Give Me Strength)', on the same day the eagerly-awaited sequel hits cinemas (16.12.22) - 13 years after the original film. The Weeknd has previously had huge success with his film work - winning a Grammy award and an Oscar nomination for his 2014 tune 'Earned It' from the 'Fifty Shades of Grey' soundtrack. 'Avatar: The Way of Water' features the original film score by the late great James Horner and new work by Simon Franglen, who took over the project after the composer's death in a plane crash in 2015. The film stars returning actors Zoe Saldana, Sam Worthington and Sigourney Weaver, and new cast member Kate Winslet. The latter recently gushed that she was thrilled to reunite with her 'Titanic' director James Cameron on the project, saying: "I absolutely loved the first 'Avatar' movie. The deeper themes it conveys about our declining planet, were extremely poignant, and that mattered to me. "So, I had no reservations at all. Plus, I was jumping into a well-oiled machine, so I was excited to think that everything they had learned as filmmakers from the first movie, would have only been ironed out and amplified in its second go around. And that's fun!"

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Coldplay Have Been in the Studio with Nile Rodgers



Coldplay have teamed up with Nile Rodgers for a new project. The 'Christmas Lights' group have been in the studio with the music legend recently, who was pleased to be in the flesh with Chris Martin and co. Speaking to The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column at the Nordoff Robbins Carol Service this week, Nile spilled: "Yesterday, I worked with Coldplay for the first day. "We had a blast. What was great working with Coldplay is that we're all in the room together and it's sort of like a spiritual thing.

"It's like they walk in and they say, 'Do you want to join the circle or not?'. I'm an old hippie, you're speaking my language. "Let's go." The collaboration is top secret for now. The 'Paradise' hitmakers recently teamed up with BTS star Jin on his solo track 'The Astronaut'. Meanwhile, Coldplay were forced to cancel a string of gigs after frontman Chris contracted a "serious lung infection".

The 'Viva La Vida' hitmakers postponed concerts in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil in early October, after the 45-year-old singer was placed under "strict" orders to rest for at least three weeks by his doctors. The group said in a statement: "With deep regret, we've been forced to postpone our upcoming shows in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo until early 2023.

"Due to a serious lung infection, Chris has been put under strict doctor's orders to rest for

the next three weeks. We're working as fast as possible to lock in the new dates and will follow up with more information in the next few days." The band went on to apologise to disappointed fans but insisted they needed to "prioritise Chris' health". They added: "To everyone in Brazil who was looking forward to these concerts, we're extremely sorry for any disappointment and inconvenience, and we're so grateful for your understanding at this challenging time where we need to prioritise Chris' health.

"Please hold onto your tickets as they will be valid for the new rescheduled dates. These will happen in early 2023 and will be announced very soon. However, we will also honour all requests for ticket refunds – which will be available at the point of sale. "We're optimistic that Chris will return to good health after the prescribed medical break and look forward to resuming the tour as soon as possible. To everyone affected, please accept our sincere apologies, and thank you as always for your love and support." The tour started again on October 25 in Buenos Aires.

The Rolling Stones Plan Virtual Concert to Celebrate Release of GRRR Live!



The Rolling Stones are set to stage a virtual concert to celebrate the release of

'GRRR Live!'. The legendary band performed their most memorable concert in 2012, when it appeared on pay-per-view - and they're now planning to celebrate the release of the 'GRRR Live!' album by airing the star-studded event on February 2. The show featured performances from a host of big-name stars, including Lady Gaga, Gary Clark Jr. and John Mayer, Mick Taylor and Bruce Springsteen.

And the legendary show is now being made available to fans worldwide on RollingStonesNewark.com, via interactive video company Kiswe's global live streaming technology Kiswe Live actually allows the fans to be part of the experience, as they will be able to upload short video selfies of themselves to celebrate the band and their performances. Fans will also be see themselves on the screen during the performances. Tickets for the online event will go on sale on December 15 at www.RollingStonesNewark.com. The Rolling Stones recently announced plans to release 'GRRR Live!' in February. The live album was recorded during their December 2012 show at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.

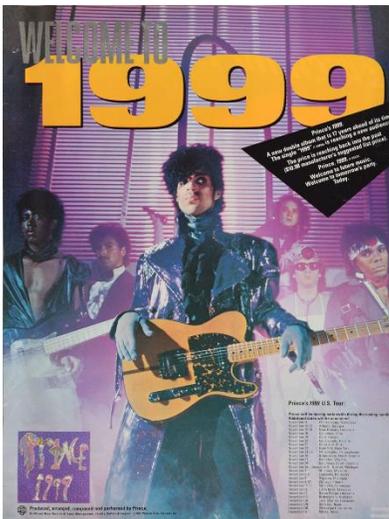
The performance - which took place during the band's 50 and Counting world tour - has been re-mixed and re-edited to create a triple-album vinyl and a double-album CD. 'GRRR Live!' is also being released on DVD and Blu-Ray. During the concert, the Stones were joined on stage by Lady Gaga, who performed a duet with Sir Mick Jagger. Elsewhere, John Mayer and Gary Clark, Jr guested on a performance of 'Going Down'. And, later in the show, Bruce Springsteen - who was born in New Jersey - performed 'Tumbling Dice'.



Purple Ruminations

MUSINGS ABOUT “PRINCE” BY CHAD WOMACK

“Joint 2 Joint”



As the year 2022 comes to a close...let's reflect on the last 4 decades of what Prince was up to in years that ended with the number # 2 and the milestones he accomplished within them. It's quite staggering to look back on such a storied career and be able to cherry pick from specific years within it, marveling at what he achieved not just as a performer, but also as an artist, trailblazer, and icon of popular culture... he was just THAT unique.

1982 saw the release of the career defining album “1999”, Prince's biggest release up to that point both in terms of scope and level of success. It was almost unheard of at this stage of an artist's career that had yet to truly be accepted by the “masses” to merit the release of a double album this early in their discography without already being established as a major star. Due to exquisite timing that coincided with the launch of the fledgling cable network MTV and the promo clips that Prince had filmed with his band in a live concert environment, thus previewing the inevitable tour supporting the album, it and its accompanying singles like the title track and “Little Red Corvette” blazed across the airwaves and sent Prince's career into the stratosphere, making him both a commercial and critical darling.

1992 ushered in a new era with Prince that followed hot on the heels of one of his most successful albums to date with his newly christened band The New Power Generation, “Diamonds & Pearls”. After a massive world tour that sadly excluded North America, Prince followed up with an album sporting a title that nobody could even pronounce. Dubbed by most in the press, the album was widely referred to

as “Love Symbol” aka “O(+>”. This also represented a tonal shift with Prince and his record label Warner Brothers. After signing one of the most lucrative contracts in the industry, Prince chose to select tracks as singles like “My Name Is Prince” and the raunchy “Sexy M.F.” that proved rather radio unfriendly. It wasn't until the mesmerizing “7” that the album truly seemed to connect with the record buying public, but by that time, Prince had already begun to shift his attention elsewhere, as the relationship between he and his label began to sour.

2002 had seen Prince go through a name change and a complete shake up at Warner Brothers, leading Prince to part ways with the industry titan and began to release his music independently as well as online so he could more efficiently connect with his fanbase which had grown rather tech savvy. The year also saw the release of a project that Prince fans had been clamoring for since the beginning of his career, a LIVE album. Hot on the heels of his latest tour that had played in much smaller and more intimate venues, the 3 CD set “One Nite Alone...Live!” was released, giving an unprecedented peek at both an entire concert and aftershow, which had become the stuff of legend amongst fans.

2012 heralded the end of the rather unusual “Welcome 2” Tour that was branded with whatever continent that leg of the tour was playing in. Initially named after the accompanying album “Welcome 2 America” the album was shelved until its posthumous release in 2021, but Prince wasn't going to allow a simple thing like having no album to promote to stop him from mounting another world tour, playing some of his first performances in North America in over six years, including a massive 21 night residency at The Forum in Inglewood California, portions of which were filmed and included on a stunning Blu-ray that was packed in with the deluxe edition of the album.

As always, Prince managed to deliver, astound and innovate in every decade, forcing the industry to constantly up its game and bring itself up to HIS level, often imitated but NEVER duplicated



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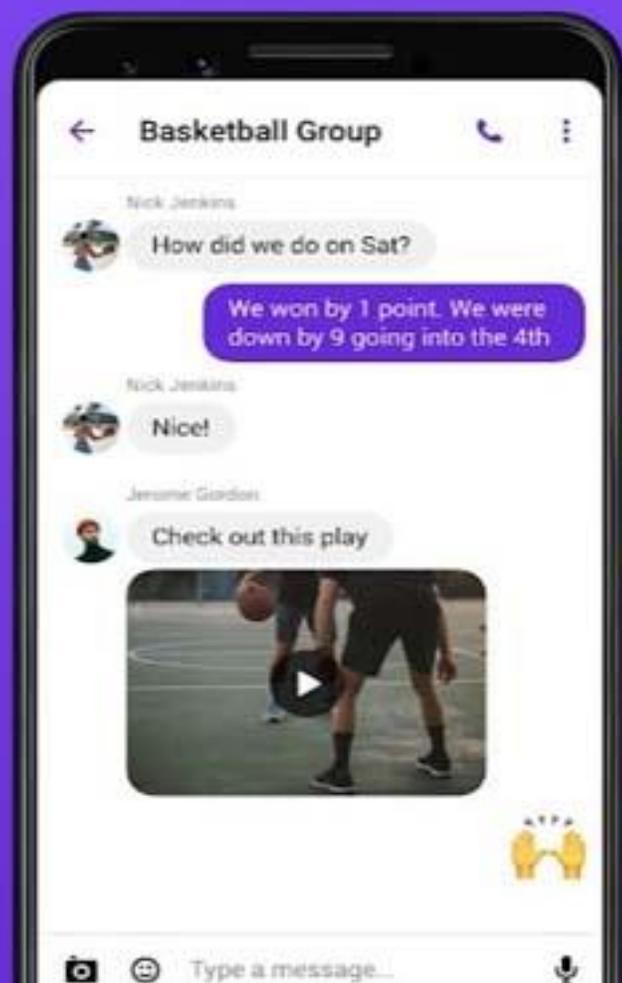
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Researchers Propose New Structures to Harvest Untapped Source of Freshwater



An almost limitless supply of fresh water exists in the form of water vapor above Earth's oceans, yet remains untapped, researchers said. A new study from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is the first to suggest an investment in new infrastructure capable of harvesting oceanic water vapor as a solution to limited supplies of fresh water in various locations around the world.

The study, led by civil and environmental engineering professor and Prairie Research Institute executive director Praveen Kumar, evaluated 14 water-stressed locations across the globe for the feasibility of a hypothetical structure capable of capturing water vapor from above the ocean and condensing it into fresh

water -- and do so in a manner that will remain feasible in the face of continued climate change. Kumar, graduate student Afeefa Rahman and atmospheric sciences professor Francina Dominguez published their findings in the journal *Nature Scientific Reports*.

"Water scarcity is a global problem and hits close to home here in the U.S. regarding the sinking water levels in the Colorado River basin, which affects the whole Western U.S.," Kumar said. "However, in subtropical regions, like the Western U.S., nearby oceans are continuously evaporating water because there is enough solar radiation due to the very little cloud coverage throughout the year."

Previous wastewater recycling, cloud seeding and desalination techniques have met only limited success, the researchers said. Though deployed in some areas across the globe, desalination plants face sustainability issues because of the brine and heavy metal-laden wastewater produced -- so much so that California has recently rejected measures to add new desalination plants. "Eventually, we will need to find a way to increase the supply of fresh water as conservation and recycled water from existing sources, albeit essential, will not be sufficient to meet human needs. We think our newly proposed method can do that at large scales," Kumar said.

The researchers performed atmospheric and economic analyses of the placement of hypothetical offshore structures 210 meters in width and 100 meters in height. Through their analyses, the researchers concluded that capturing moisture over ocean surfaces is feasible for many water-stressed regions worldwide. The estimated water yield of the proposed structures could provide fresh water for large population centers in the subtropics.

One of the more robust projections of climate change is that dry regions will get drier, and wet areas will get wetter. "The current

regions experiencing water scarcity will likely be even drier in the future, exacerbating the problem," Dominguez said. "And unfortunately, people continue moving to water-limited areas, like the Southwestern U.S." However, this projection of increasingly arid conditions favors the new ocean vapor-harvesting technology.

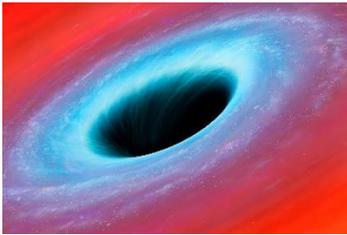
"The climate projections show that the oceanic vapor flux will only increase over time, providing even more fresh water supply," Rahman said. "So, the idea we are proposing will be feasible under climate change. This provides a much needed and effective approach for adaptation to climate change, particularly to vulnerable populations living in arid and semi-arid regions of the world."

The researchers said one of the more elegant features of this proposed solution is that it works like the natural water cycle. "The difference is that we can guide where the evaporated water from the ocean goes," Dominguez said. "When Praveen approached me with this idea, we both wondered why nobody had thought about it before because it seemed like such an obvious solution. But it hasn't been done before, and I think it is because researchers are so focused on land-based solutions -- but our study shows other options do, in fact, exist."

The researchers said this study opens the door for novel infrastructure investments that can effectively address the increasing global scarcity of fresh water. The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Lovell Professorship in the department of civil and environmental engineering, The University Scholar Program and the National Science Foundation supported this research.

[Materials](#) provided by [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, News Bureau](#). Original written by Lois Yoksoulian. *Note: Content may be edited for style and length.*

Machine Learning Reveals How Black Holes Grow



As different as they may seem, black holes and Las Vegas have one thing in common: What happens there stays there -- much to the frustration of astrophysicists trying to understand how, when and why black holes form and grow. Black holes are surrounded by a mysterious, invisible layer -- the event horizon -- from which nothing can escape, be it matter, light or information. The event horizon swallows every bit of evidence about the black hole's past. "Because of these physical facts, it had been thought impossible to measure how black holes formed," said Peter Behroozi, an associate professor at the University of Arizona Steward Observatory and a project researcher at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan. Together with Haowen Zhang, a doctoral student at Steward, Behroozi led an international team to use machine learning and supercomputers to reconstruct the growth histories of black holes, effectively peeling back their event horizons to reveal what lies beyond.

Simulations of millions of computer-generated "universes" revealed that supermassive black holes grow in lockstep with their host galaxies. This had been suspected for 20 years, but scientists had not been able to confirm this relationship until now. A paper with the team's findings has been published in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*.

"If you go back to earlier and earlier times in the universe, you find that exactly the same relationship was present," said Behroozi, a co-author on the paper. "So, as the galaxy grows from small to large, its black hole, too, is growing from small to large, in exactly the same way as we see in galaxies today all across the universe."

Most, if not all, galaxies scattered throughout the cosmos are thought to harbor a supermassive black hole at their center. These black holes pack masses greater than 100,000 times that of the sun, with some boasting millions, even billions of solar masses. One of astrophysics' most vexing questions has been how these behemoths grow as fast they do, and how they form in the first place.

To find answers, Zhang, Behroozi and their colleagues created Trinity, a platform that uses a

novel form of machine learning capable of generating millions of different universes on a supercomputer, each of which obeys different physical theories for how galaxies should form. The researchers built a framework in which computers propose new rules for how supermassive black holes grow over time. They then used those rules to simulate the growth of billions of black holes in a virtual universe and "observed" the virtual universe to test whether it agreed with decades of actual observations of black holes across the real universe. After millions of proposed and rejected rule sets, the computers settled on rules that best described existing observations.

"We're trying to understand the rules of how galaxies form," Behroozi said. "In a nutshell, we make Trinity guess what the physical laws may be and let them go in a simulated universe and see how that universe turns out. Does it look anything like the real one or not?"

According to the researchers, this approach works equally well for anything else inside of the universe, not just galaxies.

The project's name, Trinity, is in reference to its three main areas of study: galaxies, their supermassive black holes and their dark matter halos -- vast cocoons of dark matter that are invisible to direct measurements but whose existence is necessary to explain the physical characteristics of galaxies everywhere. In previous studies, the researchers used an earlier version of their framework, called the Universe Machine, to simulate millions of galaxies and their dark matter halos. The team discovered that galaxies growing in their dark matter halos follow a very specific relationship between the mass of the halo and the mass of the galaxy.

"In our new work, we added black holes to this relationship," Behroozi said, "and then asked how black holes could grow in those galaxies to reproduce all the observations people have made about them."

"We have very good observations of black hole masses," said Zhang, the paper's lead author. "However, those are largely restricted to the local universe. As you look farther away, it becomes increasingly difficult, and eventually impossible, to accurately measure the relationships between the masses of black holes and their host galaxies. Because of that uncertainty, observations can't directly tell us whether that relationship holds up throughout the universe." Trinity allows astrophysicists to sidestep not only that limitation, but also the event horizon information barrier for individual black holes by stitching together information from millions of observed black holes at different stages of their growth. Even though no individual black hole's history could be reconstructed, the researchers could measure the average growth history of all black holes taken together.

"If you put black holes into the simulated galaxies and enter rules about how they grow, you can compare the resulting universe to all the observations of actual black holes that we

have," Zhang said. "We can then reconstruct how any black hole and galaxy in the universe looked from today back to the very beginning of the cosmos."

The simulations shed light on another puzzling phenomenon: Supermassive black holes -- like the one found in the center of the Milky Way -- grew most vigorously during their infancy, when the universe was only a few billion years old, only to slow down dramatically during the ensuing time, over the last 10 billion years or so.

"We've known for a while that galaxies have this strange behavior, where they reach a peak in their rate of forming new stars, then it dwindles over time, and then, later on, they stop forming stars altogether," Behroozi said. "Now, we've been able to show that black holes do the same: growing and shutting off at the same times as their host galaxies. This confirms a decades-old hypothesis about black hole growth in galaxies."

However, the result poses more questions, he added. Black holes are much smaller than the galaxies in which they live. If the Milky Way were scaled down to the size of Earth, its supermassive black hole would be the size of the period at the end of this sentence.

For the black hole to double in mass within the same timeframe as the larger galaxy requires synchronization between gas flows at vastly different scales. How black holes conspire with galaxies to achieve this balance is yet to be understood.

"I think the really original thing about Trinity is that it provides us with a way to find out what kind of connections between black holes and galaxies are consistent with a wide variety of different datasets and observational methods," Zhang said. "The algorithm allows us to pick out precisely those relationships between dark matter halos, galaxies and black holes that are able to reproduce all the observations that have been made. It basically tells us, 'OK, given all these data, we know the connection between galaxies and black holes must look like this, rather than like that.' And that approach is extremely powerful."



When Using Virtual Reality as a Teaching Tool, Context and 'Feeling Real' Matter



A new study by UCLA psychologists reveals that when VR is used to teach language, context and realism matter. The research is published in the journal *npj Science of Learning*. "The context in which we learn things can help us remember them better," said Jesse Rissman, the paper's corresponding author and a UCLA associate professor of psychology. "We wanted to know if learning foreign languages in virtual reality environments could improve recall, especially when there was the potential for two sets of words to interfere with each other." Researchers asked 48 English-speaking participants to try to learn 80 words in two phonetically similar African languages, Swahili and Chinyanja, as they navigated virtual reality settings.

Wearing VR headsets, participants explored one of two environments -- a fantasy fairyland or a science fiction landscape -- where they could click to learn the Swahili or Chinyanja names for the objects they encountered. Some participants learned both languages in the same VR environment; others learned one language in each environment. Participants navigated through the virtual worlds four times over the course of two days, saying the translations aloud each time. One week later, the researchers followed up with a pop quiz to see how well the participants remembered what they had learned. The results were striking: Subjects who had learned each language in its own unique context mixed up fewer words and were able to recall 92% of the words they had learned. In contrast, participants who had learned both sets of words in the same VR context were more likely to confuse terms between the two languages and retained only 76% of the words.

The study is particularly timely because so many K-12 schools, colleges and universities moved to develop online learning platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Apps like

Zoom provide a rather bland context for learning," Rissman said. "As VR technology becomes more ubiquitous and affordable, remote learners could be instantly teleported into unique and richly featured contexts for each class."

The experiment was designed by Rissman and Joey Ka-Yee Essoe, the study's first author who was a UCLA doctoral student at the time. Rissman said a key predictor of the subjects' ability to retain what they had learned was how immersed in the VR world they felt. The less a participant felt like a subject in a psychology experiment -- and the more "at one" they felt with their avatar -- the more the virtual contexts were able to positively affect their learning.

"The more a person's brain was able to reconstruct the unique activity pattern associated with the learning context, the better able they were to recall the foreign words they had learned there," Rissman said. Psychologists have long understood that people tend to recall things more readily if they can remember something about the surrounding context in which they learned it -- the so-called "context crutch" phenomenon. But when information is tied to contextual cues, people can have trouble recalling it later in the absence of those cues.

For example, students might learn Spanish in the same kind of classroom where they learn other subjects. When that happens, their Spanish vocabulary can be tied to the same contextual cues that are tied to other material they've been taught, like the Pythagorean theorem or a Shakespeare play. Not only does that similar context make it easier to mix up or forget what they have learned, but it also can make it harder to remember any of the information outside of a classroom setting. "A key takeaway is that if you learn the same thing in same environment, you'll learn it really fast," said Essoe, who is now a postdoctoral scholar at Johns Hopkins University. "But even though you learn fast, you might have trouble with recall. What we were able to harness in this research takes advantage of both learning fast and improving recall in new environment."

A colorful advertisement for free advertising services. It features a QR code in the top left, a lightbulb icon, and a blue folder icon. The text "FREE ADVERTISING" is prominently displayed in large, bold, blue letters. Below this, it says "REACH OVER 12 MILLION CUSTOMERS" and "ASK ME HOW - Scan Code, Text Me, or Call". At the bottom, the phone number "469-708-9954" is written in large white digits on a red background. Social media icons for YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are also visible.

To understand the brain mechanisms that support context-dependent learning, the

researchers recruited a separate group of participants and scanned their brains with functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI. As the subjects attempted to recall foreign words while in the scanner, their brain activity indicated that they were thinking about the context in which they had learned each word. That finding suggests that virtual reality can enhance learning if it is convincingly produced and if different languages or scholastic subjects are taught in highly distinctive environments.

Rissman said although the study only assessed how people learned a foreign language, the results indicate that VR could be useful for teaching other subjects as well. Similar approaches could also be used for mental and behavioral health therapies and to help patients adhere to doctors' instructions after medical visits: Patients might be able to remember such guidance better if they're in their own homes while chatting online with their doctors, for example. Said Essoe: "Variable contexts can ground information in more environmental cues."

Humans and Nature: The Distance is Growing



The idea that humans are facing a global extinction of experience of nature is popular, but there is poor empirical evidence of its reality. To shed more light on this, the scientists measured how the average distance from an individual's home to the nearest area with low human impact changed in the last decade. They found that humans currently live 9.7 km away from a natural area on average, which is 7% further away than in the year 2000. Europe and East Asia have the highest average distance to natural areas, such as 22 km in Germany and 16 km in France. "What is striking is that all other countries in the world are following a similar pattern," explains first author Dr Victor Cazalis, a postdoctoral researcher at iDiv and Leipzig University.

The authors also showed that tree cover within cities has declined worldwide since 2000, particularly in Central Africa and South-East Asia. "This finding suggests that the possibility for the urban population to access green spaces is reducing as well," concludes Dr

Gladys Barragan-Jason, a researcher at the Theoretical and Experimental Ecology Station and co-author of the study. "Indeed, the study reveals that the destruction of natural areas combined with a strong increase in urban population is leading to a growing spatial distance between humans and nature, especially in Asia, Africa and South America." In the same study, the authors systematically searched for scientific publications assessing a trend in experiences of nature: from direct ones such as hiking in national parks, to vicarious experiences like natural settings in cultural products like cartoons, computer games or books. They found that the number of studies assessing these trends was very low (N=18), with a strong bias towards the US, Europe and Japan. This shows that any claim about the extinction of nature experience is based on poor evidence and that more studies should

investigate this question, especially in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The 18 studies found by the authors show for instance a decline in visits to nature parks in the US and Japan, a decrease in camping activities in the US, and a decrease in the number of flower species observed by Japanese children. They also find signs of disconnection in the depletion of natural elements in novels, songs, children's albums and animated movies, which are less and less imbued with natural imagery (as shown e.g. by an iDiv study from 2021). Despite these examples of decline, other interactions are stagnating or even increasing. Watching wildlife documentaries or interacting with wild animals in video games is, for example, more common than a few years ago. "New ways of digitally interacting with nature have certainly emerged or increased in recent decades," says Gladys Barragan-Jason. "But several former studies show that these

interactions have a lesser effect on our sense of connection with nature than direct interaction."

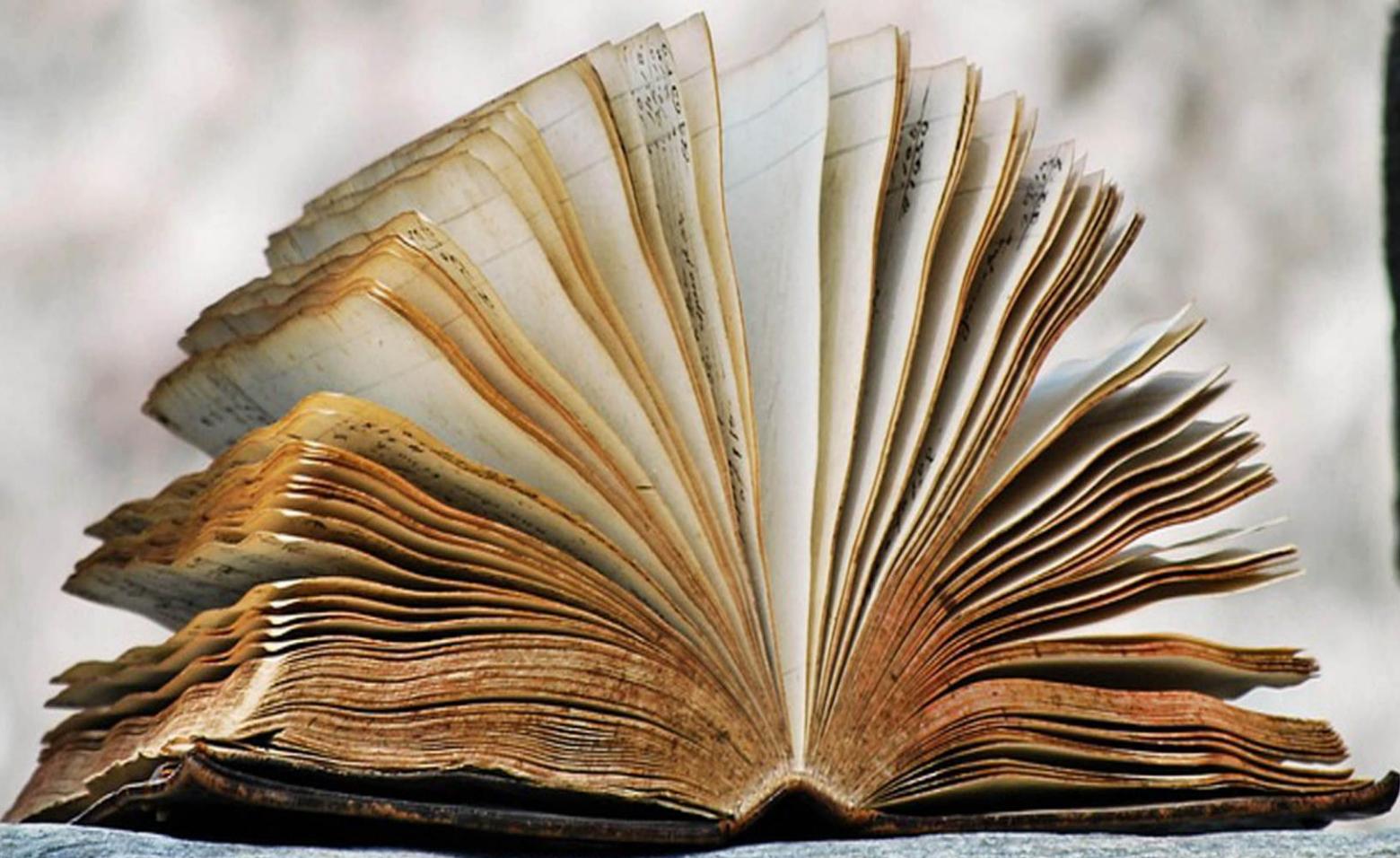
"The knowledge about these human-nature interactions is crucial, as they are key in the construction of our relationship with nature and our behaviours," says Victor Cazalis. We need to maintain a good connection with nature in order to enable the necessary societal transformations of the 21st century. Only then can humanity 'live in harmony with nature by 2050' as ambitious by our governments through the Global Biodiversity Framework that is being discussed currently in the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity."

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discovery+

Storytellers



SPACE PIZZA: Part 2
By Sydney Costa



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SPACE PIZZA: Part 2

Normally You Can't Go o Space Just By Asking Nicely, But I'll Make An Exception

The tense silence that filled the car ride back was suffocating. Mike was focused intently on the road, his eyebrows furrowed in the expression he made when he was trying to figure out a tough engineering project. He kept a white knuckled death grip on the steering wheel, and as he kept driving, I became increasingly concerned that my neck would suffer the same fate.

“...so, are we going to talk about—”

“Nope.”

“Are you—”

“Nope.”

“Can I—”

“Blake Alexander Sanchez, if you try to ask me one more question, I will swerve this car into the nearest ditch.”

“Ah,” I squeaked, then shut up.

After a few more minutes of quiet driving, Mike pulled into the driveway of my house and turned the car off, sighing. He turned to me with an exasperated expression. I grinned nervously and he rolled his eyes.

“Okay. I’m gonna try to be calm, and articulate, and understanding, and scientific about this.” He took a deep breath. “WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT?! I THOUGHT YOU WORKED AT A PIZZA PLACE!” He exclaimed, gesturing wildly with his hands.

“I...do.”

He blinked. “Uh huh. Don’t bullcrap me, Sanchez. I’m just spitballing, but that whole teleportation thing you did? That was some next level science that I *know* you couldn’t come up with on your own.”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

“Just that like—” He waved his hands around some more like that would help him form words better. “That’s SCI-FI SCIENCE! Which is *ridiculously* cool??? And ALSO how did I never find out about this?!”

“Normally I finish my shift early so I’m just waiting when you get there, but there was this one guy that took *forever*. At least he was nice, though,” I added.

“What?”

“I really do work at a pizza place. It’s just...out of this world, I guess.”

He snickered a little at my awful pun until the realization smashed into him. “Wait, you’re not trying to tell me...”

I smiled sheepishly.

“YOU WORK AT A PIZZA PLACE IN SPACE???”

“There you go.”

Mike looked like he might explode at the very concept of this revelation. “No way. How do you—when—where—you know what? I don’t believe you. It’s too impossible.”

“Seriously? I literally just used a wormhole to get home!”

“Still don’t believe you. You gotta show me now.”

“Now?”

“*Now* now.”

“I can’t! My shift already ended so the generator’s shut off, and besides, my manager would freak out if I brought another human in.”

“Hey, that implies aliens! Now you *have* to show me!”

“No. No way.”

“Please?”

“Why are you going through this much effort if you don’t believe me?”

He didn’t know what to say for a second. “Uh...I don’t! I really don’t believe you, but on the *very, VERY* off chance that it is real, it would be quite possibly one of the coolest things I’ve ever seen. Ever.” He gave me his best sincere smile.

“Mmmmmmmno. I can’t.”

“Come onnnnn, I’ll be quiet, I swear!”

“You’re being incredibly immature.”

“I feel like this is the appropriate level of maturity for the situation. Please?”

I searched his face. Mike *was* a pretty stealthy guy, *and I guess if the boss sees him I can just say he followed me...*

“Fine. Meet me at that parking lot tomorrow at 2:45. The other side of the generator *won’t* be open then, so don’t mess with any machines you see, no matter how much you want to. **ESPECIALLY** if they look spacey. You can hang out in the back and look around for a bit, but you have to make sure not to tell *anyone* about this. Promise me.”

He nodded eagerly. “I promise.”

“Alright. Cool. See you tomorrow, then?”

“Tomorrow.”

I stepped out of the car and let out a long breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding, strolling back to the door of my house and letting myself in with the spare key. I locked the door behind me and noticed a little sticky note that’d been hastily stuck onto the other side of the door. I pulled it off and examined it.

Sorry for the short notice! I would’ve texted you, but I left my charger at work again :/ There’s a good chance that SOMEONE’S going to bail out last minute (again) and I’ll have to work the night shift, so if I’m not back when you get home, there should be some mac n’ cheese on the counter you can make. Dad should be home really late tonight, but just in case, lock all the doors. Call me when you read this! Love you, nerd :)

—Obviously your favorite sister, Jamie

I chuckled. My sister was way too nice; she always took over shifts when anyone else had a last minute issue, so of course, she was always exhausted. I dialed her number, but the call went straight to voicemail as per usual. I glanced at the package of mac n’ cheese on the counter and decided against it. *It’d be too much of a mess, and besides, I’m not really that hungry anyways.*

I put the pasta away in the pantry, locking all the doors into the house and going into my room. I flopped onto my bed with a sigh. It was only around 8:30, but exhaustion had hit me like a truck. *Maybe going to bed early isn’t the worst idea. I could use some extra sleep.* I flipped the lights off and set my alarm.

“Tomorrow,” I said quietly to myself, drifting off into sleep.

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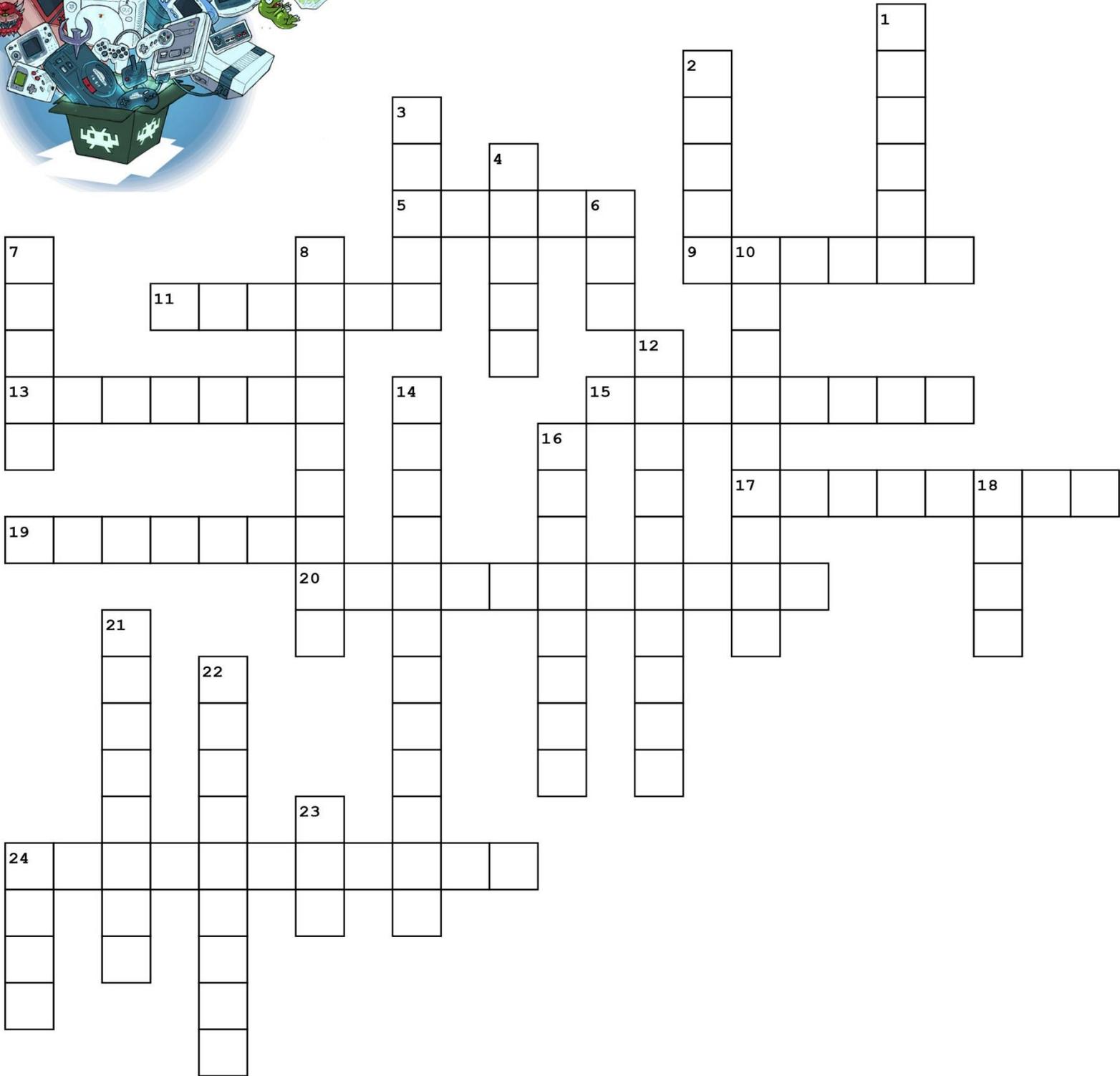
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WORD

games

Video Game Technology



Across

5. created first arcade machine
9. public video games generally located in amusement parks
11. hand held gaming device
13. a home entertainment machine
15. pixel amount
17. prototype video game console

Down

1. graphics that have three dimensions
2. earliest stage of development in video games
3. abbreviation for simulation of total atomic global exchange
4. created the game space invaders
6. used to make first chess program
7. created the game pacman

- 19. high budget game
- 20. played with multiple people
- 24. progression of video game being made

- 8. electronic interactive entertainment
- 10. created first home console
- 12. enters the coding into the game
- 14. played with one person
- 16. carries out loads of information and has many uses
- 18. second stage of development in video games
- 21. first video gaming home console
- 22. creates video games
- 23. abbreviation of frames per second
- 24. a trail or example of a product





MADDEN 23





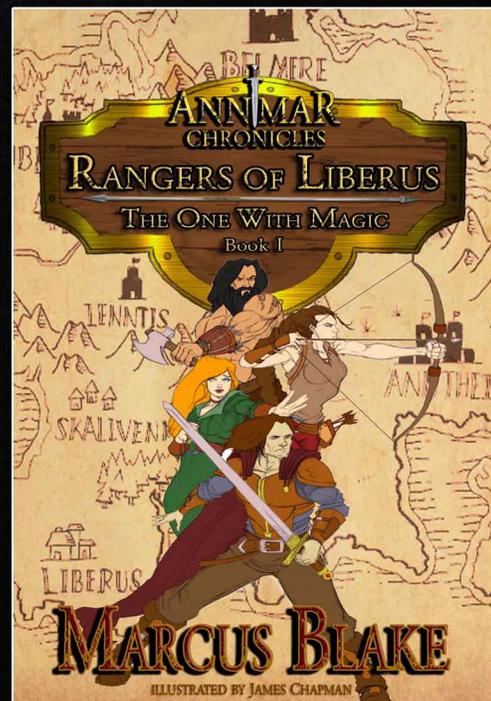
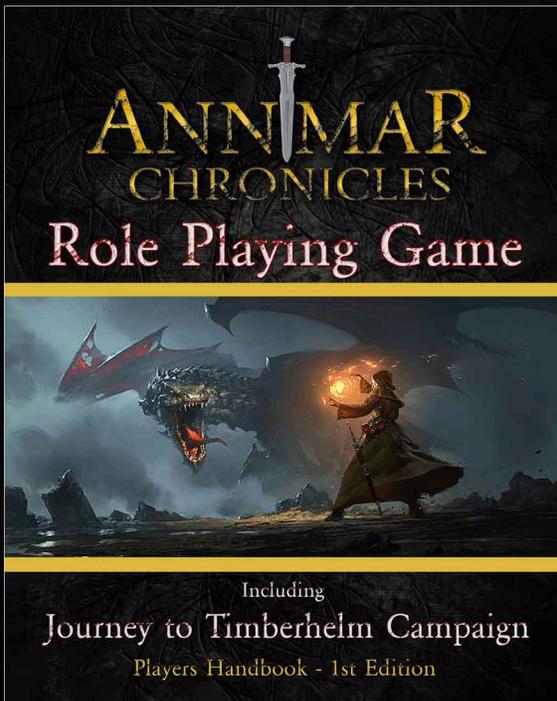
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