

# That Nerd Show



## WEEKLY NEWS



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



"It's the Same Old Madden"

**MADDEN 22 Review**

by Marcus Blake



The Greatest Half-Time Show  
and Why it Should be in Madden!

# MARVEL MOVIES THEN AND NOW

How We Rank the Movies Including **BLACK WIDOW**

BY SYDNEY COSTA & HAYDEN COSTA



**SHANG-CHI**  
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**FREE GUY**  
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Reviews and

WHAT YOU SHOULD  
BINGE-WATCH





*Enrique Meseguer*



**NO  
TIME  
TO *007*  
DIE**

ONLY IN THEATERS  
OCTOBER

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# MARVEL MOVIES THEN AND NOW

## How We Rank the Movies Including *BLACK WIDOW*

By Sydney Costa and Hayden Costa

*13 years, 23 movies, and 3 Phases* heading into Phase 4. That has been our experience with Marvel movies since Disney took over and I think every nerd can agree, that it's been a glorious time. And the best part is there's still more to come so as we close out this summer with two more Marvel movies it's time that we look back at Marvel then and now, and rank the Marvel movies so far. But we do it with a twist. We rank the Marvel movies from the perspective of two young fans who have just now gotten to see everything and we're born about the time that Disney's Marvel universe started. A brother and a sister, a sibling rivalry, they ranked the Marvel movies for That Nerd Show.

### *Sidney Costa*

Ah, the MCU. Such a wonderful creation. A place where Earth's strongest line of defense consists of gods, war veterans, assassins, scientists, and billionaires. Where terrorist attacks are common and otherworldly beings are just par for the course. Over the past year and a half, I've had a great time watching them all. The plots are intriguing, most of the characters are realistic, and the comedy is typically on point. And though I'm sure it would've been epic and cinematic to see them all in theaters, it was nice to watch them in the comfort of my own home (where outside food is allowed) on Disney+.

For the most part, the movies are good. There are some that really hit it out of the park, and there are others that feel a bit more mediocre in comparison. However, the special effects, stunts, and CGI in general are always incredible, regardless of whether or not the movie is

actually good. The well-delivered and coherent scripts blend seamlessly with incredible visuals and surprisingly excellent scores. Plot holes or contingency errors are usually fixed or nonexistent, which I adore, because logic is typically ignored in fantastical universes. In fact, realistic logic isn't just present in the MCU, rather, it's brutally applied to our heroes, often having terrible effects like soul-crushing regret, unbearable grief, and *lots* of collateral damage.

But where I think the MCU truly shines is in its characters. They're always wonderfully written, with incredibly dynamic arcs, excellent emotional moments, and incredible action scenes. I adore their designs, their weapons, their powers, their backgrounds...if I could just talk about what I liked, I'd be here for hours! So, without further ado...



#1 - Doctor Strange

In first place, my favorite Marvel movie is #1 Doctor Strange. It doesn't really have any bad points, and where it shines, it *really* shines. The best parts about this movie are by far Doctor Strange's character arc and the fight

scenes. Strange is an overconfident surgeon with everything going for him, until he loses everything. It's one of many arcs in the MCU where a character is humbled and becomes stronger for it. And while this one isn't my favorite (I'll discuss that later) it's definitely one of the best. The fight scenes in this movie are also really strong. Sure, the choreography isn't as neat or precise as some of Captain America's or Black Widow's, but all the mind-bending, reality-breaking magic is a treat to watch.



#2 - Avengers: Infinity War

Speaking of incredible magic, the movie that comes in a close second is #2 Avengers: Infinity War. Not exactly the most common of opinions, but at least let me explain why. A lot of people dislike Infinity War because of its ending, but the last 10 minutes doesn't make the movie (most of the time). I really enjoy seeing all the characters from various movies finally meet and interact with one another. The minor plots and development (like the Guardians' fascination with Thor or Peter [Parker]'s attempts to impress Tony) that occur are interesting and neat, and the humor is

slightly more noticeable here than in End Game. The tone is never altered for the movie's sake or fanservice, and the ending is actually really well-done in my opinion. The soul-shattering silence as everyone is snapped away really puts into perspective just how much has been lost. That is, until....



### #3 - Avengers: Endgame

Avengers: Endgame came along and brought almost everyone back. But not without sacrifices. This movie's emotional backbone is a lot darker and heavier, as is fitting. The undertones of grief and loss aren't overwhelming, but they are definitely noticeable. Endgame is the end of an era, after all, and Marvel made sure to show us that. Almost everyone's conflicts are resolved, the original characters are metaphorically or literally put to rest (I miss you, Tony), and once everything's said and done, it just feels so...bittersweet. It's a great movie, and it's definitely earned its spot in third place.



### #4 - The Avengers

However, the original #4 Avengers is perfect as it is. The only reason it's not in first place is because I

just happen to like the other movies better. First of all, the characterization in this movie is spot-on. All of the heroes' interactions are incredibly enjoyable, and their interactions with Loki even more so. He's an excellent villain that I've always adored seeing on screen, and his reasonable, mischievous insanity makes him the perfect counterpart to our delightfully funny and powerful lineup of heroes. The aliens in the finale look incredible, and the effects that this movie has on the rest of the MCU are massive and are definitely not forgotten.



### #5 - Iron Man

Another movie that has a huge impact on the MCU timeline is the original #5 Iron Man. Now, canonically, The Incredible Hulk is considered the first movie in the MCU. But, since I never watched it, Iron Man is the first movie in the MCU that I saw. And what a start it is. Remember earlier, when I mentioned the many arcs where a character is humbled? Well, the best one is here. Tony's typically likeable, but often obnoxious arrogance has a tendency to get him into a lot of trouble. As he's humbled by the people around him, he gets stronger and grows into a better person.



### #6 Thor: Ragnarök

You know who's also pretty good at growing into a better person? Thor. And in #6 Thor: Ragnarök, he...doesn't grow that much. But he's hilariously fun to watch. This movie is just a great ride. And yes, I know there's plot and character arcs, but I don't really care. It's like a more Avengers take on the Guardians of the Galaxy, and somehow, it works. Hulk feels completely natural in this movie somehow; Loki is a riot to watch, and Jeff Goldblum's character is perfect. The settings are absolutely gorgeous and thorough, far more so than you'd expect for a movie like this. And the worldbuilding? Perfection. All in all, it's far better than I ever would've expected and definitely worth watching.



### #7 Ant Man

Ant-Man has a much stronger emotional core than you'd think. Scott's conflict with his ex-wife and daughter, as well as his struggle as an ex-criminal trying to find a job is really compelling. It makes you far more invested in his character than you'd think. His powers,

or rather, his suit, aren't a unique concept in and of themselves, but they're definitely handled in such an interesting way that they feel different in any way from any shrinking-based superheroes. The plot is intriguing and fun, and the climax is truly a thing to behold. Definitely a great movie for a great hero.



### #8 Spiderman: Far From Home

Spider-Man: Far From Home was a way better movie than I was expecting. In the canon timeline, it comes right after Endgame, so I was interested in how they'd handle Peter's relationship with Tony and the aftermath of the Avengers truly dissolving. And Marvel really delivered. I relate to Peter trying to please everyone and ending up helping no one. The plot is a lot stronger and more impactful this time around, and Ned isn't as obnoxious as he was in the first one. Mysterio is a great villain; he plays around with Peter's emotions and his mind, abusing his role as Peter's new father figure. And of course, I absolutely adore Peter and MJ together. They're perfect for each other and their relationship forms surprisingly naturally and realistically.



### #9 Captain America: Civil War

Captain America: Civil War is my favorite Captain America movie. It not only introduces multiple major characters and has an excellent conflict, but also has great character development for Steve and a few other characters as well. The action scenes are amazingly well-choreographed--some of the best fighting sequences throughout all the movies can be found here. This movie is also one of the best examples of battles having lasting effects in the multiverse. In fact, the events of Avengers: Age of Ultron are the main cause of the story in this movie: a civil war within the Avengers over agreeing to the Sokovia Accords or not. It really shows that the writers make sure the movies are a saga and not just a selling point.



### #10 Spider-Man: Homecoming

Coming in at #10 is Spider-Man: Homecoming and it's pretty cool. Even though it's not on a massive, world-destroying scale like most of the movies are, the conflict feels just as intense and intriguing. This slightly more slice of life-

esque plot works really well for this movie, because that's what its starring hero is all about. He's not a Guardian of the Galaxy; he's not the Incredible Hulk. He's your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man, and that's just fine. The one thing I don't really understand in this movie is Peter's crush on Liz. I mean, it's fine; I understand how it helps the plot along, I just don't see any chemistry between them. It feels almost forced, but it's alright. It doesn't bug me too much. Peter's emotional climax definitely makes up for it. I love that his spider-strength is recognized and I think Peter struggling to lift the building and finally overcoming it is great symbolism for all the stresses he has a tendency to take on. It might be unintentional, but it makes a lot of sense.



### #11 Ant Man and the Wasp

My #11 choice is Ant-Man and the Wasp. I love how it extends the universe of not just the MCU, but specifically, the world of the Ant-Man movies. It showcases a lot of Dr. Pym's former colleagues, which is a great and intriguing way to expand the universe. The Wasp is an excellent superhero, and I like the fact that she isn't immediately Scott's girlfriend. Their relationship isn't immediate, and it's never fully explained where exactly it is at the moment. The villain is decent, definitely not the best but definitely not the worst. The quantum realm is interesting and uniquely designed, and while sci-fi movies pinning any-and-all complex science on "quantum" normally bugs me, it doesn't really affect my opinion of

this movie because of how smoothly integrated it is.



### #12 Captain America: The First Avenger

Captain America: The First Avenger is in the #12 slot and is a really solid first entry in the famous saga of Captain America. It sets up a great base for what is to come and has a great villain. It would never work as a standalone movie, however. It leaves too many questions unanswered; too many mysteries unsolved. But if you view it as part of a series, it's a lot better. The setting is well done, Steve is likeable, Bucky is likeable, it's just really great and likeable in general. It is definitely a good base for an incredible series and a valiant superhero.



### #13 Captain America: The Winter Soldier

Even though I consider it the weakest in its series, #13 Captain

America and the Winter Soldier is a really strong movie and very close to the others quality-wise. The only reason it's lower is because it's not quite as memorable. However, it's still really good. The movie is more plot-driven rather than emotionally driven, and it's fitting. The theme is more intense and dark compared to the noble, all-American tone of the first movie, and it's cool. Bucky is a great secondary antagonist and works well as a dark mirror to Steve. Altogether, it's a very well put together movie and definitely a great watch.



### #14 Guardians of the Galaxy

In sharp contrast, if you want to watch a stupidly funny and action-packed origin story, you'd better pull up for #14 Guardians of the Galaxy. First of all, Star Lord is the perfect protagonist for this movie. His laid-back but overconfident demeanor, his musical swagger, and his general taste in clothing make him feel like a cheap knockoff of Iron-Man and I love it. His mismatched, rambunctious crew have more natural interactions with each other than Peter and Liz ever did, and even though they all apparently hate each other and most of them are criminals, they're perfect regardless. Thankfully, they're enough fun to balance out the terrible villain that is Ronan and make him forgettable enough that we can all pretend he only exists for plot purposes. Because he does. That's the only reason he's here. Even then, he doesn't influence the plot all that much and really just acts as a generally vague, looming threat. Without him, this movie would be a lot higher up. This

movie is a lot of fun if you can manage to mostly ignore the villain.



### #15 Avengers: Age of Ultron

It makes me sad when I say that #15 Avengers: Age of Ultron is the weakest Avengers movie. I like Wanda and her brother; their action sequences are well-paced and unique. The Avengers are great together as always, and I think it's funny that Ultron gained sentience, looked at the Internet, and immediately decided that humanity needed to go (honestly, who could blame him?). Tony suffering from PTSD is a very realistic and mature plot point, which I liked, and Vision is a pretty good addition to the roster of heroes. But the one thing that brings this movie down is Pietro's wasted potential. He makes me sad, not just because of his death, but because of what he could've brought to the table. He had potential as a character, but instead the writers killed him off for Wanda's development.





#16 Black Widow

On the flip side, #16 Black Widow is a much, much better movie than I was expecting. Despite the fact that it's the origin story of a literal trained assassin, it's shockingly funny and has a lot of exciting, intriguing moments. You'd think that Black Widow and her sister would be boring to watch together, but no, they're literally the perfect foils for each other. Natasha's serious, laser-focused demeanor perfectly balances out her deadpan sister's tendencies to not take anything seriously. The rekindled familial relationships have the perfect amount of awkwardness, distance, and begrudging love. Overall, it was a pleasant surprise that I thoroughly enjoyed.



#17 Iron Man 3

#17 Iron Man 3 is a decent entry in Iron Man's saga, and while it's not bad, it's not that great either. I like

Pepper and Tony's developing relationship and its ending, but everything in between just feels a bit mediocre. I think one of the biggest problems with this movie is that the writers think the villain is scarier and more powerful than he actually is. And sure, you could argue that that's the point of his character: to be an arrogant, threatening presence that believes he's stronger than he truly is, but I just can't see it. It is a good movie, though.



#18 Black Panther

And in terms of quality, #18 Black Panther is also pretty good. I can understand why people really love it, but I just don't. It's a good movie and certainly deserves all its praise, but I just can't love it the way other people do. I really wish I could, but the emotions just don't hit me as hard as they should. The villain is better than I expected, and though I don't like the ending, it makes sense and is fitting for the movie's tone.



## #19 Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume 2

#19 Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume 2 is a good movie, but I feel like it leans a bit too heavily on crude jokes and Star Lord's sudden father-son relationship with Ego. It's developed barely at all, and Ego's so ridiculously unlikable that it just doesn't feel feasible. It is funny, however, and somehow, it managed to actually get me attached enough to Yondu that I was legitimately sad when he died. And while Ego as a character isn't all that great, the concept of a sentient planet is definitely an interesting one and makes for a stellar, gorgeous, and unique climax.



#20 Thor

My #20: The original Thor is good for what it is. It works well as a start for its franchise and for introducing us to the world of Asgard. The emotions are good, the plot is good, everything's fairly well-rounded. Not a bad movie, but nothing about it really stands out to me. Loki's lust for power and his anger at his parents for not telling him he's adopted is a bit overdone, almost to the point of making him stupid, but partway through, the writers must've realized that and toned his aggressiveness down a bit. Thor also has a similar character arc to Iron Man with the whole "arrogant fool is humbled," and while it's not quite as good as his, it's still sensible and good.



### #21 Iron Man 2

Iron Man 2 is okay. It's still an Iron Man movie, so it's good, but compared to the others, it feels a bit contrived and almost unoriginal. War Machine is a pretty good character, and Tony's growth is thought out. But other than that, it just feels like watching an average superhero movie. It isn't bad, it just doesn't feel that unique either compared to the numerous concepts introduced in the rest of the MCU. I still like Tony, though, and everything about him is perfect as always. The writers could've taken him in an unlikeable direction in any of his movies, especially this one, but somehow, they managed to steer clear of bad protagonist territory and keep the perfect balance of arrogant and powerful, yet weak and humble.



### #22 Thor: Dark World

Speaking of humility, Thor 2 is just an okay movie. My biggest issue is that I feel like Thor's relationship with Jane is a bit rushed and more for story purposes than emotional purposes, like

Liz and Peter. They don't have tons of chemistry together. Thor is a much more likeable protagonist now that he's been humbled, and I like how much his growth is showcased by contrasting him with Loki, who refuses to grow or change. But the constant messing with the space-time continuum is neat and looks incredible. The climax is awesome, and the slow buildup showcasing just how powerful the Infinity Stones are is well-written and sensible.



### #23 Captain Marvel

My #23 choice is Captain Marvel--which I don't really care for. It's not because of a bias against her or anything, it's just a really mediocre movie with a plot that feels contrived because it is. They have a lot of wasted plot points that never get any attention, which is disappointing. They introduce things like Marvel not being able to control her temper, this weird all-powerful being, and some interesting side characters, but after they're mentioned, you don't really see them again all that much. And as for Marvel herself? I think she's pretty unlikable. She's rude and distant for no reason, she's not funny at all, and she just feels really dry and devoid of depth. They try and make you feel things and get you excited for her whole awakening and such, but it just doesn't feel earned. She barely grows at all, so when she gains this massive amount of power that the best characters in the MCU haven't ever gained, it just makes it feel so generic and not worth it. However, Fury is definitely the best part of this movie. He's funny and his fight scenes are great, everything

about him feels earned and thorough, and he's just great. I wish the rest of the movie was as good as he was.

The MCU is truly incredible and deserves all the praise it gets. I love almost everything about it, and I'm glad it exists, even its weaker parts.

### Hayden Costa...

The MCU is an amazing thing to be able to experience all at once. Since I didn't get to watch them in the theaters, instead I had the pleasure of binging through all the movies on weekends making sure I didn't miss a beat. I couldn't have imagined having to wait years between movies! Being able to watch them sequentially and immediately was definitely a benefit. The best part of being able to see them on Disney+ is seeing how cohesive the storyline really is. So, let's rank these movies in terms of greatness, shall we? I recently re-watched the entire series with my 14yr old sister as she saw them for the first time. Let's see where she and I agree and disagree on these films and their overall worthiness.



### #1 Spider Man: Far from Home

Starting off the Rankings is my favorite movie in the franchise, Spider-Man: Far from Home. This is my personal favorite movie in the MCU! First because it has Spider-Man, my favorite hero, and second, how it sets up for Phase 4. "Spider-Man, Far from Home" is the direct sequel to the events in Endgame and you can see how much the world

has changed. It's the different perspectives from every character that make it feel real and make you feel connected to the characters. The main antagonist, Mysterio, really does a good job in the villain role trying to take revenge on Tony Stark by befriending Peter and gaining his trust only to try and fake saving the world. The entire movie is just a really enjoyable experience seeing how much Peter and his friends have changed, covering the new responsibilities Peter has as well as how the ending sets up the beginning of Phase 4.



## #2. Doctor Strange

Dr. Strange is a weird, yet very interesting movie placing it second on my leader board. I love Dr. Strange as a character and I think he is one of the most interesting characters in the franchise. I really love his design and his powers, as well as his origin story. The movie covers the plot of the world-renowned surgeon Dr. Strange and how he ends up losing all usage of his hands and then becomes able to use them through magic. He goes to study in a monastery and he eventually finds and uses the time stone. The most interesting part of the movie is how you see his character change, from a cocky, egotistical, shallow surgeon, to a more humble and wise magician and man. The creative ending and the final battle tie up the story while also leaving it open for more adventures from Dr. Strange in the future.



## #3 Avengers: Endgame

In 3rd place is "Avengers Endgame" the huge finale to over a decade of epic movie making. It really is one of the greatest crossovers of all time. It fluidly picks up where "Infinity Wars" left off, allowing you to still understand what happens. Each character goes through a different reaction after Thanos' snap in the previous movie, and it shows just how much time has passed and how things have changed. The final battle is truly one of the greatest battles to watch and enjoy as it's a homage to all the movies and characters, as well as completes Tony Stark's story. The only part of the movie that I less than enjoy is how many of the great characters we've seen develop over the years end up dying. Overall, it is an amazing movie and a piece of cinema that should be remembered for a long time.



## #4 Black Panther

Black Panther creates a great world that gives birth to all sorts of different characters while also connecting itself to the rest of the Marvel story arc. Prince

T'challa is a great main character as we get to see him go through the character arc of becoming a king and dealing with those responsibilities. The rest of the supporting cast really creates a vivid world picture of how Wakanda functions. The fight scenes in the movie are all really well played out and are quite intense. The movie itself is quite long so at some parts it can be hard to watch as it is just an exposition dump or some mundane moments. However, it is still great as you can see all the effort and time that went into its production. Rest In Peace Chadwick Boseman!



## #5 Avengers

The first Avengers movie is where it all began combining the setup from the first few films into one great movie. Loki will always be one of my favorite villains? Anti-Heros? Tragic characters? Of the MCU. The way that the Avengers plays into and sets up the rest of the series is beautiful. The moment of the movie where the Avengers are fighting makes for a great conflict. The loss of Phil Coulson that brings them all together is a great twist in my opinion. It flips their "hero" switch. The battle in New York city and the focus on how each Avenger works together is great and the birth of the amazing main theme, which is how each hero compliments the others. The scene where they all stand in a circle will always be one of the cinematic greats.



### #6 Thor: Ragnarok

This movie will always be one of the funniest movies in the series with the jokes and how the script is written. It was really a fun movie to watch and see how Thor interacts with the rest of the cast and how his character has changed as well. Hela is a great villain in the movie, beginning it all by showing how merciless she is and absolutely crushing Thor. The battle scene on the rainbow bridge with Asgard and the music that plays is a reason to watch a movie by itself! There are so many nuances in this movie and I love how they concentrate on the intricacies of the relationships between Thor and Loki as well as Thor and the Hulk.



### #7 Iron Man 3

Iron Man 3 is the end to the trilogy of Ironman movies as it follows Tony Stark and Pepper and their relationship. As he struggles with many mental issues and things from the battle in New York, and questions himself as a hero. This movie is yet another very important part in

Ironman's character arc through the MCU. This movie has some great jokes and is very fun to watch. The twist in who is the real villain was surprising the first time I watched it and as always the final battle was cinematically on point.



### #8 Ant Man and the Wasp

Ant-man and the Wasp was a very enjoyable movie to watch, especially as the first time I saw it was in theaters right after Infinity War. Paul Rudd's is a very fun character to watch as the jokes in this movie always give me a chuckle. The way Ant-man and the Wasp work together in this movie is just perfect, whether it's just a conversation or an intense fight scene. Once again I can always praise marvel for how they always connect each movie because at the end of this movie we figure out it takes place at the exact same time infinity war does. My only gripe in the movie is that the villain is quite lack luster and the ghost character isn't great either.



### #9 Avengers: Infinity War

Infinity war had to be the most hyped-up movie of its time and while it wasn't my favorite, I have to say I did quite enjoy it. Thanos is just an amazing antagonist as he really makes you hate him, and that is a very important quality of a villain. Even though he feels justified for his actions everyone else disagrees and I think that is what makes this movie so great. The conflict between each of the parties is very entertaining to watch even though it ends on quite a sad note.



### #10 Guardians of the Galaxy

The Guardians of the Galaxy was a blast to watch as it was super funny throughout the whole movie. I can't think of a single scene that didn't have some type of good joke. The characters' different personalities all work well together especially with all of the antics they get into. The end of the movie perfectly sums it up where star lord starts dancing to distract ronan and actually ends up beating him. I don't think Ronan was the greatest villain in the movie as he is a little cliché, but he still serves a purpose but just isn't as good as some of the other villains in the MCU.





### #11 Spider-Man: Homecoming

The current MCU definitely has my favorite spider man as I love the way tom holland portrays him, a little nerdy as peter while also being a great spider man. This movie follows his life in high school as he tries to balance all of his school responsibilities with his job as a hero, which is something I can definitely relate too. The way he changes to become a bit more responsible and learns from his mistakes. I do think the movie suffers from its awkward moments, but it does always end up good in the end. My favorite quote from the movie will always be "Penis Parker".



### #12 Avengers: Age of Ultron

The second Avengers movie is rated the lowest out of all of the Avengers movies yet is still an amazing movie to watch. Tony Stark creates a self-aware AI that learns everything humans have done

and plans to destroy them. The movie is filled with interesting fights, characters, and how it setups for Phase 3 in the MCU is just marvelous. Ultron makes for a great villain and honestly, I wish I could see more of him. Another character I enjoyed in the film was Quicksilver even though his role was short lived. The movie has some funny moments and teases one of my favorite moments in the MCU when Steve Rogers almost lifts Thor's hammer.



### #13 Captain America: The First Avenger

The original Captain America film is by far my favorite of the 3 showing the origins of the 70 year old Steve Rogers. His story is an entertaining movie and it is super cool to see how his character is formed. Out of all the Avengers he has definitely changed the least and always sacrifices himself. His fights and all of the raids of Hydra bases in the movie are awesome to watch as I am a huge sucker for explosions and fight scenes.



### #14 Iron Man

The original iron man film was the start of the MCU. Being introduced to Tony Stark as a millionaire playboy sets it up so we can see the monumental character development he goes through. I think the best part of the movie is Iron Man's character and just how cool he is. Even though he is cocky and has a huge ego, the scene where he creates the suit from scraps shows that he has the skills to back it up. It was a great start to the MCU really hooking you in. I didn't think there was anything particularly bad about the film as it really was just the beginning.



### #15 Captain America: The Winter Soldier

Yet another Captain America movie covering some backstory. Seeing Bucky die in the begging but then bringing him back as the main antagonist was definitely a twist in itself. Seeing Steve Rogers antagonized was definitely a great change of pace for his character. Watching him having to uncover the secrets of Hydra while also trying to rescue his friend creates a great split focus dynamic. Once again, I'm going to applaud the world building in the MCU as the plot of the story shows that its main conflict definitely effects the people around him and having Iron Man in the film as well exemplifies that.



**#16 Ant Man**

At first, Ant Man seems like a standalone movie if you watched it by itself, but it makes a great contribution to his character. The antagonist is the weakest point in the film for sure, but the rest of the cast makes it so enjoyable. Ant Man himself gets put into many funny situations and its hilarious to watch him switch from a complete blundering idiot to a very smart and responsible guy. Hope is another one of the great characters in the film as she also undergoes some great character development.

too and why they did what they did. Overall, it was an enjoyable movie to watch as I especially enjoyed The re Guardians performance.



**#18 Captain America: Civil War**

Captain America Civil War follows the events of Ultron and has an interesting conflict with the Sokovia accords. Where Iron man and Captain America take sides on how the Avengers should operate. Cap believes that the Avengers should be able to do what they want and be free from government influence and Stark disagrees and thinks they should be regulated by the government. The sharp contrast in the movie makes for a good time watching always wondering what is going to happen between the two parties.

with the frost giants even after being told not to, and it follows Thor adjusting to the human world as he changes and becomes a little bit more humble throughout. Once again, my favorite part of the movie is Loki as he is a great villain for the film really just trying to mess things up once Thor is gone. The rest of the movie was still good and it sets up some important characters as well.



**# 20 Iron Man 2**

Iron man 2 in my opinion is the weakest of the iron man films as it is partially due to the villain of the movie. Compared to the first and the third it the villain just seems to be there. Tony Stark faces pressure from the military to share his technology as they think it should be used for the rest of the US even though tony stark doesn't want to do that. His friend Kevin ends up stabbing him in the back taking one of his suits for the military, which was a good twist. The movie is not bad, but it doesn't measure up to the rest of the films.



**#17 Black Widow**

Black widow is the only movie that premier on Disney plus and was a good movie that takes place right after the events of Ultron. Black widow is a great protagonist as she tries to free these girls from something that can control their minds. The red room where she was raised is what is behind everything. She ends up finding her mother and father



**#19 Thor**

The original Thor movie is a super important movie to the plot of the MCU as it introduces Thor. He was banished from Asgard because he ran into battle



## #21 Captain Marvel

Captain Marvel wasn't a bad movie per say. It just wasn't too amazing either. I personally didn't enjoy the character of Captain Marvel as I felt like there wasn't any development through the movie. Having her be so overpowered even from the beginning makes it less entertaining to watch, although I think the part where she breaks free is a great scene. The third act of the film I will say though is much better than the second and the first, escaping the ship and seeing her blow everything up is the highpoint of the movie.



## #22 Guardians of the Galaxy: Volume 2

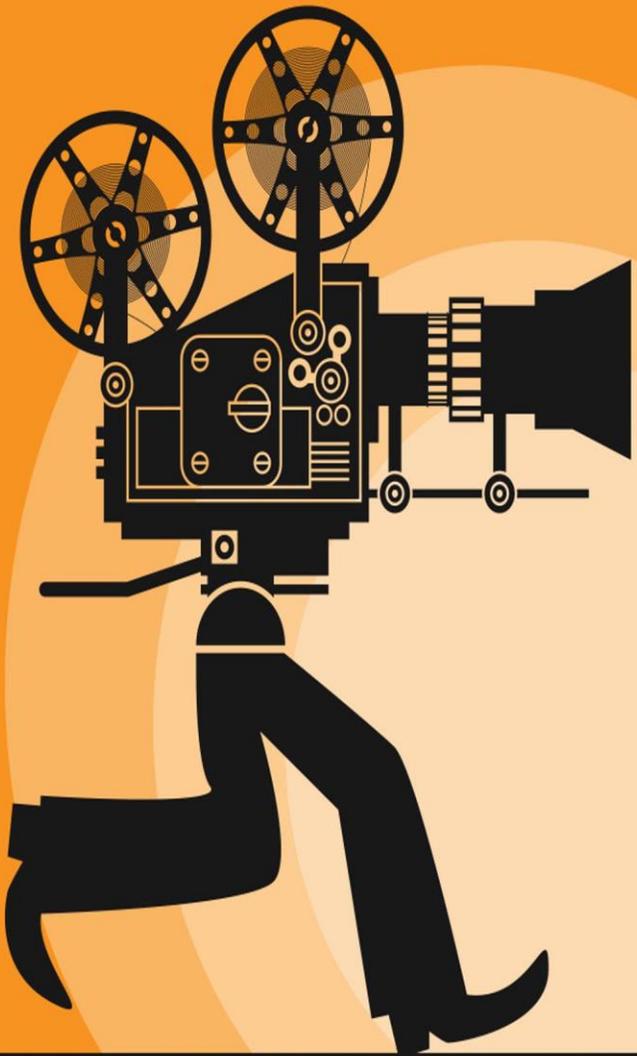
Guardians of the Galaxy 2 is decent movie following the events of Guardians of the Galaxy. In this movie we follow Star Lord on his journey to find his father and how they eventually figure out that he is part celestial which gives him all sorts of powers. The movie itself tries to keep the humorous feel of the first but doesn't accomplish it as well. Once again you should just watch the movie to understand how it plays into the plot.



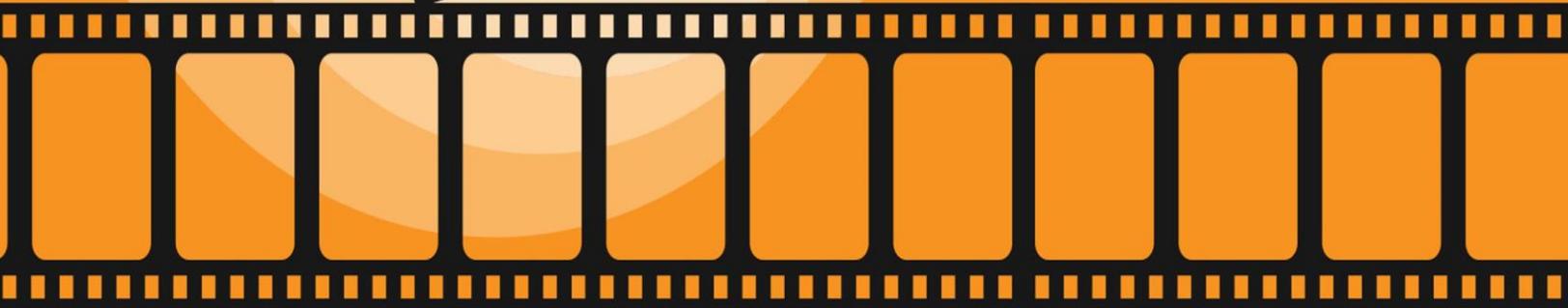
## #23 Thor: Dark world

Thor: Dark World is my personal least favorite movie in the series as the story just feels kind of bland. Thor was definitely not at his best in this movie and it just feels kind of "blocky" as a whole. The only reason to really watch the movie is to see how it plays into the larger MCU. The humor in the movie is not as great as in Ragnarök, nor how the supporting cast plays in the film. The dark elves are not very good villains either, they are kind of just wanting to destroy the nine realms just to destroy them...boring!





# Film and TV



What's Happening This Week...



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# 'Top Gun: Maverick' Flies From Thanksgiving To Memorial Day Weekend; 'Mission: Impossible 7' Ignites In Fall 2022

After a successful launch of clips and footage at CinemaCon, Paramount is pushing its big Tom Cruise tentpoles, *Top Gun: Maverick* to May 27, Memorial Day weekend 2022, and *Mission: Impossible 7* to Sept. 30, 2022. Again, these are big potential billion dollar grossing franchises co-produced with Skydance which require the world to be in an ideal order, not crimped by a pandemic. *Mission: Impossible* alone through six movies has grossed over \$3.57 billion. The most recent movie in 2018, *Mission: Impossible – Fallout* hit a franchise high of \$791.7M at the worldwide B.O. *Top Gun: Maverick* vacates the pre-Thanksgiving weekend of Nov. 19, and takes over *Mission: Impossible 7*'s previous spot of Memorial Day weekend next year, putting the sequel to the 1986 hit back in the summer, where the original first launched and grossed \$357M-plus global. In addition, Paramount's *Jackass Forever* will debut on Feb. 4, 2022 instead of Oct. 22 this year. Why is *Jackass* moving too? Paramount didn't want to cherry pick which movies will open in the current climate. In their view, all their filmmakers and stars deserve the same consideration and positioning in a future potential robust box office marketplace. For the time being, this leaves the rest of 2021 without any Paramount releases; their first big feature back is the Spyglass Dimension produced reboot of *Scream* on Jan. 14. After Paramount consulted with experts and their own global team, they decided to move the movies given the current conditions of COVID and its Delta variant around the world. The outlook for global theater attendance is expected next year, which is the opportune time to maximize box office potential, and overall makes the most business sense for the studio's movies. Recently, Paramount

moved *Clifford The Big Red Dog* out of the fall and will re-date some time in the future. There was a rumor that Sony was moving *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* from its most recent Oct. 15 wedge between MGM/UAR's *No Time to Die* on Oct. 8, and Warner Bros./HBO Max's *Dune* on Oct. 22, to *Top Gun: Maverick*'s pre-Thanksgiving spot. Alas, no, as the Culver City studio announced moments after Paramount's news here that they were dating *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* on Nov. 19 following the pic's rave reception at CinemaCon last week. While NRG moviegoing comfort level date has remained stable over the last two weeks at roughly 67%, it's down 11 points from July. In the latest NRG data from last week, 58% of Parents are 'very or somewhat comfortable' taking their children to the movies, which is down 5 points from Wednesday's wave and is the lowest point we've seen on this measure since late April. Moms drove this decline, down 7 points to 53%. Overall, 25+ females have the lowest personal comfort (57%, vs. 79% among Males <25). Similarly overseas, the comfort in attending a movie theater and positive outlook on the pandemic have declined from earlier this summer. Many markets – intercontinentally – have experienced big downturns over the past few months, including Australia, Mexico, Japan and China. Some examples of key international markets floundering in the midst of another coronavirus downturn include Australia and Southeast Asia (The Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam, particularly.) In Southeast Asia, The Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia are all fully shutdown, and Vietnam is operating at 2% of the market open. That said, most of Asia is still shut down or slowly return,



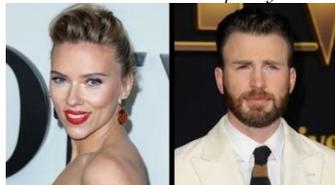
i.e. Taiwan. Japan and Korea, continue to be more than half off of their normal box office market. New Zealand, previously the safest place in the world in terms of the pandemic, is now on strict lockdown due to the delta

variant, while Australia is still missing 55-60% of its pre-Covid theatrical footprint because of major regions such as Victoria and New South Wales being closed. It appears as though New South Wales (repping 40% of the market) won't return until the end of October. Latin American, while it's seeing great slow growth, has major markets like Mexico and Brazil still 50% off from their pre-pandemic norms at the B.O. Europe is more on track to be making a robust comeback, but with the vaccine passport in effect (particularly in France, Germany, and Italy), theatrical recovery is still slow. Italy recently posted a 70% decline off its box office norm, while France and UK are down 40%.

reported by deadline.com

## Apple, Skydance Reuniting Marvel Superhero Stalwarts Scarlett Johansson & Chris Evans In Dexter Fletcher-Directed 'Ghosted'

Apple Studios has set a high profile project that will reteam Marvel stalwarts Scarlett Johansson and Chris Evans in *Ghosted*, a romantic action adventure that will be directed by Dexter Fletcher. He helmed *Rocketman* and finished *Bohemian Rhapsody*.



The stars are in advanced negotiations. The script is by Paul Wernick and Rhett Reese,

the writers of the *Deadpool* films and *Zombieland*, and most recently scripted *Escape from Spiderhead*. They hatched the idea and sold it to Skydance as a pitch. This becomes the latest deal for David Ellison's

Skydance, which is coming off the Chris Pratt-starrer *The Tomorrow War*, which was distributed by Amazon, the Michael B. Jordan-starrer *Without Remorse*, and just set Victoria Mahoney to direct *Old Guard 2*, the Netflix sequel. It gives another plum title for Apple, which just opened the Sundance sensation *CODA*, and is in production on the Martin Scorsese-directed *Killers of the Flower Moon*, the Will Smith-Antoine Fuqua film *Emancipation*, and upcoming is the Ridley Scott-directed *Kitbag* with Joaquin Phoenix as Napoleon Bonaparte and Jodie Comer as his wife Josephine. The new Wes Anderson film) since her attorneys filed a lawsuit against Disney over the studio's decision to day and date release *Black Widow* for premium purchase on Disney+. The dispute has become a proving

ground for stars and their reps looking to cement a new template on deals with no backend bonuses, when studios flip titles to streamers. Johansson just had her first child with husband and *Saturday Night Live* head writer and *Weekend Update* newscaster Colin Jost, and Deadline revealed that Disney responded with a barbed rebuke to Johansson while she was in labor (in fairness her lawyers filed suite during the same period), which prompted her reps to announce the birth of their son. Start date is uncertain, predicated on when she can return to work. She and Evans worked together in three *Avengers* films, as well as *Captain America: Winter Soldier* and *Captain America: Civil War*. Waiting for more detail on the film and will convey when I have it.

reported by deadline.com

# Anthony Mackie Closes Deal to Star In Disney/Marvel's 'Captain America 4' Film



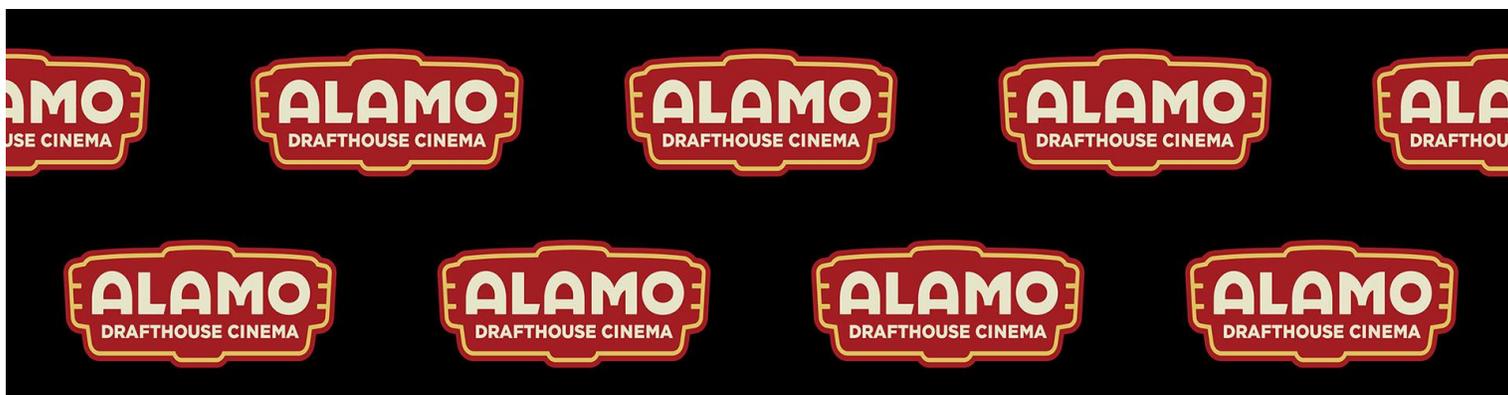
**Anthony Mackie** has closed a deal to carry the shield and his first superhero picture in *Captain America 4*, sources said. Kevin Feige's Marvel Studios keeps its details well under wraps and it isn't clear whether the movie will involve Sebastian Stan, who starred

with Mackie in the well-received Marvel Studios Disney+ limited series *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*.

The unofficial title indicates this is Mackie's vehicle, and it's an exceptional career moment for the Juilliard-educated actor who has been a bright spot in every film he's appeared in. That includes the Best Picture winner *The Hurt Locker*, *8 Mile* and *The Banker*, to his turns as Falcon, the wingman of Captain America, who was handpicked by that superhero to succeed him. The series involved his conflict in taking on the superhero persona. Mackie played Falcon in six Marvel films beginning with *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*.

*Captain America 4* is being scripted by *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* head writer and creator Malcolm Spellman, along with series staff writer Dalan Musson. This is not believed to be the top-secret project tipped by my colleague Justin Kroll that might bring Chris Evans back into the fold. A director hasn't yet been set for Mackie's film.

reported by [deadline.com](https://deadline.com/2021/08/anthony-mackie-captain-america-4-movie-deal-disney-marvel-malcolm-spellman-1234817327/)  
<https://deadline.com/2021/08/anthony-mackie-captain-america-4-movie-deal-disney-marvel-malcolm-spellman-1234817327/>



## 'Sonic The Hedgehog 2': Idris Elba to Play Knuckles



**Just Announced!** **The Suicide Squad** star Idris Elba is joining Paramount's *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* voicing the famed character of Knuckles. Knuckles is a red Echidna and he's the guardian of the Master Emerald in the videogames. He is also

known to be hot-headed and a fighter. Elba joins previously announced James Marsden, Ben Schwartz, Tika Sumpter, Natasha Rothwell, Adam Pally, Shemar Moore, and Jim Carrey. Jeff Fowler is returning to direct on the sequel after delivering a pre-pandemic blockbuster for Paramount with the first 2020 film which grossed close to \$320M WW. Pat Casey, Josh Miller and John Whittington are writing the script off a story which Casey and Miller penned based on the SEGA video game. Neal H. Moritz, Toby Ascher, Toru Nakahara, Hitoshi Okuno are producing. EPs are Haruki

Satomi, Yukio Sugino, Shuji Utsumi, Nan Morales and Tim Miller. Elba is a 5x Emmy nominee, and won a Golden Globe in 2012 for Best Actor in a Miniseries for *Luther*. His recent features include Netflix's *The Harder They Fall* and *Concrete Cowboy* as well as Universal/Will Packer's *Beast* and George Miller's *Three Thousand Years of Longing*.

Reported by [Deadline.com](https://deadline.com/2021/08/sonic-the-hedgehog-2-idris-elba-to-play-knuckles-1234812424/)  
<https://deadline.com/2021/08/sonic-the-hedgehog-2-idris-elba-to-play-knuckles-1234812424/>

# Aubrey Plaza To Star in Low Spark Films' 'Emily The Criminal', Will Also Produce!



**Aubrey Plaza** is set to star in *Emily The Criminal*, from producer Low Spark Films. Plaza is also on board as a producer. Gina Gershon and Megalyn Echikunwoke have also been cast in the feature. The film tells the story of Emily (Plaza), who is down on her luck and saddled with debt who gets involved in a credit card scam that pulls her into the criminal underworld of Los Angeles, ultimately leading to deadly

consequences. The pic is written and directed by John Patton Ford. Tyler Davidson, Plaza and Drew Sykes are producing, with Dexter Braff, Kevin Flanigan, Angus Wall, Kent Kubena, Lowell Shapiro, and Mike Dill serving as Executive Producers. Low Spark is fully financing the film. ICM Partners, CAA Media Finance and Verve are handling domestic sales. Production recently wrapped on the film in Los Angeles. Plaza recently starred in and produced *Black Bear* and *Ingrid Goes West* and starred in *Happiest Season*. Plaza will next be seen starring in two upcoming films - Guy Ritchie's *Untitled Thriller* opposite Jason Statham and *Best Sellers* opposite Michael Caine which premiered at the 2021 Berlin International Film Festival. Plaza recently signed onto star as the lead role

in Hulu's drama series, *Olga Dies Dreaming* which she will also produce. Additionally, she well known for starring in Noah Hawley's FX series, *Legion* and the Emmy-nominated comedy, *Parks & Recreation*. Gershon will next appear as 'Moxxi' in Eli Roth and Lionsgate's highly anticipated adaptation of the popular video game *Borderlands*. Later this year, she will be seen opposite Cate Blanchett, Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence in Adam McKay's *Don't Look Up*. Most recently, she starred in Woody Allen's *Rifkin's Festival*, opposite Wallace Shawn.

reported by deadline.com  
<https://deadline.com/2021/08/aubrey-plaza-emily-the-criminal-1234816800/>

## Rachel Brosnahan Boards Quiver Distribution-Backed Walter Hill Western 'Dead For A Dollar'



**The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel** Emmy, SAG and Golden Globe award winner Rachel Brosnahan is joining Walter Hill's upcoming western *Dead for a Dollar* which already stars Oscar winner Christoph Waltz and Oscar nominee Willem Dafoe. In addition, Quiver Distribution, we understand, was instrumental in arranging the film's financing and packaged the project

alongside Canadian-based production company CHAOS a Film Company. Quiver will release the movie in the U.S. and Myriad Pictures has acquired the international distribution rights which they began selling at the recent Cannes market. Deadline first told you about the project. *Dead for a Dollar* follows a famed bounty hunter (Waltz) who runs into his sworn enemy, a professional gambler and outlaw that he had sent to prison years before (Dafoe), while on a mission to find and return the wife (Brosnahan) of a successful businessman who is being held hostage in Mexico. Hill also wrote the movie. Berry Meyerowitz, Neil Dunn, Carolyn McMaster, Kirk D'Amico and Jeremy Wall are producing. EPs are Jeff Sackman, Larry Greenberg, Christoph Waltz, Lawrence Mortorff, and Alex

Habrich. "We are thrilled to be working with Rachel and this best-in-class cast," said Quiver Distribution Co-Presidents Berry Meyerowitz and Jeff Sackman. "As a rapidly growing company in an ever-changing industry, we are always eager to expand our horizons as we venture more into finance and production. Brosnahan recently starred in the Amazon movie *I'm Your Woman*. Her other feature credits include *Beautiful Creatures*, *The Finest Hour*, *The Courier*, *Spies in Disguise*, and *Patriots Day*. She has also starred on such series as *House of Cards*, *Manhattan* and *The Black List*.

Reported by Deadline.com  
<https://deadline.com/2021/08/rachel-brosnahan-dead-for-a-dollar-movie-quiver-distribution-1234812466/>

# Amazon Prime Video Announces Latest Installment of “Welcome To The Blumhouse”



Amazon Prime Video is excited to announce this year's installment of "Welcome To The Blumhouse," featuring an all new set of unique, unsettling thrillers developed with an eye towards original, diverse storytelling. Produced by Blumhouse Television and Amazon Studios, BINGO HELL, BLACK AS NIGHT, MADRES and THE MANOR premiere worldwide this October exclusively on Prime Video. The "Welcome to the Blumhouse" slate once again showcases both well-established and breakout actors collaborating with emerging, predominantly female, directors. BINGO HELL and BLACK AS NIGHT premiere on October 1, followed by MADRES and THE MANOR on October 8.

**BINGO HELL**

October 1, 2021

### Logline

A feisty senior citizen fights to protect her beloved neighborhood from an evil force that's taken over the local bingo hall and is killing the residents in gruesome ways.

### Short Synopsis

When a sinister figure threatens the residents of a low-income community, a feisty senior citizen tries to stop him in *Bingo Hell*, a wickedly original horror movie with a fiendishly funny twist. After 60-something neighborhood activist Lupita (Adriana Barraza) discovers that her beloved local bingo hall has been taken over by a mysterious businessman named Mr. Big

(Richard Brake), she rallies her elderly friends to fight back against the enigmatic entrepreneur. But when her longtime neighbors begin turning up dead under grisly circumstances, Lupita suddenly discovers that gentrification is the least of her problems. Something terrifying has made itself at home in the quiet barrio of Oak Springs, and with each new cry of "Bingo!" another victim falls prey to its diabolical presence. As the cash prizes increase and the body count steadily rises, Lupita must face the frightening realization that this game is truly winner-takes-all.

**Directed by:** Gigi Saul Guerrero  
**Written by:** Shane McKenzie, Gigi Saul Guerrero, Perry Blackshear

**Starring:** Adriana Barraza, L. Scott Caldwell, Richard Brake and Joshua Caleb Johnson  
**Executive Produced by:** Jason Blum, Lisa Bruce, Jeremy Gold, Marci Wiseman, Raynor Shima and Lauren Downey

### BLACK AS NIGHT

October 1, 2021

#### Logline

A resourceful teenage girl driven by revenge, alongside her trusted friends, spends her summer battling vampires terrorizing her city of New Orleans.

#### Short Synopsis

A resourceful teenage girl leaves childhood behind when she battles a group of deadly vampires in *Black as Night*, an action-horror hybrid with a strong social conscience and a biting sense of humor. Fifteen years after Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, a new threat leaves its mark on the Big Easy in the form of puncture wounds on the throats of the city's vulnerable displaced population. When her drug-addicted mom becomes the latest victim of the undead, 15-year old Shawna (Asjha Cooper) vows to even the score. Along with three trusted friends, Shawna hatches a bold plan to infiltrate the vampire's mansion in the historic French Quarter, destroy their leader, and turn his fanged disciples back to their human form. But killing monsters is no easy task, and soon Shawna and her crew find themselves caught in a centuries-old conflict between warring vampire factions, each fighting to claim New Orleans as their permanent home.

**Directed by:** Maritte Lee Go

**Written by:** Sherman Payne

**Starring:** Asjha Cooper, Fabrizio Guido, Mason Beauchamp, Abbie Gayle with Craig Tate and Keith David

**Executive Produced by:** Jason Blum, Jeremy Gold, Marci Wiseman, Lisa Bruce, Maggie Malina and Guy Stodel

### MADRES

October 8, 2021

#### Logline

Expecting their first child, a Mexican-American couple move to a migrant farming community in 1970's California where strange symptoms and terrifying visions threaten their new family.

#### Short Synopsis

Beto (Tenoch Huerta) and Diana (Ariana Guerra), a young Mexican-American couple expecting their first child, move to a small

town in 1970's California where Beto has been offered a job managing a farm. Isolated from the community and plagued by confusing nightmares, Diana explores the rundown company ranch where they reside, finding a grisly talisman and a box containing the belongings of the previous residents. Her discoveries will lead her to a truth much stranger and more terrifying than she could have possibly imagined.

**Directed by:** Ryan Zaragoza

**Written by:** Marcella Ochoa & Mario Miscione

**Starring:** Tenoch Huerta, Ariana Guerra, Evelyn Gonzalez, Kerry Cahill, and Elpidia Carrillo

**Executive Produced by:** Jason Blum, Jeremy Gold, Marci Wiseman, Lisa Bruce, Sanjay Sharma and Matthew Myers

### THE MANOR

October 8, 2021

#### Logline

After suffering a mild stroke, Judith Albright reluctantly moves into a historic nursing home where she becomes convinced a supernatural force is killing the residents.

#### Short Synopsis

A malevolent force preys upon the residents of a sleepy nursing home in *The Manor*, a gothic tale of terror with a modern twist. When a mild stroke diminishes her ability to care for herself, Judith Albright (Barbara Hershey) moves to Golden Sun Manor, an assisted living facility with a sterling reputation. But despite the best efforts of the staff, and a budding friendship with fellow senior Roland (Bruce Davidson), strange occurrences and nightmarish visions convince Judith that a sinister presence is haunting the massive estate. As residents begin to die mysteriously, Judith's frantic warnings are dismissed as fantasy. Even her devoted grandson Josh (Nicholas Alexander) thinks her fears are the result of dementia, not demons. With no one willing to believe her, Judith must either escape the confines of the manor, or fall victim to the evil that dwells within it.

**Written and Directed by:** Axelle Carolyn

**Starring:** Barbara Hershey, Bruce Davison, Nicholas Alexander, Jill Larsen, Fran Bennett and Katie Amanda Keane

**Executive Produced by:** Jason Blum, Jeremy Gold, Marci Wiseman, Lisa Bruce, Sandy King and Richard J Bosner



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# MOVIE REVIEWS

## Last of the Summer Movie Reviews

**"It's the Next Great Marvel Movie!"**  
**Shang-Chi: The Legend of the Ten Rings**  
Review by Marcus Blake



As we enter into Phase 4 of the Marvel universe new characters will be introduced. And now it's time for Shang Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings. He is a Marvel character with great martial arts abilities who was introduced into

the comics while working with the Avengers and trying to stop the Ten Ring terrorist organization. Now, as you can imagine, Marvel has taken a few liberties with this character and added a little bit more mysticism than what he had in the comic books. But the basic elements of this character are all there. He is the son of a man who wants to destroy world peace at all cost and is sometimes referred to as The Mandarin and yes, this is a bit of a spoiler alert, we actually get to meet the real Mandarin, unlike the one we saw in Iron Man 3. But Shang Chi is another character that will be working with the Avengers and this is a perfect time to introduce him. I want to say first that this is a fantastic movie, I enjoyed it very much, and I do consider it one of the better Marvel movies. Origin story movies in the Marvel universe tend to be better, although, that is not always the case as we have seen with Wolverine: Origins and I think we can all admit that Captain Marvel was kind of "blah." However, for Shang Chi, this is a great origin story that's filled with lots of action, heart, and the right amount of comedy thanks to Awkwafina playing the best friend or sidekick if you will. But the real praise has to go to actor Simu Liu in a lot of ways played in almost perfect Shang Chi. If you are not familiar with his work, then I encourage you to check out Kim's Convenience Store where he plays the older brother. This is his "big

break" and he does a marvelous job. In fact, the Asian cast was damn near perfect. I admit that I didn't think much of this movie going in and maybe part of that was not having known that much about the character, but I'm glad that it surprised me at every turn especially with its connection to Doctor Strange and the Multiverse. As always, each individual movie perfectly connects to something larger and this is no different. It's an almost perfect movie and we'll get to why it's not exactly perfect a little bit later, but here's what makes this movie great and worth seeing in the theater. First, the action is Non-Stop and it's some of the best martial arts choreography that we've seen especially for a superhero movie. The cast is great not only for the lead actors but Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, who played the father to Michelle Yeoh who is great in anything she does. I admit, she is still one of my favorite Bond girls. I don't think Asian actors get enough credit when it comes to English roles, but there has been an abundance of great Asian actors that have graced the silver screen and it's nice to have them more and more in superhero movies. Awkwafina is always a delight on the big screen and she has perfect chemistry with Simu Liu. If you have a great cast, then almost you're guaranteed to have a good movie.

There's a lot of nods to not only the original storyline of shame she but how this is all connected to the other Marvel movies. Spoiler alert: they got to Ben Kingsley make an appearance again as Trevor or the fake Mandarin. He was a delight. I felt like the pacing and everything about this movie was damn near perfect. It did a good job of setting up the character's origin story and how the main character has to face off against his evil father to save the village that his mother was from while basically following his own hero's path. There are some slow moments for dramatic effect with the characters and the issues they're wrestling with, especially their past and the choices they must make in order to save the world. But as slow as these scenes are, they do work well and don't disrupt the pacing. Overall, this is a great film with the right amount of action and comedy that will make fans who are not familiar with Shang Chi fall in love with the character. It's a very enjoyable movie and while I still can't say it's

the best Marvel movie, I'm sorry Winter soldier and Logan will take that spot, I can definitely throw this into the top 10, especially for how great this particular origin story is. And the little welcome scene during the credits, introducing them to, "spoiler," what Bruce Banner refers to as the "circus" is adorable. Now here's what doesn't make the movie perfect. Ancient mysticism is one thing, but it needs to be explained so that the audience fully understands. I don't think they did that well enough, except when creating some ancient enemy that wants to destroy the world. Boring! Tell me more about this enemy and what they really want to do. Where do they come from? What is the enemy's origins? You can't give an audience a little mystery and then have some flying creature come out of a mountainside and say he wants to destroy the world. We need more than that.

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

movie and needs to be seen, especially on the big screen. I don't think Disney premium access would do it justice. If this is the first true superhero movie that we get to see coming back from the pandemic then Shang Chi and the legend of the Ten Rings it's perfect for that. The movie will keep you on the edge of your seat. The cast will keep you entertained and laughing. If you're a fan of Marvel movies or just superhero movies in general, you will not be disappointed and it's about time that a great Asian cast gets to shine in a Marvel movie! For me, it's almost perfect and left me wanting more. It is certainly, one of the best martial arts movies I've seen in a long time. So, I definitely recommend going to see this movie in the theater, it's worth every penny of a full-price movie ticket and introduces these new characters, wonderfully, to the Marvel universe. Plus, there's plenty of Easter eggs connected to the other Marvel movies that will make your inner nerd child jump up and down. It's easily a 9 out of 10 for me and I can't wait to see it again!

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

**'Reminiscence' Certainly Makes Us Remember Other Films; Review by Chloe James**

Though we may not realize it, most of us film nerds love a good film noir story, or at least elements from them. The mystery, the suspense, the class, the grit, the seemingly jaded lead that still has a good heart deep down. Although only becoming mainstream around the 1940s, this not entirely old genre has seeped into our pop culture almost as much as the Superhero film. For lovers of the genre like myself, the good news is most writers and directors love it way more than most people, and we'll never be lacking in new material. The drawback...well a lot of the classic tropes may have started to feel overdone. Hoping to prevent it from becoming stale, writer's are constantly finding new ways to re-invent film



noir...leading of course to the "cyber-noir" (futuristic sci-fi flavored noir in laymen's terms) sub-genre. I can safely say *Bladerunner* alone contributed greatly to my love of both sci-fi and noir. And here we come to *Reminiscence*, the latest entry in the cyber-noir continuum. Starring Hugh Jackman as Nick Bannister (the most noir name I've ever heard), a specialist who uses special technology to help people relive their most treasured memories with the help of his assistant Watts (Thandiwe Newton.)

When the beautiful client Mae (Rebecca Ferguson) enters his life, then mysteriously vanishes months later, Bannister obsessively tries to solve the mystery of her disappearance—through any means necessary. The film was written and directed by Lisa Joy, who also created the *Westward* series and also wrote for *Pushing Daisies*, so we know we are in the hands of a sci-fi nerd who loves a good mystery. Set in Miami a dystopian near future in which global warming has already very much left it's impact, *Reminiscence* certainly doesn't look exactly like any other cyber noir film. For starters, most of Miami is flooded in this world's future, which is often shown in some very impressive looking scenery glory shots. Because the daytime has become intolerably hot to the average person, most people in this setting now live and work during the nighttime, making the day the perfect time to commit crime and solve mysteries. You guessed it. In an ironic twist, most of the action in this noir film takes place during peak daytime hours, making it one of the brightest of it's genre I've ever seen. I'm actually intrigued by the idea of a bright noir film, as that is definitely a subversion of what we would normally expect. After all, its not really the physical darkness that defines the genre, but the overall feeling that must be there. On the other hand, the aesthetic is where the uniqueness of this movies ends. *Reminiscence* is indeed reminiscent of many films we've already seen, namely of course, *Bladerunner* and *Minority Report*. On top of that, it has a heavy dose of classic 1950's noir influence as well. The thing is, I'm not entirely sure it was trying to be all that original. I'm not trying to say Lisa Joy blatantly copied any of these movies because she couldn't come up with anything better. I do think she is just a lover of pop culture and wanted to include as many nods to her favorite movies as she could while still being able to play around with her own original characters and plot. Hey it works for Tarantino, why shouldn't it work for her? Something I can definitely say as a positive is the cast. No matter what, Hugh Jackman always brings it, and once again, I'm impressed by his performance. It

doesn't matter if I've seen him play a sad, cynical character a 100 times, I'm always down to see it again. I hate to say it, but Thandiwe Newton may have out bad-assed Hugh Jackman this time, which is no easy feat! I may be biased because she was one of my favorite parts of *Westworld*, but Newton is always perfect at playing my ideal type of strong female character, all while staying both classy and vulnerable. One of the main issues that may not make this film for everyone is the writing. Staying true to genre, it's extremely dialogue heavy, with far more talking scenes than action. For me, that's 100% fine. For many who may not like so much talking or going into it expecting *The Matrix* amounts of action, it may be a bit wordy to digest. Like any good mystery, it takes a decent amount of time to unravel what's actually happening. I can't say it could have been shortened in any way without sacrificing important plot in some way, but there are definite times in which the movie feels a bit draggy. At the same time, because scenes were allowed to breathe more, I felt it was much easier to follow what was going on than in other noir films my first time watching them. While it may lack in some originality, *Reminiscence* is still a solid entry in both the noir and cyber-noir genres. Maybe it's because I love noir so much that I want to see it as a self-aware homage rather than anything terribly ground breaking. And, again I may be projecting, but I honestly think that was the director's intent. Sometimes, in order to keep a genre alive, you need to stick as close to the tried and true as possible. If anything, now I want to watch *Bladerunner* again—all 5 versions.

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

**"Sweet Girl" Review by Julie Jones**



Ever since I saw Jason Momoa as Khal Drogo I have been a fan. I'm not blind to the fact that sometimes he is a better actor than others. And I'm not blind to the coincidence that he is a better actor when he is playing a shirtless warrior king than when he is

playing...well...anything else. But, sometimes I want to give him a chance. And for those

who are concerned, I lost all bias when he shaved his beard. I'm still dealing with the trauma, so I don't see him as the distraction I once did. Now, it's an even playing field. Sweet girl is about a family dealing with a medical crisis. The mother has cancer and the medical bills are racking up. They aren't a rich family, but they are willing to do anything they can to gain any extra time together.

When a new drug is offered and thought to be their salvation, they think they are saved. But, a company interferes with the release of this treatment and her husband and daughter become, understandably, upset. The rest of the film is about them trying to figure out all the details and get a little revenge along the way. While the storyline isn't something that we see often, I wouldn't call it a good one. I can understand someone becoming upset about losing someone they love because a drug is unavailable to them, but the part where they are able to access this person and all the people involved seems a little too convenient. And all the violence involved seems a little excessive when we all know that things like this happen all the time. Political play in the world of Big Pharma is hardly anything new and while I know that doesn't make it ok, it does make it unlikely that someone would go hunting down all those guys and being successful. The acting isn't anything that's going to win any awards, not from anyone. You will see some faces you recognize, but I doubt you will be able to put names to them. It's just a big game of "Isn't that the person from that thing?" that isn't really worth the effort. If you enjoy watching actors in their craft, you can skip this movie. It will just irritate you. There is a twist at the end; if you can make it that far. However, I'm not sure that it's worth enduring the whole thing to be able to tolerate the last half an hour. There isn't anything special about this movie; so it isn't worth noting film direction, cinematography, etc. Really, the best the film has to offer is action and even that leaves you wanting. The action scenes are obviously choreographed and that is really annoying, they could have done a better with them. However, its an action movie in a lot of ways so you get your money's worth with it Overall, I thought it wasn't a great movie. It was better than The Joker, in my eyes, but it wasn't something I enjoyed or would watch again. I just had a hard time finding the suspension of disbelief and the entire film felt lacking to me. I didn't feel connected to the characters, the development was too fast. Adding an extra 20 minutes might have made it better. even if I had more time, the acting made it almost impossible to watch it again. I would give it a five overall and I would recommend that you

just skip it unless you just have to see a Jason Momoa in a movie.

## Final Grade: 5/10 (Average)

### "Swan Song" Review by Marcus Blake



If there was ever a perfect gay road trip movie or maybe the gay version of Jack Keruoaac's. "On The Road," then it's a film by director Todd Stephens called Swan Song starring the fabulous

Udo Kier... a leading man at 76 years old! It's also one hell of an indie film. It's heartwarming, it's emotional, it's hilarious, and more importantly inspirational for those who are in the twilight of their years and might have forgotten that, yes, they too can have one last swan song! Even as over the top as it might have been with its lead character, I still loved this film. I'll just tell you that right now and I certainly think it's a must-see film for 2021 especially after the pandemic. It's a film, we need as we try to get back to a somewhat normal society. The story is about a retired hairdresser living in a depressing and mundane nursing home as the best years of his life are behind him. Then he gets one last curtain call to do the hair of one of his beloved patrons before her funeral, so he breaks free of his depressing existence and embarks on a journey across small-town America to do one last job and rediscover his zeal for life in the only way a flamboyant gay man can. Road trip movies are supposed to inspire the audience. Some fail, some hit it out of the park, this one does the latter. When I review movies, I always talk about what I think is perfect casting. I don't know if given the premise of this movie I would have automatically thought about Udo Kier being the leading man because he's been so great as a villain over his 50-year career. It's easy to immediately think of Nathan Lane or the late Robin Williams for a role like this, but Udo is perfect and you will understand that in the first 5 minutes of this film and especially

when he breaks out of the nursing home and starts his journey. Of course, hanging out with the man and getting to party with him at a film festival will convince anyone he's perfect for this type of role. Todd Stephen has crafted a fabulous story based on a man that he knew in his hometown who wasn't afraid to be gay when many were still hiding in the closet and more importantly wasn't afraid to be himself, therefore inspiring, I'm sure, more than one closeted gay boy that it's okay to be who you really are and not "give a fuck" about what other people think. Udo's character, Pat, in the movie perfectly embodies that and it's easy to see where Todd Stephen drew his inspiration when writing and directing this film. But as much as Udo takes center stage in this film, the rest of the cast does a sensational job from Jennifer Coolidge to indie film actors that you may not have heard of or real life people who just happen to be in this film and are not really actors at all. It's a beautifully shot film that shows the last hurrah of a character seemingly waiting for death, but needed one last swan song. Now it's not a perfect film, of course, I have minor critiques as a film critic. Sometimes the over-the-top antics of the main character take away from the subtle dramatic moments that really make it a beautiful film. Sometimes these antics are necessary to drive the story as when he's dancing in the gay nightclub. But sometimes the true beauty in a film is when the characters are quiet and subtle and there isn't much going on, but yet convey so much emotion that it intensifies the drama. Now there are a lot of beautiful scenes in this film that are like that. Such as the one with Udo and the old woman who gives him a ride to the church. But other than a few minor critiques that could probably have been fixed in editing, there's no denying that the performances are beautiful and uplifting. There's no denying that this story is heartwarming and inspirational, especially for old gay men who might have spent half their lives in the closet and may still get a chance to rediscover their passion for life. I don't think Swan Song is meant to be an activist film, but in its own way it is that because no matter what your sexuality is or what you did in life, it's easy to get into a rut in your twilight years, but then something could come along that will bring back your zeal for life. And I think it's a great tribute to the men and women who are very much like Mr. Pat, the inspiration for Todd Stephens to be who you are and live a full life while not giving a shit what other people think, the ultimate "fuck you" to bigots and judgmental jealous people who want to tear you down because they can't have what you have. That's a beautiful underlining message in this film as well. But

this is definitely wonderful as the story and Udo Kier made it even better by his fabulous acting.

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

**“CODA” Review by Danielle Butler**



CODA is the next great film to watch on Apple + TV. Ruby Rossi played by Emilia Jones is a seventeen-year-old girl who's dealt with the struggle of being the only hearing

member of her family and aiding her deaf parents and brother by interpreting for them with their fishing business. Soon after joining her high school choir, Ruby faces an internal struggle to prioritize her family, or entertain the possibilities of college driven by her strong singing ability. CODA means child of deaf parents; this movie is based on the 2014 French film *La Famille Bélier*. This film is telling an authentic story and filled with American Sign Language (ASL) bringing the struggles, simplicities, and realities of the deaf community to the forefront. As Ruby develops her singing voice and discovers her love of singing, Ruby's family is hit with harsher restrictions from the businessmen who take a portion of the fishermen's profits. Ruby's teacher provides guidance and support, encouraging Ruby to practice vocal exercises and to hone her craft, which competes with her time to help her family interpret meetings and everyday tasks that require the Rossi family to interact with hearing people in their town. The film shows the raw and real hurdles the deaf community faces and how Ruby's loyalty to her family has stifled her ability to pursue her personal endeavor to sing a duet for a concert and audition for Berklee College of Music. Will Ruby stay with her family as they struggle to keep their fishing

business and means to earn a living afloat? Or will she choose to do something with her singing talent and leave her family for college? The film takes place in beautiful Gloucester, Massachusetts. We see scenic views and the hours of work it takes the family to caught and sell fish in their local town. The Rossi family's day begins early (3:00am to be exact.) Ruby waking up early before school to be on board the ship with her father and brother as their interpreter and deckhand. The family was cast by all deaf individuals who sign ASL. Ruby's parents played by Academy Award winning and Golden Globe winning actress Marlee Matlin (Jackie Rossi best known for her roles in *Children of A Lesser God* and *Switched At Birth*), dad, Frank Rossi played by Troy Kosner, and brother (Leo Rossi) played by Daniel Durant. The story showed how heavily Ruby's family relies on her and the challenges the teen has finding time to focus on her voice as well as connecting to her family. There is an excellent tone and use of sound (or lack thereof) in the film that really conveys how Ruby and her family differ. Ruby was teased in school for speaking like a deaf person because she was raised two deaf parents.

She was not interested in studies after high school for that reason. However, with the help of her music teacher Mr. Bernardo Villalobos (played by), Ruby begins to believe in herself as a person with a gift for singing and the possibility of a future outside of helping her family's fishing work. The beauty of this story is the unfolding of the family's and how they come to see each other different light. I always hope for a happy ending and without giving it away, I think you'll be pleased to see how this family learns to relate to each other and show the familial love that bonds siblings, parents, and children despite differences. The singing scenes with Emilia are total gripping, and we even get a chance to see her sing and sign simultaneously. Clearly, Emilia Jones did an outstanding job singing, signing, and portraying a typical teenager facing obstacles your average teenager would not while also showing many of the challenges the deaf community face daily. Her performance struck a chord with emotional scenes and laugh out loud scenes. I was truly impressed by all the actors of the Rossi family (Emilia Jones, Marlee Martin, Troy Kosner, and Daniel Durant.) They're

funny and loving – much like a real family would be. This is a story about a family. A coming-of-age film and dramedy of a rocky journey with a beautiful ending. How do you think the family deals with a sea monitor and the coast guard? Will the family be able to come out from the under fees and strict restrictions set by authorities? Will Ruby's family understand her love of singing and support her? Does Ruby have a chance to go to Berklee and if she did, what would her family do if they can't afford a hearing person as their deck hand? No spoiler alerts here. I rate Sundance film CODA, directed by Sian Heder, a nine out of 10 for its character depth, humor, and storytelling magic. Be sure to sit down and watch CODA on Apple TV+, its worth it!

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

**THE BENDS (AND BREAKS) OF “BECKETT,” FILM REVIEW BY ALEX MOORE**



What can I say? It is August and I feel burnt out. If you are from Texas (or anywhere else in the south), you will probably understand what I mean. However, as it turns out, this is also the time

of the year when movie studios tend to churn out the last of their summer films and clear the decks for the big fall season lineup. Now, things might be a bit different, considering the world around us over the past 18 months or so, but I digress... One such example has just been released by Netflix. Who knew that a streaming service could become so sought after that its release would be just as significant as a theatrical release? I think that even if things were normal, this would still be somewhat of a factor, but that is just my own opinion, is it not? Am I still digressing?... OK, so “Beckett” is the name of our lead character, who happens to be played the growing, big screen sensation,

John David Washington ("Tenet"). He is on a trip with his special lady, April Hanson, played by Alicia Vikander ("The Green Knight"). They are in the country of Greece. I admit that this is an interesting setting, as I cannot even recall the last time I saw a movie at this location. As they make their way to their next stop, late at night, they have an automobile accident in which the vehicle is overturned and crashes into a small house, down the side of a hill and just off the main road. Beckett emerges conscious, but badly injured and seems to see some people approaching him, just before he blacks out. When he comes to, he awakes inside of a hospital room, still reeling from the incident and confused about everything that has happened. His girlfriend is not around and the local medical team and police force attempt to clear the haze surrounding his memory, but to little or no avail.

The real story, essentially, begins here. For whatever the reason, Beckett decides to make his way back to the scene of the crash. It would be understandable if a man who has just been through what he has been through could barely make his way around a strange, foreign town, let alone an isolated house on the outskirts of that town, yet he finds it with little difficulty. What he discovers is that there appears to be some kind of a coverup connected to the location and the police are soon on his tracks, trying to put him down, permanently, but why? Well, that remains unclear, for now. At this point, I was reminded of a movie from the past that had something of a similar premise, known as "The Net." With that in mind, I began to compare and contrast the two films. How could I not at that point? It is an unsettling situation to say the least: you are in another country, you have lost everything that you hold of value while you are there and you are unsure of whom you can trust. A key difference for Beckett is that he is able to find trustworthy strangers along the way and none of them seem to ever betray his trust, as limited as it must be. I failed to see any evidence in the titular character that he was actually struggling to trust anyone he might come in contact with. That was not the case in "The Net." Beckett eventually makes contact with the US Embassy and quickly makes his way to the capital of Greece so that he can get the help he needs on foreign soil. Although he faces some resistance along the way, he gets there with

relative ease. If you have ever seen any other movies of a similar nature, you would know that there is no way he is home free. Something has to rise up and so it does. It will become obvious sooner than later, but will you still be at all interested at that stage? Even though I found myself impressed with the performance of Washington, I felt that the direction the story went was unnecessary. The plot turned away from Beckett's personal affliction and great loss and toward his mistaken involvement with a potential, national crisis. Perhaps I think it would have been more interesting if we did not find out so much about what was really going on. The intensity and interest as a moviegoer, for me, was greater when we did not know the true outcome of Hanson's condition, for instance. Once I knew the truth about her, there seemed to be nothing left to keep me intrigued by what Beckett was going through. Why should he suddenly care about what he is mixed up in when he had no idea what was going on in the first place? Yes, he is trying to survive, but at what cost and for what? I did not care what happened after the revelation of Hanson had occurred, plain and simple. Beckett's reaction. Seemed too minimal, but maybe that was intentional, so that the filmmakers could justify his further involvement in the national crisis in Greece. He had some close saves and ridiculous falls, but that is to be expected in an action movie. The trouble with that is it did not feel like a traditional action film for the majority of the story, More like a thriller, such as "The Net." I cared about Angela Bennett's plight in that story. I was satisfied when the outcome came to fruition. I was not quite satisfied at the end of "Beckett," but at least it was not too long...

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

**"Free Guy" is the High Score  
Movie of the Year!  
Review by Marcus Blake**

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



NPC inside an action-oriented open world video game that takes on a life of its own! If there was an Oscar category for the best comedic action hero, Ryan Reynolds would win at hands down! As a nerd who plays video games, did I like this movie? F@#k yeah! It was everything I expected it to be. It may not have been absolutely perfect, but it kept me laughing and I was truly entertained. It's the kind of movie that I would watch with Ryan Reynolds to get me ready for the next Deadpool movie. But even though this is a perfect film for the comedic talents of Ryan Reynolds at the heart of this movie is really a gamer's love story. That's not to say that this is some kind of romcom masquerading as a gaming movie, not at all! But it is a movie about gamers finding love within their own love of creating a fantastic Video Game world. For nerds, it's the kind of romantic story we like because we're always looking for people that like the same things we do, whether it be gaming or comic books or certain kinds of films. So, what makes this movie good and worth seeing! If you get past the love story, it's just a funny movie about NPC players finding their own identity within a system.

Isn't that kind of a metaphor for life. It's Ryan Reynolds doing what he does best and keeping us laughing while killing bad guys! But the movie is also a critique on the video game industry in itself, the difference between creating some popular mind-numbing game like Fortnite versus gamers coming together and creating something truly wonderful in an open world system, plus the struggle of those gamers against greedy corporate types who don't care about creativity as long as they're making money. I think in a lot of ways this movie captures the essence of those type of people perfectly. It's the kind of people we rail against that run big gaming studios and put out shit year after year because they know they're going to make money, you know, like whatever version of Call of Duty that'll never

be as good as it used to be 10 years ago or the latest version of Madden which didn't really make any updates from the year before except rosters and a new schedule. But instead of taking the direction that the movie *Tron* did 40 years ago where you have a truly evil villain that doesn't smile, you can't help but laugh at Taika Waititi's portrayal of some phony gaming guru who's all about the bottom line. In fact, he almost steals this movie just as much as Ryan Reynolds. Free Guy, almost feels like the sister movie to *Ready Player One* with tons of gaming and nerd references and great cameos that will keep you entertained for almost 2 hours. And while both of these people light up the screen, the other actor who truly makes this a wonderful film is Jodi Comer from *Killing Eve*, who is the perfect gamer girl that nerds have seen in their dreams. You know the kind of girl that is nerdy, but hot, and loves to play video games with you! Yes, unfortunately, that's kind of rare! She adds her quirky sense of humor that we all love from *Killing Eve* and elevates this movie even more beyond it just being a comedic vehicle for Ryan Reynolds. I think she is perfect casting. Now, as much as I love the film and will certainly watch it again, it isn't perfect. Because it's a video game movie set in an active open world, there's a lot going on and you don't always have time to catch your breath. It's true that the action is necessary because it is a video game movie, but sometimes we just need to take a moment and catch our breath to enjoy what's really going on in the movie. Free Guy does that to a point with some of the scenes where the main characters are talking, but even that gets a bit repetitive at times, especially when the Ryan Reynolds NPC player is having to live out the same scene over and over. However, these are minor complaints. Free Guy is not a drama... It's a comedic action movie for gamers so in that regard the movie knows exactly what it's supposed to be. It's a fun nerdy movie that will entertain you and definitely a good one to go to the theater to see. If you like Ryan Reynolds and a *Deadpool* movie, then you will certainly like him in this kind of movie because I feel like in a lot of ways his character is what *Deadpool* would be if he were an NPC player in a video game, funny, snarky, and full of action that will keep you entertained. Video game movies are always hard to make, but unlike other video game movies where the story is based on the story of an original video game, this one works because it knows what it is as a film and isn't trying to be anything else. It doesn't need to have some big social message, although I feel like the movie does take aim at certain kinds of video games that while they may be

popular, they're absolute shit! At the end of the day and in a logical world shouldn't be popular video games. The cameos are good and as I've said before trying to figure out the actor's identity will be just as fun as watching the movie. So, my overall assessment of Ryan Reynolds' *Free Guy* is at its core just pure unadulterated entertainment with a bit of a gamer's fantasy when it comes to love and that's okay! It's entertaining and worth the price of a movie ticket. It will keep you laughing and as for a Ryan Reynolds movie, it's a good filler until we get *Deadpool 3*! Free Guy knocks it out of the park in a lot of ways, but more importantly, it's just a lot of fun to watch and it doesn't need to be anything else. It's the perfect kind of entertainment, especially if you're a nerd!

**Final Grade: 8/10 (Good)**

### **"The Suicide Squad" Is Masterfully Done Chaos!" Review by Chloe James**



This opinion isn't exactly controversial, but the first *Suicide Squad* movie just wasn't my jam. Like, how can you take a story that's supposed to be about a motley crew of villains being forced under pain of death to save the day, and make it dark, serious, and slow? I defended the theatrical cut of *Batman Vs. Superman*, and even I had a hard time watching *Suicide Squad*. Even worse, this was the live action debut of Harley Quinn, a character who is immensely popular and highly anticipated considering she was only introduced to the

Batman canon in the early 90's. Of course, there was no way Harley is ever going to be a 100% perfect betrayal to the diehard fans of hers. But...well, even with the seemingly perfect casting of Margot Robbie, Harley was not quite how she was supposed to be. And I was prepared to be as forgiving as possible with her. When it was announced that director James Gunn (of *Guardians of the Galaxy* fame) would be taking over the next *Suicide Squad* film, I was relieved...yet cautious. I'm a huge fan of the *Guardians* films, of course, and of his older (and far less restrained) works with Troma. But can Gunn's unique style of film making fit with the ever so serious DCU? The latest *Suicide Squad* film takes place some time after the original. Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) is back behind bars and is tasked by the ever staunch Amanda Waller (Viola Davis) to join another task-force of second rate super villains on a suicide mission. A second "Task Force X", also put together by Waller has landed on the island. Led by ultra-jaded killer Bloodsport (Idris Elba) and not so jaded killer Peacemaker (it's John Cena!), and including Polka-Dot Man (David Dastmalchian), Ratcatcher 2 (Daniela Melchior), and King Shark (Sylvester Stallone). This time, the mission takes place on the island of Corto Maltese, which has been recently taken over by a violent, insurrectionist army, and is hiding a terrible secret Waller wants her teams to destroy at all costs.

But even with two "uniquely gifted" teams of villains assigned to the task, this mission may be more than any of them can handle. As one could expect from Gunn writing and directing this installment, *The Suicide Squad* is not only a HUGE departure from the previous film, but for DC films in general. While it is technically a sequel, Gunn made sure that you don't necessarily have had to see the first one in order to get this. And the new film is such a "rebranding" that even the most severe haters of the first film should be able to give this one a chance. For starters, the writing feels like a breath of fresh air. Both the dialogue and the action are quickly paced, while still allowing the audience to be able to figure out what the hell is going on — which is exactly the opposite of the first film! Also unlike the previous *Suicide Squad*, the characters actually have charm to them. This time, I actually care about each of their motivations and backstory,

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

**“Disney’s ‘Jungle Cruise’ is Extremely Accurate to the Ride (Take That However You Want)”  
Review by Chloe James**



even the would be less than likable characters. I even found myself cheering for the doofy King Shark, who really doesn't have much to him, other than being a powerful man-eating shark man. Harley Quinn may be the biggest improvement. While she may have been the most likable character in the first film, I still had many problems with how she was written. But Gunn is a rare example of a man who actually knows how to write female characters. He understands that while Harley is, and will always be a "sexy" character, being "sexy" isn't part of her core personality. Instead, he allows her to play up her child-like insanity, her master manipulation skills, and her inner struggle with morality. Like I said, Robbie was always a perfect casting choice for Harley, but just needed the right script and direction to get there. I might also mention her costumes feel much more accurate to her original vision. (Sorry, call me basic, but I'm a huge Harley fangirl, so it's pretty important to me that they get her right!) Visually, while still being impressive, *The Suicide Squad* felt almost absurdist. Like the CGI was very good, but made us feel more like we are watching an actual comic book movie, rather than a world of dark realism like DC has been going for in most of its main films. It's easy to compare it visually to the *Guardians of the Galaxy* films, but I could almost say it goes a step beyond them. In fact, in almost every aspect, you can get the sense that Gunn was stretching the creative freedom he got as far as he could. The result? A chaotic, irrelevant mess that somehow works perfectly. Deaths in this movie come fast, cheap, and unexpected. Because of this, you really get a sense of Gunn's gross-out, B-film origins. And yet, through all the cartoony chaos, it managed to tell an entertaining story that stayed true in spirit to the source material. It's not often that we get a sequel that is not only better than the original, but blows the first film out of the water. I'm very pleased that the powers that be behind this film had the foresight to hire the right director and give this franchise a much needed make-over. This not only proves that matching the right writer and director to the right film is important, but giving them the creative freedom to follow their own vision, (unlike how the studios treated Zach Snyder), can lead to something absolutely fantastic.

Are any of you old (and cynical) enough to have scoffed at the idea of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* film when it was announced? I mean, I can't say I fell into that category, as I was still young, full of wonder, and loved all things Disney and pirate related. (At the same age, I thought the *Star Wars* prequels were flawless, so let's just say I was easily impressed.) But if you really think about it, the idea of making a film based off of a ride was just...strange. Like the opposite is quite common. Of course film themed rides can are the standard -who wouldn't want to go on a ride based on their favorite films? But Disney...Disney really did take a dark boat ride featuring animatronic pirates and turn it into a multi-billion dollar film franchise. Who could blame them for trying to milk that formula with some of their other park attractions. So far, their other attempts have been...less than successful (*The Haunted Mansion*, *Tomorrowland*.) But hey, Disney has a lot more rides and tons more money, so why not try, try again? Set in 1916, Dr. Lily Houghton (Emily Blunt) and her brother MacGregor (Jack Whitehall) detail Lily's research on the Tears of the Moon, a fabled tree whose petals can cure illnesses, to an association of English explorers, explaining that the petals could revitalize medicine and aid in the war effort. The Houghton's request access to an arrowhead recovered by Dr. Albert Falls that Lily believes is key to

locating the tree. When the association denies their request, believing the tree to be a myth and a female scientist unqualified to join their ranks, Lily steals the arrowhead instead. She narrowly avoids Prince Joachim (Jesse Plemons), a German aristocrat who also wants the arrowhead and the tree. Traveling to South America, Dr. Houghton meets up with Frank Wolff (Dwayne Johnson), an overzealous and exaggerating jungle cruise tourist guide, which initially starts with deception but eventually leads the group on a jungle adventure in pursuit of the Tears of the Moon. I can't say I see too much originality in this film. A lot of the visual and plot aspects derive from the *Pirates* films. But don't worry, it has a healthy dose of *The Mummy*, *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars* thrown in as well! The one slightly more...unique aspect was the the character of MacGregor, Lily's not-so-adventure ready brother. While having a whiny load character in these types of stories is a fairly common trope, he might be my favorite I've ever seen of this. I don't want to spoil too much about him, but I did find myself smiling every time he was on screen. Emily Blunt, who is a pro at playing strong woman, made sure to go over the top this time, as her character Lily makes Princess Leia seem polite at times. At least it works for this type of film. As far as Dwayne Johnson's Frank goes, he felt like he literally embodied the "soul" of this movie.

Yes, this seemingly unoriginal cash grab of a movie actually has bit of soul to it. I'm not sure if I should be surprised or not that *Jungle Cruise* was chosen to be the base of this latest attempt. It's one of the attractions I remember the least in my visits to Disneyland. Perhaps I was just too hyper fixated on ghosts and pirates. But looking up a video of the ride on YouTube, it all came back to me. The one thing that makes it unique, though, from all of the attractions that got turned into films so far is it's guided by an actual person (the Skipper) reciting the (very pun-heavy) given script with their own flair. To this extent, the film stayed pretty faithful to the original spirit of the ride. Dwayne Johnson's Frank truly embodied the cheesy, punny Skipper featured in the actual tour, sprinkling in many corny jokes from the ride throughout the film. And for fans of the ride (and cheesy humor in general, like me) this alone is worth the price of admission. Much like any old school Disney park ride, the

Jungle Cruise ride relies heavily on animatronics, not that I would ever complain about that! The movie...well...much like most films made at this time, is almost all CGI when it comes to special effects. I'm really only drawing a comparison of the two because, I must admit, the CGI in this film doesn't quite cut it for me. I'm not saying its bad, just not great compared to what I know Disney is capable of. Yet, (and hear me out), in this rare instance, this aspect almost lends itself to adding more charm to the film. Because the CGI feels "less than real", I was reminded of the of the ride's animatronics. We crusty adults know both animatronics and CGI aren't real, yet if we're having enough fun in either a ride or a movie, it doesn't matter. While *Jungle Cruise* probably won't be enough to inspire another multi-billion dollar franchise, its definitely the "Disney Ride" film I've enjoyed the most since the (first three) *Pirates* films. Sure, it lacked in originality and depth. But that didn't matter, as it was just plain fun and did everything it needed to do to pay proper homage to the ride. The only downside is I wish I can go back to Disneyland now....

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

## SLIDING IN AND OUT OF REALITY WITH "ANNETTE!" REVIEW BY ALEX MOORE



The category of Musical is rich in success and tradition in the world of cinema. If you were to go back and look at all of the classics which have won Best Picture, especially during the 1960s, I think you would find that many of them were musical in nature. Even as recent as the past two decades, we have seen this occur. It is quite simple as to why: classic never dies. However, it changes with the times and times have definitely changed a lot in a very short amount of time, lately... As per usual, when I sat down in the movie theater (for the first time in a year or so), I had zero expectations. All I knew was that this was going to be a long movie, as in two hours and twenty minutes. For starters, this is the English-language debut of French director Leos Carax ("Holy Motors"). He, also, co-wrote the screenplay with the story originators, Ron Mael and Russell Mael (of Sparks fame). If you are a fan of Musicals, I would suggest that you prepare yourself for something off-beat. In my personal experience, the songs in a musical are meant to convey a thought or feeling, but in a poetic and deeply-expressive way. As you know, music tends to carry a lot of emotion within it. What makes the concept different, in this case of "Annette," is that the words are very deliberate and straight-forward.

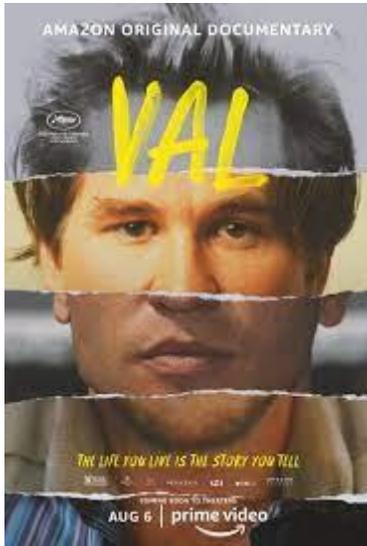
The lyrics do not tend to sound poetic. Instead, the delivery and actions of the actors carry the emotional weight. For example, the opening number literally announces "this is the start of the show" and the early love-making scene involves the primary actors singing what they simply feel as they rub each other and so forth. I do not think I have ever seen anything like that before, but maybe some of you have. Speaking of the primary actors, they are: Adam Driver ("Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker") as Henry McHenry and Marion Cotillard ("Dolittle") as Ann DelGreco. They represent the centerpiece of a loving, celebrity couple. The advancement of the plot is told in sequences of what they do as celebs; one is a comedic, performance artist and the other is an opera star of sorts. The story is, also, pushed forward through the production of news gossip outlets. Since none of the characters really say or sing anything with much depth, this is what we have to work with. It might sound silly, but it is surprisingly affective if you just watch the facial and bodily expressions that accompany the actors. If there is a third (or

a fourth) character of importance, they come in the form of: Simon Helberg ("Florence Foster Jenkins") as The Conductor and Devyn McDowell as Annette. In my opinion, The Conductor was the most interesting performance throughout the film. I found him to be highly relatable. As for Annette, she is, well, odd. Do not expect a typical appearance, but stay open-minded, because it will make more sense by the end of the story. Although I was slow to accept the approach of this Musical at the outset, one thing that I never had a complaint about was the cinematography and set design. They combined to take on a timeless, French quality, which is not very surprising, but still welcomed and appreciated. This style has become pretty familiar inside of the 21<sup>st</sup> century of moviemaking and does not seem to have worn out its welcome, if I may be allowed to sound somewhat redundant. As I tried to imply, the style of singing grew on me, but many of the numbers, themselves, were pretty forgettable. There is one song that reprises itself several times and is, no doubt, the most important song in the Musical, but it is really the only one that I still replay in my head days after I first experienced "Annette." What I gathered from this movie is that love and success tend to flutter in and out of the worlds of reality and ideology. The primary characters involved are literal in their words, but seem to be in and out of touch with what is around them. The only one who seems to stay grounded is The Conductor (and, eventually, Annette). She unleashes a few surprises, especially at the end, and it spells a very tragic undoing for Henry McHenry. All along, he was never who we thought he was and neither was the world around him. If you pay close attention, it all make sense in the end, I repeat! Dare I say that the trend of making films which are seemingly too long is continuing in the year of 2021...? Yes, I most certainly do! I believe that "Annette" will garner plenty of accolades in the months ahead, but I do not think I have seen the year's best film, either. Not yet, anyway. The off-beat nature of this Musical will definitely rub many moviegoers the wrong way. I saw quite a few walk out before the halfway point, myself. However, the critics are eating this one up and, in certain portions, will likely continue to do so. I have found myself renting in the

middle of the two: I did not hate this film, but I did not love it, either. I was impressed with certain details, from a technical standpoint and enjoyed the difficult acting performances, but overall, it is simply good and not great, from my perspective.

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

**THE ONE AND ONLY “VAL”  
FILM REVIEW  
BY ALEX MOORE**



Going back to my childhood days, which I like to revisit often, there were certain movies that made a lasting impression. There was the unpopular (and controversial) sequel to “The Wizard of Oz,” for example, and then the film adaptation of a musical all about singing plants from outer space. I rented them with the help of my mother and rewatched them over and over and over again. Not longer after, there was another. It was produced by a director who took the cinema world by storm in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. At the heart of this movie was a handsome, charismatic and humorous method actor. His name is Val Kilmer. Over the years, I have come to love and appreciate Kilmer’s style and dedication to his roles, namely in the 1980s and ‘90s. It started, for me, with “Willow” and continued on with films such as “Tombstone,” “Batman Forever” and “The Saint.” He continued on throughout the 2000s, but, for some reason, I did not keep up the way that I did before. By the time the 2010s had arrived, Val was working on a one-man show, disguised as Mark Twain, so that he could fund a bigger

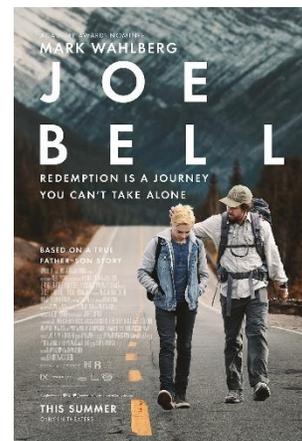
project about the same character. Alas, tragedy struck soon after and he is still waiting for the right opportunity... What I have often said about the film genre of documentaries is that they can usually be divided into two, distinct categories: those with an open-ended purpose where everything is gathered as it comes, and those with a pre-determined purpose, where everything is already set and is simply presented to the viewers. However, in the case of “Val,” we have something of a hybrid. You see, Kilmer’s affinity for filming himself and those around him was already set to be cut and spliced together, so to speak, but then there are the scenes taking place now as a cancer-recovering Val travels around the country (and abroad) with friends and family while somebody else is filming him. Perhaps the most special and important detail is the decision for narration. We SEE whom it is, early on, but we do NOT know who that is until the very end of the film and it is a grand revelation.

The old footage tends to go in a biographical order. It begins with Kilmer’s childhood, a time when he and his two brothers often made movies together at their family’s home in California. It was charming to watch, as almost none of us have ever seen any of this before. It immediately reminded me of another documentary from some 20 years ago, entitled “American Movie.” The key difference is that Mark Borchardt’s dream has yet to ever, truly be realized and Val Kilmer’s is still unfolding. As you watch present-day Val relive some of his fond memories of college at Juilliard, you will then see his past life unfold and learn all about his difficult beginnings. As Kilmer summed it up, they were difficult times, but promoted much growth. Slowly but surely, Val found his way to the top, not only stealing scenes, routinely, as a formidable supporting actor, but also as a daring lead. Along the way, he was married and had several children, he went through some challenging film productions and a painful divorce and he interacted with lots of very interesting people and places all over the world. What a life Val Kilmer has had! With all that said, it is comforting to know that Val has not lost his sense of optimism. He is still pushing forward, despite all of his difficulties as of late. He believes that it is not just himself that lives this life, but all of us, together,

with the help of God. He believes deeply in that he will one day be healed and I found that to be inspiring, but that is not all... “Val” came along at a time when I was personally dealing with some hard times. The hard times are not over, yet, either. Sooner or later, we all have times of self-reflection, and those moneys can be scary and depressing. As I watched Val Kilmer traverse through the present and the past and look forward to the future, I found myself thinking about my own past and present an future. It is not over until it is over, so we all might as well make the most of it. I think that Mr. Kilmer would nod his head if he heard me say that right now. You do not have to be a fan of the titular character to enjoy this documentary, but it probably makes the experience more fun. It also makes it harder to watch, at times, too. Hearing Val struggle to speak is not easy, but we can easily see that he is struggling and so it is okay. He is not seeking our sympathy. In fact, he wants us to empathize, instead. There was a moment when I was able to connect with an emotion on y end as he was experiencing it on his end. This is the mark of a great film. “Val” might be lacking in some details that I was curious to hear more about, but aside from that, it was just about as good as anyone could hope for. Take my word for it and then see it for yourself. You will not be disappointed.

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

**“Joe Bell” Film Review  
by Marcus Blake**



walking from Oregon to New York City and talking to anyone who would listen about the dangers of bullying. His son had

Mark Wahlberg stars as Joe Bell in a new movie about the “real life” Joe Bell. If you don’t know the story, Joe Bell was a grieving father who dealt with the suicide of his gay son by



# Netflix's 'Cowboy Bebop' Live-Action Series Sets Premiere Date; John Cho As Spike Spiegel Unveiled In First Look Images

Coming November 19, 2021



I think it's time to blow this scene. Get everybody and their stuff together. OK, three, two, one let's jam. *Cowboy Bebop*, after the long and winding road of production, has finally touched down on Netflix. The streamer unveiled the premiere date and first-look images for its live-action series, starring John Cho. Based on Shinichirō Watanabe's cult anime series, *Cowboy Bebop* follows a group of misfit bounty hunters, led by Spike Spiegel (Cho) as they search for the galaxy's most valuable criminals. Mustafa Shakir also stars as Spike's trusted co-pilot Jet Black and Daniella Pineda as the highly-skilled bounty

hunter Faye Valentine. The series will debut on Netflix Friday, November 19. The first look images, which can be viewed below, expand on the quick glimpse the *Cowboy Bebop* stars provided earlier in the summer during Netflix's Geeked Week event. The pics see Cho donning Spike Spiegel's signature purple suit, Shakir's prosthetics and tease Faye's slick bob on Pineda. The only member of the original Bebop gang missing from the series so far is hacker protégé Edward, a.k.a. "Radical Ed." Netflix's images also reveal the Bebop in its mechanical glory, Ein the experiment-turned-pet Corgi and a key scene between Spike and nemesis Viscous, who will be played by Alex Hassell. *Cowboy Bebop* also features Geoff Stults, Tamara Tunie, Mason Alexander Park, Rachel House, Ann Truong and Hoa Xuande. The highly-anticipated live action adaptation has experienced delays over the course of production due to Cho's on-set injury, which put the show out for seven to

nine months. Production on *Cowboy Bebop* wrapped in March. Original anime series director Shinichirō Watanabe is a consultant on the series, and original composer Yoko Kanno returns to score the live-action adaptation. *Cowboy Bebop* is executive produced by André Nemec, Jeff Pinkner, Josh Appelbaum and Scott Rosenberg of Midnight Radio, Marty Adelstein and Becky Clements of Tomorrow Studios, Makoto Asanuma, Shin Sasaki and Masayuki Ozaki of Sunrise Inc., Tim Coddington, Tetsu Fujimura, Michael Katleman, Matthew Weinberg, and Christopher Yost. Nemec serves as showrunner.

reported by Deadline.com  
<https://deadline.com/2021/08/netflix-cowboy-bebop-premiere-date-john-cho-spike-spiegel-first-look-images-1234819040/>



# Taylor Sheridan's 'Yellowstone' Prequel '1883' To Star Sam Elliott, Tim McGraw, Faith Hill



Big news on the *Yellowstone* prequel series. Paramount+ and MTV Entertainment Studios have set Sam Elliott to star with Tim McGraw and Faith Hill in *1883*, the Taylor Sheridan-created prequel to the network's signature hit drama *Yellowstone*. 101 Studios and Bosque Ranch Productions will serve as production partners on the series. The trio seems just about perfect for a continuation of the saga. *1883* follows the Dutton family as they embark on a journey west through the Great Plains toward the last bastion of untamed America. It is a stark retelling of Western expansion, and an intense study of one family fleeing poverty to seek a better future in America's promised land — Montana. Elliott is set to play Shea Brennan, a tough-as-nails, handsome cowboy with immense sadness in his past. He has the herculean task of guiding a group from Texas to Montana, and he does not suffer fools. McGraw and Hill will portray James and Margaret Dutton, the respective patriarch and matriarch of the Dutton family. Additional cast to be announced. Said McGraw: "This is truly a dream job. Taylor has found a

way of storytelling that brilliantly creates these epic dramas and family sagas with so much depth and creativity. The Duttons are tremendous characters, and it's so thrilling to be able to bring them to life. As a kid growing up riding horses, you think about dream jobs like this, and I am just so excited to work with this amazing cast and crew." Added Hill: "This is the opportunity of a lifetime. The Duttons are a formidable family, and it is an absolute dream to bring such a strong female character like Margaret Dutton to life. I am humbled and honored to work with Taylor and his entire team." Said Chris McCarthy, President/CEO, MTV Entertainment Group: "*Yellowstone* is a massive hit show with tens of millions of fans — with *1883*, we are taking those fans back to the origin story, and in the process, turning the *Yellowstone* world into a global hit franchise to fuel the growth of Paramount+. We are thrilled to have Sam, Tim and Faith as the stars of Taylor Sheridan's new series exclusively for Paramount+ around the world." David Glasser, CEO of 101 Studios, said: "We are thrilled to have Academy Award nominee and acting legend Sam and hugely talented, award-winning artists Faith and Tim all join the Taylor Sheridan universe. Taylor's proven his immense capability of creating captivating characters and immersive worlds and there's no exception here with *1883* and Sam, Faith and Tim's characters. We are looking forward to this further expansion of the world of *Yellowstone* and bringing it to audiences everywhere." Elliott received an Academy

Award nomination and a National Board of Review Award for his performance in *A Star Is Born*. His numerous other film credits include *The Big Lebowski*, *Tombstone*, *Road House* and *The Contender*. On television, his credits include a Critics Choice Award-winning performance in *Justified* as well as *Parks & Recreation*, *The Ranch* and the upcoming *MacGruber*. He is also the golden-voiced voice of Coors, which *Yellowstone* viewers know as "yellow jackets," which is the way the cowboys on the Dutton ranch order the beers at the bar. McGraw is a Grammy-winning singer, author, and actor who has sold more than 80 million records worldwide and dominated the charts with 44 #1 singles. His previous acting credits include *Friday Night Lights* and the Academy Award nominated film *The Blind Side*. Hill is a five-time Grammy-winning artist who has performed twice at both the Super Bowl and the Academy Awards, sold over 40 million albums globally, and celebrated multiple #1 singles worldwide across all formats. She most recently starred in *Dixieland*. *1883* will be executive produced by Taylor Sheridan, John Linson, Art Linson, David Glasser, Ron Burkle and Bob Yari. As *Deadline* revealed recently, [Yellowstone](#) and the saga of the Dutton clan in contemporary times returns for Season 4 in November.

Reported by [deadline.com](#)

## 'Kung Fu': Yvonne Chapman Upped To Series Regular For Season 2



[Yvonne Chapman](#), who heavily recurred as villain Zhilan on the first season of [the CW's Kung Fu](#), has been promoted to series regular for Season 2. Chapman's Zhilan, a hard-edged and cunning assassin, is ruthless in achieving her goals. After stealing an ancient sword from Nicky's shifu Pei-Ling—and nearly killing Nicky in the process—Zhilan flees China

and begins her pursuit of the rest of the mystical weapons. The mystery of Zhilan's identity, and her real intentions with those weapons, will fuel Nicky's quest for justice. *Kung Fu* follows a young Chinese American woman, Nicky Shen, played by Olivia Liang, whose quarter-life crisis causes her to drop out of college and go on a life-changing journey to an isolated monastery in China. But when she returns to San Francisco, she finds her hometown is overrun with crime and corruption and her own parents Jin (Tzi Ma) and Mei-Li (Kheng Hua Tan) are at the mercy of a powerful Triad. Nicky will rely on her tech-savvy sister Althea (Shannon Dang) and Althea's fiancé Dennis (Tony Chung), pre-med brother Ryan (Jon Prasida), Assistant District Attorney and ex-boyfriend Evan (Gavin Stenhouse), and new love interest Henry

(Eddie Liu) as well as her martial arts skills and Shaolin values to protect her community and bring criminals to justice...all while searching for the ruthless assassin who killed her Shaolin mentor Pei-Ling (Vanessa Kai) and is now targeting her. Christina M. Kim wrote the pilot episode and serves as executive producer/co-showrunner with Robert Berens. Greg Berlanti, Sarah Schechter, Martin Gero and David Madden also serve as executive producers. Hanelle Culpepper directed and co-executive produced the pilot episode. *Kung Fu* is produced by Berlanti Productions and Quinn's House in association with Warner Bros. Television and is inspired by the original series created by Ed Spielman.

Reported by [Deadline.com](#)

# 'HALO' & 'Man Who Fell To Earth' Was "One-Time Trade" Between Showtime & Paramount+, Gary Levine Says



Back in March, Showtime's series *Halo*, based on the hugely popular Xbox video game franchise, moved to Paramount+, while Paramount+'s *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, based on the Walter Tevis novel and the cult classic 1976 film, migrated to Showtime. (It had been ordered to series by Par+ predecessor CBS All Access which was more adult-focused than the broader, four-quadrant Paramount+). *Halo* had been in development at Showtime for seven years.

"We love *Halo*, we have great affection for it. And (as a studio), we're going to be intimately involved with the creative and the production of it," Jana Winograde, President of Entertainment, Showtime Networks, said during TCA. "But the truth is that it was always a bit of an outlier for us in terms of its fit in the Showtime universe. We did an amazing job of imbuing into the series the character drama that we're so well known for. But at the end of the day, it is a big, broad, big-tent show, so when Paramount+ came into being, it really was a natural fit there." Meanwhile, with *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, "when we looked at that one, it felt like a better fit with Showtime, and we're thrilled to have it," she said. While Showtime and Paramount+ are both premium outlets within the same company, ViacomCBS, whose scripted content is overseen by the same executive, Showtime CEO David Nevins, there are no plans for

future cross-pollination. "I think this is a one-time thing, and we did a one-time trade, 'You can have *Halo*, we'll take *Man Who Fell to Earth*. We're happy; they're happy. I think both shows will thrive in their new environments," said Gary Levine, President of Entertainment, Showtime Networks. "But these are two distinctly different services with two very different missions, and I think we will stay true to our brand. And we have high hopes for Paramount+ to define itself." Added Winograde, "At the end of the day, we are going to be developing content for Showtime — sophisticated premium curated shows — and Paramount+ will be developing content for Paramount+ — big-tent shows that are four-quadrant... All intents are to keep those lanes separate."

Reported by [deadline.com](https://deadline.com)

## The Comedy Brand Store: New Marketing Firm launches with a focus on funny!



A new full-stack marketing firm launches today intending to help brands and companies "lighten up!" Three partners created the Comedy Brand Store to help companies and brands add comedy and humor to their social media, websites, SEO, blogs, sales funnels, mailers, and other marketing materials. The idea started in a small coffee shop in Fort Worth, Texas, and \$50. It was born out of the pandemic, troublesome politics, and a sense that companies and brands, as a result, have presented very institutional and sterile content. As Chief Visionary Officer & Chief Founder Andrew Rittler puts it, "Essentially, we have all had our teeth kicked in over the last year and a half with COVID, political turmoil, and overall bad news. But unfortunately, brands and companies have not been immune." Rittler, a veteran in the PR/Marketing arena for two decades, had

contemplated the idea for a while but struggled with how to scale a business based on comedy. "With comedy, timing truly is everything," he added. To help create and deliver this content to clients, the Comedy Brand Store hires comedy writers, stand-up comedians, and graphic designers. Rose Katherine Epler, the CEO with a strong marketing background, is excited to be helping seasoned veteran writers and new young-fresh talent alike. "We have a great mix of award-winning writers from across the country and new up-and-coming talent as well," said the stand-up comedienne, "we anticipate that this talented team will deliver amazing and positive results for our clients. But it's not all fun and games. While lead by Epler, the team focuses on developing a culture of creativity, innovation, humor, and rewarding team members. That motivation is vital to creating a team that works well together and supports one another when writers' block sets in or to help get the creative juices flowing. It is the brand's Chief Cultural Evangelist that helps to drive that. Pete Havel, a well-known author who, from his own experiences, wrote a best-seller, "The Arsonist in the Office," leads the firm's internal communications efforts. These include offerings that focus on employee communications, C-suite presentations, and even training. Pete lives, eats, breathes, and teaches positive employee

cultures. "We face a rapidly changing workforce that is seeking work-from-home and remote opportunities, and outstanding companies are rising to the occasion to offer this arrangement and still provide a stellar customer experience. And, the Comedy Brand Store is doing just that," he said. The Comedy Brand Store has already hired a few writers and graphic designers, with more hires on the way. They are also in discussions with potential clients seeking their comedic and humorous slant for their brands. The extended range plan is to provide content to other marketing firms and expand to multiple markets. Over the next six months, the Comedy Brand Store will bring on new clients, provide an excellent customer experience, introduce their team to the world, and help companies and brands realize something they [the partners] have understood for a long time...comedy sells and sells well. **Mission Statement.** The Comedy Brand Store (CBS) exists to help companies and brands find their comedic voice. CBS is a full-stack marketing and public relations firm that can serve as a sole-source provider for brands and companies who wish to provide humorous, fun, and funny content to their customer base. We intend to help businesses of all sizes to bring the comedy stage to their corporate



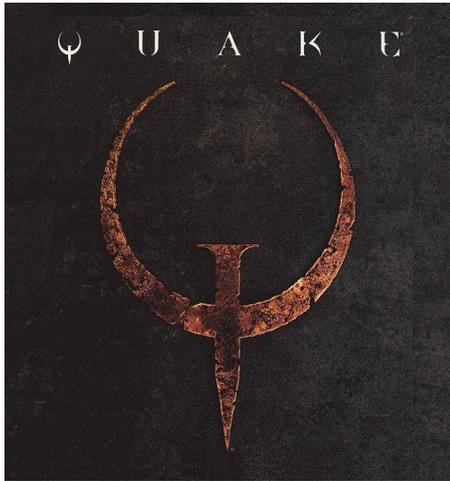
**GAMING NEWS**



*Peter Fischer*

# Quake Returns with an Enhanced Re-release Available on Xbox Game Pass

## Play Quake 25 Years Later



- Quake returns today with an enhanced re-release on Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S (via backward compatibility), PC, and with Xbox Game Pass.
- The re-release supports local or online co-op for up to four players across its campaign, original

expansions, and two campaign add-ons created by the award-winning team at MachineGames.

- Quake II and Quake III: Arena are also now available with Xbox Game Pass for PC in their original form.

The legendary first-person shooter that inspires today's retro shooters is back! In celebration of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Quake returns today with an enhanced re-release on PC and Xbox One and with Xbox Game Pass. This re-release is backwards compatible with Xbox Series X|S and will also receive next-gen optimizations at a later date, bringing native 4K resolution and 120hz refresh rates. Updated for modern gaming systems, this version of Quake features up to 4K resolution and widescreen support on compatible devices, enhanced models, dynamic lighting, anti-aliasing, depth of field and more, bringing the shooter and both its expansions to a new generation of players. Players will also have

tons of free levels to play with add-ons, providing post-launch support featuring some of the best community-made content made for the game. There's not just a ton of single-player to explore: Quake's genre-defining multiplayer is also intact with the re-release supporting local or online co-op for up to four players across its campaign, original expansions and even two campaign add-ons created by the award-winning team at MachineGames, developers of *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*. Naturally, players can also bring their skills to Quake's arenas, duking it out with up to eight players with cross-platform support, custom matches, and even dedicated servers for online matchmaking. As part of the celebration, Quake II and Quake III: Arena are also now available with Xbox Game Pass for PC in their original form. Whether you're a newcomer stepping through the Slippgate for the first time or a veteran raring to relive one of gaming's most influential shooters, there's no better time to experience the re-release of Quake.

## Settle the score in Star Hunter DX, the gorgeous galactic shmup is out now on PlayStation 4 and Xbox!



Following the launch of Star Hunter DX on Steam and Nintendo Switch on 5 August 2021, Chorus Worldwide and two-person British studio ICC Games have today launched the beautifully refined shoot 'em-up on PlayStation 4 and Xbox consoles!

Betrayed by her cut-throat crew, Luna Starr - former Space Pirate Captain turned bounty hunter - has a score to settle. Experience Luna's intergalactic quest for revenge in widescreen, with crisp pixel art and original character designs inspired by '80s cartoons. Choose between Luna, CAT-99, and Edgar, each with

their own distinctive style, and conquer the cosmos as you dodge through kaleidoscopic bullet patterns and blast your way through over fifty unique enemy types.

### Features:

- Old-school shoot 'em-up gameplay, refreshed by new systems, endless flair, and a bounty hunter's tale of revenge
- Stunning pixel art bursting with colourful style
- Feel unstoppable by filling the Bullet Time gauge, and unleashing it for lovely slow-motion chaos
- The extensive practice mode can help beginners build their skill, and allows seasoned players to perfect their runs
- Take your high scores global with online leaderboards, push yourself to the top of the table!

Star Hunter DX is available now on PC, PS4, Xbox consoles, and Nintendo Switch! Get the shoot 'em-up here on PlayStation

4: <https://store.playstation.com/en-us/product/UP5258-CUSA28492-00-4198972393380469/> and here on Xbox consoles: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/p/star-hunter-dx/9nnnj3v1cm8>

A collector's edition for Star Hunter DX for Windows PC is also in the works thanks to HUEY Games, featuring the game packaged within a unique, nostalgia-inducing USB Cassette. The collector's edition is fully funded with two days to go on Kickstarter: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/robhwson/star-hunter-dx-collectors-usb-cassette>

# XBOX: New Games with Gold for September 2021



The September Games with Gold lineup is here! On Xbox One and Xbox Series X|S, battle the Chaos Gods and their horde of bestiaries in *Warhammer: Chaosbane*, and embark on an epic quest in *Mulaka*. For our classic lineup via [Backward Compatibility](#), fight among the stars with the *Zone of the Enders HD Collection*, and clash blades in the classic fighter *Samurai Shodown II*. Xbox Live Gold members will have exclusive access to these games for a limited time as part of [Games with Gold](#). So will [Xbox Game Pass Ultimate](#) members, who receive all the fantastic benefits of Gold plus access to over 100 high-quality games with Xbox Game Pass.

- ***Warhammer: Chaosbane*** (\$39.99 ERP): Available September 1 to 30

- ***Mulaka*** (\$19.99 ERP): Available September 16 to October 15
- ***Zone of the Enders HD Collection*** (\$29.99 ERP): Available September 1 to 15
- ***Samurai Shodown II*** (\$9.99 ERP): Available September 16 to 30

## *Warhammer: Chaosbane*

In a world ravaged by war and dominated by magic, you are the last hope for the Empire of Man. Choose your hero among four different character classes and prepare for legendary battles with up to four friends against the all-powerful Chaos hordes in this action role-playing game.

## *Mulaka*

In this action-adventure title based on the rich indigenous culture of the Tarahumara people, fight back against a strange foulness that is corrupting their land. As the local shaman, Sukurúame, draw upon the power of the demigods, solve puzzles, and fight hand-to-hand in environments inspired by real Sierra locations.

## *Zone of the Enders HD Collection*

From Hideo Kojima, the creator of the Metal Gear series, comes a space epic like no other. Pilot the Orbital Frame, Jehuty, and help the

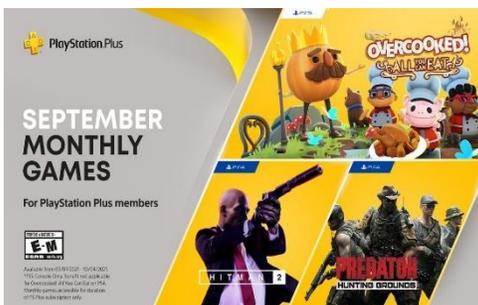
Space Force defeat the Bahram forces once and for all. This title contains both *Zone of the Enders* and *Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner*, all in one collection.

## *Samurai Shodown II*

Step onto the grand stage to test your skills in intense sword fights using the Rage System and Weapon Breaking Attack features. Play 15 of your favorite characters in this renowned weapon-wielding fighting game, against competition that is as sharp as ever. [Read more about our Games with Gold program here](#) and stay tuned to Xbox Wire for all the latest news on Xbox. Like we said before, if you're an Xbox Game Pass Ultimate member, you get all the benefits of Xbox Live Gold, over 100 high-quality games you can play on console, PC, and Android devices with cloud gaming (Beta, where available), and access to EA Play at no extra cost. New games are added all the time, so you're never without something new to try when you're looking to find your next favorite game. If you're new, or if you're an existing Xbox Live Gold and Xbox Game Pass for Console member, [join or upgrade today for just \\$1](#).

# PlayStation Plus FREE Games for September 2021

Hunt, cook and assassinate: take your pick of profession with September's PlayStation Plus lineup. Play one of sci-fi's most enduring icons in *Predator: Hunting Grounds*, whip up culinary chaos in *Overcooked! All You Can Eat* or puzzle out inventive takedowns in *Hitman 2*. All three games will be available from Tuesday, September 7 to Monday, October 4.



## **Overcooked: All You Can Eat! | PS5\***

Overcooked!, Overcooked! 2 and all additional content are blended together and remastered in this delicious definitive edition. Enjoy hundreds of levels of cooperative cooking chaos both local and online\*\*, across increasingly perilous and obscure kitchens. Players can enjoy campaign, survival and practice modes, and new to All You Can Eat – assist mode! The game contains features to allow as many players as possible to join in the food frenzy, with scalable UI, dyslexia friendly text and colour blindness options all available.

## **Predator: Hunting Grounds | PS4**

Hunt or be hunted in this asymmetrical multiplayer\*\* shooter that pits man against Predator. As part of a four-person Fireteam, complete challenging missions before the Predator finds you Or be the Predator and hunt

your prey, using deadly alien weaponry – such as the shoulder-mounted Plasma Caster, Combistick and more – to stalk your prey. Learn different classes and styles of play no matter what side you choose.

## **Hitman 2 | PS4**

Travel the globe and track your targets across exotic sandbox locations, from sun-drenched streets to dark and dangerous rainforests. Nowhere is safe from the world's most creative assassin, Agent 47. Prepare to experience the ultimate spy thriller story your mission is to eliminate the elusive Shadow Client and unravel his militia, but when 47 learns his target's true identity and the truth about his past, it changes everything. Hitman 2 introduces new ways to play, new game modes and new features, including the new Sniper Assassin mode with franchise first co-op play\*\*

# FARCRY 6



10-7-2021

# Your Place To Talk!



**DISCORD**



# Assassin's Creed: Valhalla's Next Major Expansion, "The Siege of Paris" is Out!



Ubisoft announced that Assassin's Creed® Valhalla's next major expansion, Released August 12th The Siege of Paris, will be available tomorrow. Set in Francia, this new adventure will set Eivor on a dangerous path full of gripping questlines across the Frankish countryside towards one of the most infamous battles in Viking history. Players will get their hands on new weapons, abilities, gear, and skills to take on new enemy types. The Siege of Paris will also mark the return of Infiltration Missions, directly inherited from long-time, fan-favourite Black Box Missions. Here, players will have the liberty to choose the best way to eliminate their designated target. The Siege of Paris will be available for all Season Pass owners or as a separate purchase by all owners of the main game.

Players will have access to the expansion after completing one of the two first narrative arcs available in England (Grantebridgescire or Ledecestrescire), which unlock just after they arrive from Norway. When in Ravensthorpe, Eivor will stumble upon visitors from Francia offering suspiciously generous presents and will then find their way to Francia. The suggested power level for Francia is 200, but there is no mandatory power level to play The Siege of Paris. With development led by Ubisoft Montreal\*, Assassin's Creed Valhalla offers players the captivating experience of playing as Eivor, a legendary Viking warrior, driven from Norway by endless wars and dwindling resources in ninth century AD. Players can relive the ruthless fighting style of Viking warriors with a revamped dual-wielding combat system and experience new gameplay features such as raids, assaults, and the settlement, as well as a revamped progression and gear upgrade system. Political alliances, combat decisions and dialogue choices can influence the world of Assassin's Creed Valhalla, so players must choose wisely to protect their clan's home and their future. Assassin's Creed Valhalla is available on Xbox Series X | S, Xbox One consoles, PlayStation®5,

PlayStation®4, the Epic Games Store and Ubisoft Store on Windows PC, as well as on Stadia, Amazon Luna and Ubisoft's subscription service, Ubisoft+.\*\* For more information about Assassin's Creed Valhalla, please visit [assassinscreed.com](https://assassinscreed.com). For the latest news on Assassin's Creed Valhalla and other Ubisoft games, please visit [news.ubisoft.com](https://news.ubisoft.com). # # # \*Associate Ubisoft studios are Sofia, Singapore, Montpellier, Barcelona, Kyiv, Bordeaux, Shanghai, Chengdu, Philippines, Quebec, Bucharest, Saguenay, Winnipeg and Pune. Additional help provided by external partner Sperasoft. \*\* £12.99 per month. Cancel anytime. The Gold and Ultimate Editions will be available as part of a Ubisoft+ subscription. More information at [ubisoftplus.com](https://ubisoftplus.com).

## About Assassin's Creed

Since it first launched in 2007, the Assassin's Creed series has sold more than 155 million games worldwide. The franchise is now established as one of the best-selling series in video game history. Recognized for having some of the richest, most engrossing storytelling in the industry, Assassin's Creed transcends video games, branching out into numerous other entertainment media.

## Forces from outer space attack Harran – clean up the world of Dying Light in the latest Low Gravity event



Techland has announced the launch of a new unique event in the world of Dying Light, Low Gravity, in which Harran has been haunted by forces from outer space. Additionally, Techland announced the opportunity for players to purchase the Astronaut pack accompanying the event, which contains unique items and skins related to Low Gravity. Low Gravity is an event in which players must protect the Earth from the invasion and influence of alien visitors. Unknown perpetrators have modified gravity, which affects the way

players and their opponents behave. Heroes of Harran during the event will: jump higher than before fall much slower avoid taking damage when falling use a grappling hook that allows players to quickly pull them towards a target.

Unknown cosmic forces have also affected the infected. Just like players, they will fall much slower and will take no damage when falling. Furthermore, an explosion or dropkick attack will launch them high into the air. The event will be accompanied by challenges in which players will receive special rewards for completing. For defeating 100 enemies participating in the local event, players will be awarded the V-27 Chameleon Machete (gold), while in the global event, for eliminating 100,000,000 infected, players will receive 3 King upgrades. Players will also experience the interference of forces from outer space through changes in Harran itself – with the ability to find a crashed alien ship, among

other things. Low Gravity will last until 01.09.2021, 19:00 CEST. In connection with the event, Techland has also prepared for players the opportunity to buy a unique package of weapons and skins – Astronaut. It was created to help players fight in the new conditions dictated by aliens and defend Earth against invaders from outer space. The pack contains the following items accompanied by unique modifications:

- 1 Laser rifle – The V-23 Eraser – with laser ammo and a chance to burn enemies
  - 2 Stasis pistol – The V-40 Suspender – that'll put enemies in stasis with every last shell in the magazine
  - 3 Machete – The V-27 Shifter – that changes its effect after several consecutive hits
  - 4 Outfit – The V-9 Defender Suit – with fall damage reduction
- Buggy skin – The V-39 Star R

# The Weeping Angels are back for the console release of critically acclaimed Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins



## Heralded 'the best Doctor Who game ever', Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins launches on PlayStation, Xbox and Switch

Digital entertainment studio Maze Theory, in partnership with BBC Studios, today announces that *Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins* will be available on current and next gen consoles from 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021. BBC Studios – Games &

Interactive senior producer, Kevin Jorge says: “*The Lonely Assassins* set a new benchmark for how we tell engaging and interactive *Doctor Who* stories and we wanted to give console players the chance to experience the mystery, drama and terror of this exciting new adventure.” Maze Theory CEO, Ian Hambleton, says: “The success of the mobile version *Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins* shows us that we’re giving *Doctor Who* fans and adventure gamers what they love: thrills, excitement, Weeping Angels, tension, epic story-telling and genuinely terrifying moments!”

He adds: “Making the game compatible with current and next gen consoles builds further fan interaction and broadens the experience of a truly immersive and gripping journey.” The game, co-developed with award-winning studio Kaigan Games, achieved critical acclaim on PC and mobile, averaging a Metacritic score of 78 across both platforms. By popular demand, the console version of *Doctor Who: The Lonely*

*Assassins* will be available for fans of the iconic series and gamers interested in cryptic, narrative-driven adventures. *Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins* builds on the events of iconic *Doctor Who* episode *Blink*, transporting players into a series of sinister events occurring at Wester Drumlins – the very same abandoned London townhouse where the Weeping Angels made their first TV appearance. The game stars ex-UNIT scientist Petronella Osgood (played by Ingrid Oliver). Players are invited to help her search through messages, emails, videos, photographs and more to uncover clues, solve puzzles and reveal the truth behind a terrifying menace. Shot on location in London and Cardiff, *Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins* blends live-action footage with puzzle gameplay, with players encouraged to hunt down clues and solve a dark mystery. *Doctor Who: The Lonely Assassins* will launch on PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S, Xbox Series X, Nintendo Switch on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

## TORMENTED SOULS CLASSIC SURVIVAL HORROR OUT NOW ON PLAYSTATION 5 AND STEAM | Other Consoles Coming Soon!



Fans of classic horror survival videogames can now get more of the scares and thrills for which they thirst. *Tormented Souls* is available today digitally on PlayStation 5 and Steam for \$19.99, as well as PlayStation 5 physical retail for \$39.99. Versions for the Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch are coming soon. From PQube, Dual Effect and Abstract Digital Works, *Tormented Souls* is a return to classic fixed-perspective survival horror, inspired by cult classics such as *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*. Dropping into the secluded town of Winterlake, players investigate the disappearance of missing twin girls within the halls of an abandoned mansion-turned-hospital. Unspeakable horrors and mind-bending challenges await at

every corner. Players must collect and combine resources, build weapons, and solve puzzles to unravel the mystery – and survive the night. In the terrifying world of *Tormented Souls*, players will discover:

- **Welcome to Winterlake** - Lead to the small, isolated town of Winterlake, something terrible happens to Caroline Walker. Waking in the dead of night, naked and alone, hooked up to decrepit medical equipment, Caroline must fight for her life as she explores the halls of the abandoned mansion. As the previous inhabitants run amuck, players must scavenge essential resources and tools to decipher clues and create a variety of weapons to protect themselves from the darkness within.
- **Keep Your Wits About You** - Nothing is quite as it seems in Winterlake. Cleverly combine items and scour the mansion for clues as players face cryptic and unusual puzzles throughout the grounds of the mansion. Mirrors provide a gateway to

another place and time – investigate even the seemingly mundane to discover ways to manipulate the very fabric of reality and seek your escape.

- **You are Never Alone in the Dark** - The mansion may seem stark and abandoned, but the deeper you venture, the more overwhelming the horrors within become. From terrifying, wheelchair-bound atrocities to vile disembowelled crawlers prowling the halls, these tormented medical monsters aren't the only threats that Caroline must face. There are also darker threats at play – quite literally. Early on, you are warned not to let the shadows embrace you...

*Tormented Souls* is available now digitally on PlayStation 5 and Steam for \$19.99, PlayStation 5 physical retail for \$39.99 and is coming soon to Xbox consoles, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch. *Tormented Souls* will launch in English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Brazilian Portuguese; post launch will include Italian, Japanese, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional) and Korean.

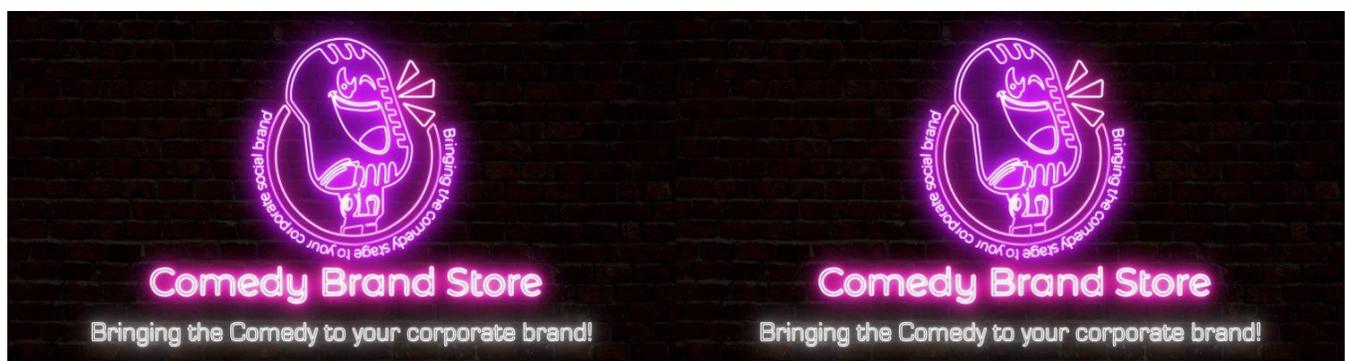
# GAME RELEASES FOR SEPTEMBER 2021

PRODUCT	COMPANY	FORMAT	RELEASE DATE
Cookie Clicker	Playsaurus	PC	01/09/2021
Flarts	BitSmudge	iOS	01/09/2021
JUMANJI: The Curse Returns	Marmalade Game Studio	NS, PC	01/09/2021
Lake	Gamous	PC, XSX	01/09/2021
Unholy Alliance - Tower Defense	Mutasim Games	PC	01/09/2021
WizardPunk	Keith Thomas	PC	01/09/2021 (Early access)
ZOMBEEZ: A Killer Queen Remix	Bumblebear Games	PC	01/09/2021
Armed Emeth	Kemco	NS	02/09/2021
BRAVELY DEFAULT II	Square Enix	PC	02/09/2021
Cargo Company	Ambiera	PC	02/09/2021
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	Konami	PC	02/09/2021
Funny Farm Animal Jigsaw Puzzle Game for Kids and Toddlers	McPeppergames	NS	02/09/2021
MALUM	MalumGames	PC	02/09/2021
Pathfinder: Wrath of the Righteous	Prime Matter	Mac, PC, PS4, XO	02/09/2021
RICO London	Aksys	PC	02/09/2021
Shindig	Imaginary Friends Games	PC	02/09/2021
The Magister	Digerati	NS, PC, XO	02/09/2021
Weapon of Choice DX	Mommy's Best Games	NS, PS4, PS5, XO	02/09/2021
WRC 10	Nacon	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	02/09/2021
A Night at the Races	Nakana.io	NS	03/09/2021

<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>RELEASE DATE</b>
<b>Active Life: Outdoor Challenge</b>	<b>Bandai Namco</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Big Rumble Boxing: Creed Champions</b>	<b>Survios</b>	<b>NS, PC, PS4, XO</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Family Trainer (2021)</b>	<b>Bandai Namco</b>	<b>NS</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Golf Club: Wasteland</b>	<b>Untold Games Ltd</b>	<b>NS, PC, PS4, XO</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Good Knight</b>	<b>Doublethink Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Making it Home</b>	<b>Pill Bug Interactive</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>SYNCED: Off-Planet</b>	<b>NExT Studios</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>03/09/2021 (Alpha)</b>
<b>The Medium</b>	<b>Bloober Team</b>	<b>PS5</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Two Hundred Ways</b>	<b>Sunlight Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>03/09/2021</b>
<b>Bus Simulator 21</b>	<b>Astragon</b>	<b>PC, PS4, XO</b>	<b>07/09/2021</b>
<b>Dream Cycle</b>	<b>Raw Fury Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>07/09/2021 (Early access)</b>
<b>Encased</b>	<b>Prime Matter</b>	<b>PC, TBC</b>	<b>07/09/2021</b>
<b>S.I.N. Unit</b>	<b>Zoryth Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>07/09/2021</b>
<b>Sonic Colours: Ultimate</b>	<b>SEGA</b>	<b>NS, PS4, XO</b>	<b>07/09/2021</b>
<b>Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodhunt</b>	<b>Sharkmob</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>07/09/2021 (Early access)</b>
<b>Chicken Cannon</b>	<b>Matteo Dalmasso</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>08/09/2021</b>
<b>Dull Grey</b>	<b>Provodnik Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>08/09/2021</b>
<b>Terragon: Symbol Of Magic</b>	<b>Reality Shift Studios</b>	<b>PC, Quest</b>	<b>08/09/2021 (Early access)</b>
<b>Arboria</b>	<b>All in! Games</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>
<b>BloodRayne: Betrayal</b>	<b>Majesco</b>	<b>NS, PS5, XSX</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>
<b>Boulder Dash Deluxe</b>	<b>BBG Entertainment</b>	<b>NS, PC, XO, XSX</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>
<b>Dice Legacy</b>	<b>Ravencourt</b>	<b>NS, PC</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>
<b>Residual</b>	<b>OrangePixel</b>	<b>NS, PC, XO, XSX</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>
<b>Teravit</b>	<b>CyberStep</b>	<b>PC</b>	<b>09/09/2021</b>

<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>RELEASE DATE</b>
Ultra Age	DANGEN Entertainment	PC	09/09/2021
Inked: A Tale of Love	Somnium Games	PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	10/09/2021
Knights & Guns	Baltoro Games	NS	10/09/2021
LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLORS	Square Enix	PC, PS4, PS5, Stad, XO, XSX	10/09/2021
Port Royale 4	Kalypso Media	NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	10/09/2021
Tales of Arise	Bandai Namco	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	10/09/2021
The Rewinder	Gamera Game	NS, PC	10/09/2021
WarioWare: Get It Together!	Nintendo	NS	10/09/2021
Table of Tales: The Crooked Crown	Tin Man Games	PC	13/09/2021
Fire Commander	Movie Games	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	15/09/2021
Gas Station Simulator	Movie Games		15/09/2021
merek's market	Big Village Games	PC, PS4, Stad, XSX	15/09/2021
Timberborn	Mechanistry	PC	15/09/2021 (Early access)
Clash of Chefs VR	Flat Hill Games	HTC Vive, Oculus Rift, Quest	16/09/2021
Eastward	Chucklefish	NS	16/09/2021
Gamedec	Anshar Studios	PC	16/09/2021
I Am Fish	Curve Digital	PC, XO, XSX	16/09/2021
Aragami 2	Merge Games	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	17/09/2021
Nexomon	PQube	NS, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	17/09/2021
Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom	Bandai Namco	NS	17/09/2021
Plunder Panic	Will Winn Games	PC	17/09/2021

PRODUCT	COMPANY	FORMAT	RELEASE DATE
Severed Steel	Digerati	NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	17/09/2021
CABOUS	Hala Al Masoud	PC	21/09/2021
The Revenge of Sophia Red	Sleepy Creepy Studio	PC	22/09/2021
Diablo II: Resurrected	Blizzard	NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	23/09/2021
Embr	Curve Digital	NS, PC, PS4, XO	23/09/2021
Lost Judgment	SEGA	PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	23/09/2021
Dragon Ball Z: Kakarot + A New Power Awakens Set	Bandai Namco	NS	24/09/2021
Lost Judgment	SEGA	PS4, PS5, TBC, XSX	24/09/2021
Spacebase Startopia	Kalypso Media	NS	24/09/2021
Agatha Christie - Hercule Poirot: The First Cases	Microids	NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	28/09/2021
AWAY: The Survival Series	Breaking Walls	PC, PS4, PS5	28/09/2021
Chernobylite	The Farm 51	PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	28/09/2021
Ghostrunner	All in! Games	PS5, XSX	28/09/2021
Hercule Poirot	Microids	NS	28/09/2021
Maritime Calling	Tiamat Games	PC	28/09/2021 (Early access)
New World	Amazon Game Studios	PC	28/09/2021
Guardians of Hyelore	Freedom Games	PC	29/09/2021



# “Another Football Season, The Same Old Madden Game!”

## Madden 22 Review

by Marcus Blake

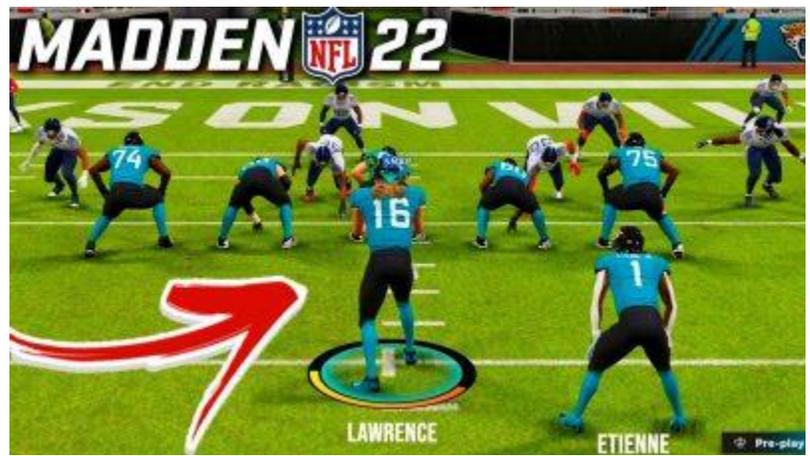
**Madden football is back!** A new football season is upon us and that means Madden 22 is here, but is it worth buying? Did EA make enough improvements to warrant paying full price for this game especially after a pandemic? I guess we'll see. Now I freely admit that I'm going to buy Madden every year because I love the game and I love playing a new season and using my new draft picks. I'm a Chicago Bears fan, so this year I get to play with Justin Fields and I'm very excited. I can already tell that Madden favors Justin Fields because I'm completing throws that I normally wouldn't have with the likes of Mitchell Trubisky. Of course, this is the first Madden that was truly built for the new consoles. Yes, we got an update for Madden 21 for the PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X and that was nice, but this game was made strictly for those consoles to give you more realistic and better experience. However, I also have to admit that as much as I'm liking this game, I don't know if there's been enough improvements compared to Madden 21. But it is clear that EA coming out of a pandemic made a real effort to improve things like the franchise mode, which is where most players truly enjoy Madden and we'll get to that!



We start with the franchise mode which is where EA made its biggest improvements in this year's Madden. Built for the GM in you. The franchise mode is where you're going to get the most fun in playing an NFL video game. Whether you're playing a season as your favorite franchise or you're one of those that likes to do it all and build a winning franchise from the ground up, this is the mode where you can do the most stuff. For the first time in Madden history, you don't just play the coach, you have a whole staff of coaches, which means you can promote and fire assistant coaches even to the point of firing the head coach and promoting an assistant coach. All of this leads to building team chemistry and help build the best franchise by having the best coaching staff. It gives you more to do in running your franchise with the added bonus of being able to do press conferences. It seems like every year sports games are getting more and more like an RPG so I guess this is Madden's way of making that happen with adding more choices to build a winning franchise. The press conference is just one way of showing off, but at the same time, as intriguing as that might be, how long will it take before the press conference turn into something resembling more like the FX TV show "The League" where you're just being sarcastic and mocking everything. Now, while we can all marvel at the new interface that may or may not make things easier in the franchise mode depending on your preference, one thing that does get a high grade is the new scouting system. It has always been the bare minimum and never really reflected what scouting is in the NFL. This time it does, and it takes into account how you scout different parts of the country where you might have a lot of quarterbacks in one part that will help determine your decision making in building your franchise. The scouting system is not perfect, but it's a mass improvement over what we have seen in years past. I can honestly say that Madden 22 in this regard has made a huge step in becoming more realistic when it comes to running an NFL team. There's an awful lot to get excited about with the franchise mode in this year's Madden.

Another big improvement is the Face of the Franchise mode. For the first time ever, you get to choose from four different positions, you're not just stuck playing quarterback. You can be a receiver, a running back, or a linebacker on the defense, which gives you a lot more possibilities in determining your own story. I feel that it is soon approaching where the franchise mode will not be as exciting, especially when EA releases NCAA Football again next year, but in the meantime getting to play four unique positions that make or break a franchise is a good thing. I enjoyed the face of the franchise the first year in 2019 and didn't really do anything last year, but this year I would love to create maybe the next Walter Payton and become the face of a franchise. But as exciting as this mode is, there's still some lackluster modes like the backyard football mode. EA does this in every sports game, you can play street soccer in FIFA and you can play 3 on 3 ice hockey in NHL. It might be fun for like 5 minutes, but it's not the best part of a sports game and it definitely doesn't beat the franchise mode in Madden. It's almost as if they're just throwing in these extra modes to warrant the hefty price tag for a new version of Madden. But let's face it, we really just want to play in the franchise mode and play the season over and over. Extra modes won't ever be able to top that. Ultimate team is pretty much when it's always been, but you can add some unique players this year if you're into creating your own League. Nothing has really changed over the last few versions when it comes to the ultimate team.

Now let's talk about the gameplay in Madden 22 where this year's version is definitely less than perfect! I'm not saying that the game is unplayable. It's a good version, but there seems to be a quest by EA to make Madden the most realistic possible, especially for the next generation of consoles and with that comes a lot of glitches. One of the things that I have noticed in the gameplay is the reaction time of defenses being better on the Pro Level or the All-Madden level. It seems that I'm having to be more-clever about my passes and finding open space because the reaction time of defensive backs is better and a little bit more realistic. This is not necessarily a bad thing, we should be challenged in sports games and it should force players to be like real NFL coaches where you might have to change your game plan in the middle of the game. It happens. I've always relied on a handful of plays that I know are going to get me down the field Go-To plays if you will! They haven't always worked in Madden 22. Like for example the curl pattern which should be an easy 10-yard reception, I've been intercepted more times on this particular play because the defensive backs or an outside linebacker reacts better. When it comes to one-on-one man coverage and I'm throwing the deep ball, usually I rely on aggressive catch and my receiver being able to come down with the ball, but it seems like free safeties come out of nowhere and knock the ball away without barely touching the receiver when they weren't really in the vicinity to begin with. I don't know if this is supposed to be realistic, but it is frustrating that the game is making it so realistic that you can't even throw long passes anymore and hope that your receiver is going to be able to come down with it. We all know that sometimes glitches cause players to not move, but they shouldn't make a defensive back appear out of nowhere to disrupt the play.



One of my chief complaints about this year's Madden is we've gone to more of the stick control when it comes to defensive linemen getting off the line and rushing the quarterback. I never like the fact that we moved away from buttons to begin with, but if we're going to use stick control, then shaking the stick left to right should give us an advantage to getting past an offensive lineman and that isn't necessarily the case because I find myself spinning or going into the direction of another block especially when I've gotten the jump on the offensive lineman. Everybody should go through the tutorials with each new version of Madden just to see what has changed, but also to see how more realistic they're trying to make Madden, if you master the tutorials then those moves should work in an actual game and I haven't always found this to be the case as I'm playing my season in the franchise mode. It's causing me to be scored upon a lot more and not being able to close gaps enough to stop the run. I don't mind challenges in Madden. I've had more games go to overtime and I've had to change my strategy which is cool, but we also want the game to work. Glitches can be a problem, but in EA's quest to be the most realistic football game in the world, sometimes it causes the gameplay to not work. One shining example for me is doing a double slant pattern on the goal line and as soon as I time the break of the receiver, hands go up by a defensive player to knock the ball out of the air and that shouldn't be the case if your receiver is an open space. I even had a ball go right through a player into the receiver's hands when it clearly should be an interception. I'm sure most of this can be fixed with patches and updates like in any game, but the point I'm trying to make is there's something called the perils of perfection wherein trying to be too perfect you actually cause more harm. Sadly, the gameplay is not what it could be and I can at least give EA the benefit of the doubt because this is the first version of Madden truly built for the next generation of consoles so it could be considered a work in progress, but I also have to admit that it's not the best version of Madden and that's a little sad considering it's meant for the PS5 and the Xbox Series X

Overall, I think this year's Madden is okay, but except for all the changes they put into the franchise mode, I don't see really any improvements on Madden 21. Yes, it's true that the gameplay is built more for the new consoles and that's great. We want this game to be as realistic as possible, but they're still some bugs that need to be worked out and hopefully the big update coming in September will fix all that. But as for a day one review, I can't say that it's a great game. It's Madden and if you love playing Madden football then you're going to enjoy it for what it is, but that doesn't mean that it's worth full price especially if you're spending \$100 on the MVP edition. I will enjoy it for the new season and getting to play the new Bears franchise quarterback Justin Fields, but sadly I feel like I could have just paid \$30 for some really good DLC for the updated season and roster, and been fine with last year's version. I'll admit that it will be fun to play the face of the franchise mode as a running back, but seriously, adding three more positions in that mode could have just been DLC for Madden 21. For the players that are going to run out and spend full price, I don't think there are enough new things in Madden to spend more than \$60 and to be honest you can wait until this version goes on sale for about 30 or \$40. In 5 months, it's going to be on EA Play or Xbox Game Pass for free anyway. Madden 22 is an okay video game and I think the only fans that are going to think it's great are the ones that love to be a GM and build a winning franchise. The improvements they made in the franchise mode make this game better than average, and time will tell if the updates coming in the future will improve the quality of the game. For me getting to play the true version built for the Xbox Series X is why I really paid for it... the graphics on the new console are amazing and that's one thing this year's version of Madden definitely has going for it!

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

The

**NERD**

Opinion



# XBOX

## SERIES X

**IN STORES NOW!**



# "Why **THE CW** is one of the Best Networks on Television and Streaming" 6 Shows Nerds Should Check Out Now and 1 That's Fun to Watch Again.

By Allison Costa



*Although*, The CW is typically pegged as a network for teenagers or millennials, I can definitely say that even as a mom of 7, the CW has one of the best line-ups today. With the increasing amount of streaming networks popping up everywhere, it has been harder and harder for network television to compete with the vast amounts of new shows on

dozens of new streaming networks. Many of these television networks are becoming obsolete. We haven't had a television subscription in years thanks to all of the apps and services out there. The CW app, despite the ads, has one of the best free streaming services with good content still on the market today. So, I am going to do you a favor and give you a little re-cap of my current favorite shows streaming on the network today and what you should check out.

First up we have *Roswell*. I have talked about this show in the past in regards to it in comparison to its original. Other than the names of the characters and the fact that they both have aliens in them, the new *Roswell* is nothing like the original. It's definitely older and edgier, and although it has a lot of soap opera elements it also has great action, intrigue and plot twists. We also still have some of our superhero shows hanging in there. Although *Green Arrow* has ended, we are in the final seasons of *The Flash* and *Supergirl*. Both of these shows have had ups and downs over the years and I have had seasons that I disliked and seasons that I loved. So far, these final seasons have been quite good, and because I have watched from the beginning I have to hang in there to see how it all ends!

Then you have the quirky outlier, *The Legends of Tomorrow*. This show is so different--yes it has super heroes and time travel and good action, but it is also extremely humorous and goofy and I love that it doesn't take itself seriously! It's such a unique combination of characters and pretty much always makes me laugh!

Next, we have *Superman & Lois*, as well as *Stargirl*. Both of these shows are of the newer generation of Superhero shows on the CW and they are still proving themselves. I am still in the process of checking these out and I will keep you posted!

One of my personal favorite shows on the CW is "Legacies". If you were ever a fan of "Vampire Diaries" or "The Originals", then this show is for you! It still has some of your favorite characters from those shows plus a whole new generation of hybrids, werewolves, vampires, and witches all imbued with amazing abilities and their own unique back stories. It's also quite funny and each plot line has been unique.

There are so many other shows on the CW that it is just impossible to list them are. But if you are a superhero fan, or a fan of the supernatural and mythic but you still like having love stories and human emotion in the storylines, then the CW is a great place for you to start!

# “Nicolas Cage’s Most Disciplined Performance to Date!”

## “Pig” Film Review

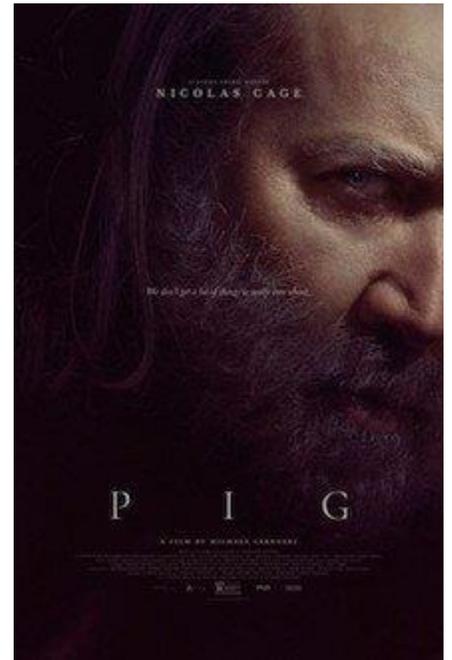
By Alex Moore

*The* year of 2021 has become an unusual transition phase for nearly anyone in greater society. Even in the world of movies, not everyone has made their way back to the big screen theaters and who could blame them? As a result, the studios have begun to list two release dates for each film they have produced: one for the theatrical release and another for the small-screen, streaming release. As you might imagine, this has made things all the more confusing for those of us who have an embargo on our reviews to contend with. Perhaps there could be a compromise, instead of something that seems so inconsistent, but I digress... As I was telling a friend whom I talk about movies with a great deal, due to the financial losses that most studios have had to face in recent times, the direction of their films has taken a distinctly different turn. For those of us who enjoy low-budget, character-driven story arcs, it is a pleasant, though somewhat unexpected scenario. However, since it is a relatively new spin, not everyone involved quite knows how to make it a success... yet. You see, big-budget offerings are a cat of a different color, by comparison, and if a particular moviemaker is not accustomed to the former, it could be a great challenge and vice-versa.

So, what is the latest offering? Well, perhaps it is Michael Sarnoski’s “Pig,” starring Nicolas Cage, though it is his directorial debut, to be clear. Cage (“Jiu Jitsu”) is Robin Feld, a former chef who has become reclusive and now makes an earning as a truffle hunter. With his only companion, a small pig, at his side, the two live in an isolated environment, with the only real contact to the outside world being a young man by the name of Amir, played by Alex Wolff (“Jumanji: The Next Level”). Amir acts as a go-between for upscale restaurants who need the coveted truffles that Rob supplies. Before things proceed, we observe Rob as a puts in a tape on his old stereo system. It appears that the voice he is hearing is of someone he cannot bear to listen to at this time; perhaps someone whom he loved and lost? The real story takes off when some apparent poachers break into Rob’s small cabin and steal his prized pig. Try to imagine being totally alone with your thoughts and feelings and the only company you keep is a small, affectionate animal, but then that animal is taken from you. What does that pig truly represent for Rob? Maybe we will find out later on... Amir takes Rob to the big city, which happens to be Portland. It becomes clear very quickly that Rob has been out-of-touch with society for quite some time and the exposure is painful to him, even in small doses. It is almost humorous to see Cage’s grimacing face, though, but in a very constrained way, which is unusual in my experience while watching him act over the years. In any case, Rob is determined to find his beloved pig and almost nothing can, or will, get in his way. Rob goes through a series of somewhat brutal exchanges with various figures of his past, only to discover that it was someone even closer to him that had taken his pig away from him, which seems to make things all the more hurtful.

This is where we see the introduction of Darius, played by Adam Arkin (“10 Cent Pistol”). His scenes with Cage are some of the most intense and emotionally meaningful moments of the entire story, but you will have to watch it to see why that is. The connection leads to something of a falling out between Amir and Rob and it is pretty understandable, in the end. However, I found that the less Cage’s character spoke, the better it was for the whole film. Sometimes when Rob would speak, it did not make much sense or seem relevant to the actual story, but that is my personal perspective. Above all else, Nicolas Cage’s performance was remarkable. I had not seen him show such control in a role, maybe ever, and it was refreshing to me. In specific moments of the movie, the music and cinematography and editing were equally impressive. They were not as consistent, but it was a treat to experience, throughout. I think we can almost all relate to certain details of this character, Robin Feld, and it should make for a somewhat empathetic reaction, even though there were times when I was lost, around the middle portions of the film.

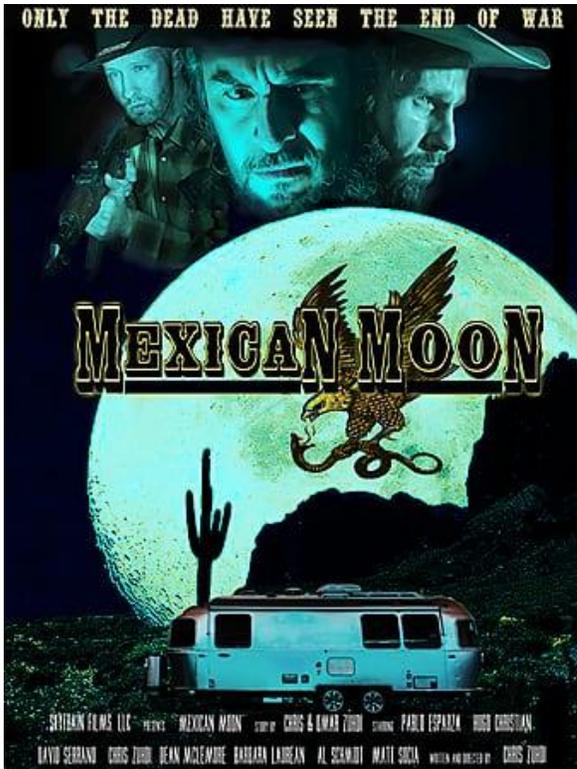
“Pig” is a great debut, in my view, from a directorial standpoint. This is a difficult position to take on and Mr. Sarnoski should be pleased with what he has helped to deliver. I was not totally satisfied with the overall product, but there was nothing that struck me as weak or falling short, either. Even though this movie was just over 90 minutes, I thought that the pace dragged just a little bit in the midst of the story, but that was it. Perhaps we will see some major acclaim once award season has arrived. It should not be much longer. Maybe the pig, itself, is good luck, after all. Who knows? **It’s a 7/10**



# Film “Gems” Found on Amazon!

## Mexican Moon: Film Review

By Marcus Blake



One of the reasons Amazon Prime is great for movies, it's a treasure chest of hidden gems when it comes to Indie Film, I would even argue that the best indie films can be found on Amazon compared to other streaming services. And let's face it, it's one of the best ways to distribute a film that may not necessarily get seen through other avenues. One of those hidden gems is a film called Mexican Moon by director Chris Zhudi. It's a film that was shot right at the beginning of the pandemic and barely got finished before filming was shot down in 2020. Completing the film very much resembles the theme within the story about the resilience of human beings against great odds as well as finding soul in the depths of despair. It was an interesting film to watch as it deals with a Vietnam Veteran trying to come back to civilian life in a small Texas border town with no prospects until he has made an offer to do what he is best at... Kill.

And if you're trying to escape what you had to do during war, but your offered lots of money, would you do it? It certainly is the ultimate test in humanity. It is an artistic film, I can't say that you would watch it over and over, but it is a beautiful film because of the way it was shot. It allows you to take an intimate look into the main character himself. It's the kind of character study that we don't often get in today's films whereas indie films can explore that a lot more. I

can certainly go on and on about Mexican Moon, but in doing so would spoil it and I feel like this is a film that everybody should experience because no matter what time period it is set in, it has a universal theme. As I said the resilience of humanity. It also shows us the audience, the strength a character can when crawling out of the abyss and find hope. It may not be the perfect film for escapism like some typical action movie that we've seen over and over or whatever chapter we're on in the Fast and Furious series, but it is a film that should be experienced and talked about because it definitely inspires great discussions. Those kinds of films are the great ones. And it's the perfect example of how you can tell this enormous story on a short budget because we should all know by now that 200 million dollar movies don't necessarily tell great stories. Sometimes less is more. But for this week, my hidden gem on Amazon that I want to recommend to cinephiles is Mexican Moon by Chris Zhudi. ***It's a 7/10***

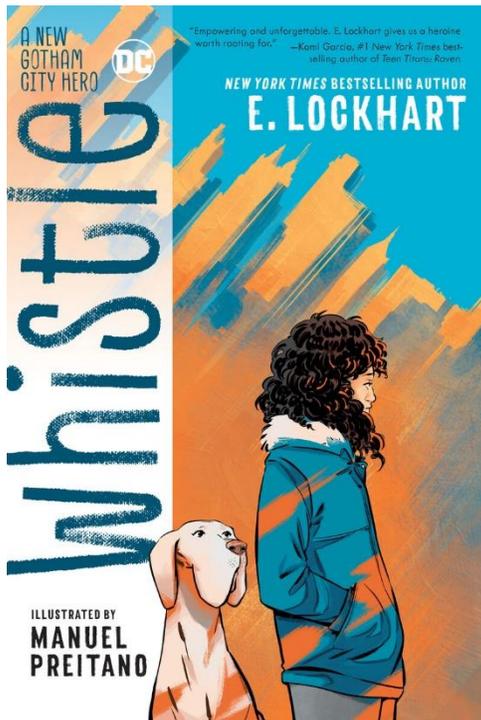


**COMIC BOOK NEWS**



*Prettysleepy Art*

# Introducing the Villains of E. Lockhart's 'Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero'

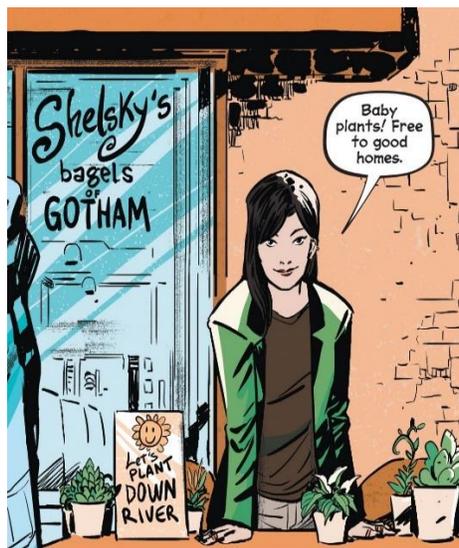


## Whistle: A New Gotham City

*Hero* introduces readers to new comic book hero Willow Zimmerman and the courageous sixteen-year-old has something to say. In her big DC debut and origin story, *Whistle* takes a closer look at the daily life of Gotham teen and superhero Willow and her loyal dog companion, Lebowitz, in the unexplored neighborhood

of Down River. When she's not on the streets protesting City Hall's neglect of her run-down Gotham neighborhood, Willow's working nights at the local dog shelter. But as much as she does for the world around her, she's struggling at home taking care of her sick mother. Without health insurance and money running out, a desperate Willow reconnects with estranged family friend E. Nigma – ex-addict, party promoter and real estate tycoon. Nigma opens the door to an easier life, offering Willow a new job hosting his glamorous private poker nights with Gotham City's elite. Now, Willow is able to afford critical medical treatments for her mother. Plus, the job gives her a taste of the high life she's never had... but is it more than what she bargained for? And what's a hero without her villains? In this exclusive first look, *Whistle* offers a new take on classic villains E. Nigma/The Riddler, Poison Ivy, and Killer Croc. But are the contemporary versions of these villains any match for a young girl from Gotham with brand new superpowers, big aspirations, and an even bigger dog? The upcoming young adult graphic novel is written by *New York Times* best-selling author E. Lockhart (*Genuine Fraud*, *We Were Liars*) with art by Manuel Preitano (*The Oracle Code*). E. Lockhart is known for her books *Again Again* and the *Times*

bestseller and *LA Times* Book Prize finalist *Genuine Fraud*. Her novel *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* was a Printz Honor book and a National Book Award Finalist. *Whistle* is her first graphic novel. "I love the Gotham City rogue's gallery and it was a challenge to choose the villains who would be the best dark mirrors for Whistle's heroism. I picked the Riddler because I love puzzles and word play, and gave him a back story that connects him to my hero's family history. He's a complex villain with a sweet side readers may not have seen before! Poison Ivy is a villain who crusades for something she believes in," said *Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero* writer E. Lockhart. "As an academic and an activist (of the most destructive sort), she serves as both a mentor and an antagonist for Whistle And Killer Croc – well, a girl with dog-related superpowers would naturally go up against a crocodile man! And my version of Croc, like Whistle, sees himself as a protector of their Down River neighborhood. Only Croc protects it by going on a murder spree, while Whistle uses more positive methods." *Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero* will be available digitally and at participating bookstores on Tuesday, September 7.



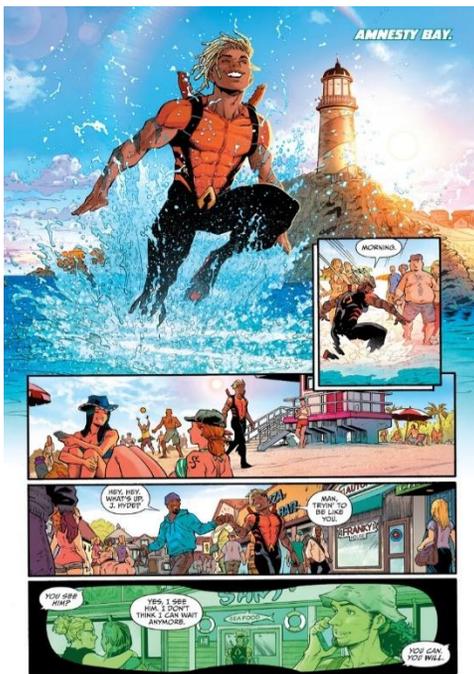
# Jackson Hyde Makes Waves in 'Aquaman: The Becoming'



Jackson Hyde finally has it all. Mentors who support him, a community that loves him, an honest relationship with his mother, a cute new guy in Amnesty Bay who's caught his eye, and access to Aquaman's private training facility in Atlantis. Well, he *had* it all—until that training facility and half of the Atlantean palace got blown to kingdom come

with Jackson in them. Now Jackson stands accused of wrecking the life he worked so hard to build. Aqualad's going to need all of his skills, wit, and cunning just to prove his own innocence, let alone graduate from sidekick to Aquaman! Written by Brandon Thomas (*Future State: Aquaman*) and drawn by Diego Olortegui, along with artists Wade von Grawbadger, Scott Koblish, Skylar Patridge and Adriano Lucas, *Aquaman: The Becoming* is a six-issue miniseries that will shine the spotlight on the DC Universe's newest Aqualad for the very first time! Take a look into the first issue and, to be sure you get a copy at launch, preorder *Aquaman: The Becoming* from your local comic shop before August 29! *Aquaman: The Becoming* #1 arrives wherever comic books are sold on September 21. "*Aquaman: The Becoming* is a coming-of-age story for Jackson Hyde, marking his final transformation from Aqualad to Aquaman," said Thomas. "When the series begins, Jackson has everything he's ever wanted—acceptance, respect and a strong web of found family and friends around him. He and his mother are finally on the same page and his training with Arthur Curry (with an assist from Batman) is going extremely well. The shadow of his father Black Manta still looms, but he's refusing to let that completely define him and his life. Everything is perfect. "So naturally, we spend the entire story challenging and damaging everything he's

created, forcing him to fight for it and prove himself worthy of even having it. Jackson's spent so much time trying to distance himself from his infamous father, but if he's going to endure what's ahead, he'll need some of that darkness, that commitment to survive against all odds." Throughout the series Jackson will have to confront his past (including a visit to the destroyed and abandoned West Coast Titans Tower!), survive the fight of his life with the mysterious new villain DELUGE, and more! Is this Aqualad ready to become Aquaman? Jackson Hyde officially arrives and will headline *Aquaman: The Becoming* #1 on September 21, but before his big first issue hits shelves, his journey will kick off in *Aquaman 80th Anniversary 100-Page Super Spectacular* #1 on August 31 with a short story by Thomas, Olortegui, von Grawbadger and Lucas! Stay tuned! More about *Aquaman: The Becoming* can be found here on [dccomics.com](http://dccomics.com). *Aquaman: The Becoming* by Brandon Thomas, Diego Olortegui, Wade von Grawbadger, Scott Koblish, Skylar Patridge and Adriano Lucas will be available in print and as a digital comic book. Lettering for the series will be by AndWorld Design's Deron Bennett. Covers are by David Talaski and variant covers are by Khary Randolph & Emilio Lopez. Francis Manapul's variant cover for *Aquaman: The Becoming* #1 connects to his variant cover for *Black Manta* #1 (on sale September 7).



# MARVEL Comics Reveals 8 New Tentpole Titles

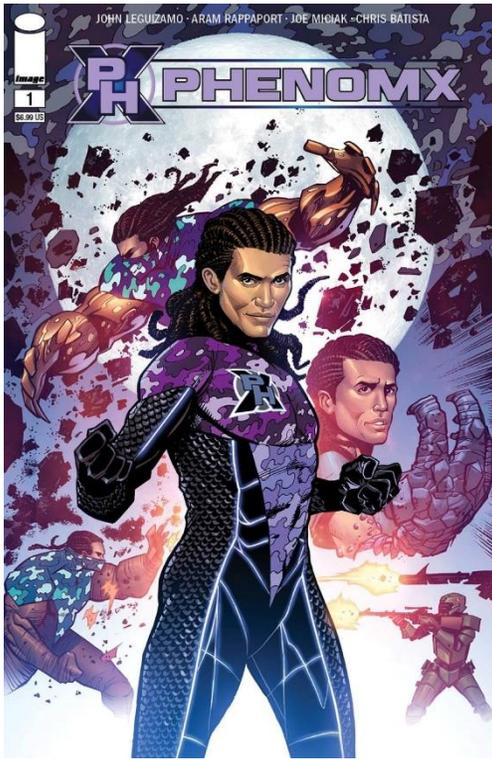


*In celebration of Marvel's Birthday,* Marvel Comics revealed its first look at eight new tentpole titles that will shape the future of the Marvel Universe in the months to come. All hell breaks loose in the Marvel Universe as the Kingpin finally declares all-out war on the heroes in **Devil's Reign!** Having set the stage in their Eisner-nominated Daredevil epic, Chip Zdarsky and Marco Checchetto's far-reaching crossover event finds Mayor Fisk outlawing all Super Heroes in New York and unleashing intel on all their dark secrets, while pitting Daredevil, Elektra, Captain America, Iron Man, Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, and many more against his Thunderbolt agents. But in the end...Who Will Reign? Marvel Comics' **Avengers Forever** pulls together archeologist Tony Stark, AKA the Invincible Ant-Man, and Avengers from across the multiverse to bring order to timelines where 'hope' is a four letter word. Jason Aaron and Aaron Kuder present an all-new series that will redefine the Avengers as...the

Multiverse's Mightiest Heroes. The future of the Marvel Universe is here, and **Timeless** is where it all begins. When a threatening new timeline emerges, Kang the Conqueror must fight his way through the coming year to protect the main 616 timeline he's worked centuries to solidify as his own. Jed MacKay, Kev Walker, Joe Bennett, Mark Bagley, and more provide a first look at what's coming to the Marvel Universe in 2022 in a story that will prove...the Future is Timeless. House of X and Powers of X ushered in the First Krakoa Age of the X-Men. Now, Marvel Comics' **X Lives of Wolverine** and **X Deaths of Wolverine** will test 'the best there is at what he does' before any mutant can survive to the Second Krakoa Age. Benjamin Percy, Joshua Cassara, and Federico Vicentini tell two interlocked tales about what happens to Wolverine when...His Past Meets His Future. Marvel Comics' **She-Hulk**, from Rainbow Rowell and Rogê Antônio, throws the book at Jennifer Walters as she tries to put her rage-filled

days behind her and return to practicing law in defense of the innocent. But when a friend from her past comes knocking with a mystery she can't resist, She-Hulk gets...Back To Bashing. Dan Slott is joined by Carlos Pacheco and Rachael Stott for Marvel Comics' **Fantastic Four: Reckoning War**, an epic saga over 15 years in the making. The original secret war of the Marvel Universe has been reignited and every living being in reality is in danger, for we are finally at...Our Day Of Reckoning. Lunella Lafayette and her lovable 20-foot dinosaur are BACK in Marvel Comics' **Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur**. But what shape will their partnership take in this exciting new era? Keep your eyes peeled in the coming months for more news about the next adventure of the biggest brain in the world that will send dino-sized shockwaves throughout the Marvel Universe. In 2022, Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur will bring new meaning to the term "Marvel Team-Up" in a tale that promises to...Shake Your World.

# JOHN LEGUIZAMO TEAMS UP WITH TODD MCFARLANE TO LAUNCH THE NEW SUPERHERO COMIC PHENOMX



**On sale November 2021**

PORTLAND, Ore. 08/25/2021 – The highly anticipated creation, *PhenomX* is heading to comic shops this November from acclaimed actor, John Leguizamo. The first issue is an extra-length comic featuring cover art by *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane. McFarlane and Leguizamo first met on the set of the 1997 *Spawn* movie, where Leguizamo delivered a memorable performance as *Spawn*'s arch-enemy, The Clown. In 2018, the two creators re-connected at New York Comic Con and made the decision to put their heads together. *PhenomX* centers around the character, Max Gomez, who was wrongfully imprisoned and is

desperate to regain his freedom. Max agrees to become a subject in an underground government experiment. When the trial gives him phenomenal shape-shifting abilities, Gomez learns his new “freedom” requires surviving a superpowered war fought on the streets of NYC. Fans have been anticipating Leguizamo’s Latin superhero since a crowdfunding campaign was announced in 2019 for his creator-owned project *PhenomX*. The all-Latino creative team launching Leguizamo’s new hero includes artist Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez – author of the comic series *La Boriqueña* – as well as interior art by Chris Batista, Sabrina Cintron, and Christopher Sotomayor and cover art by Jim Muñiz, José Marzán, Jr., and Juan Fernández. “In today’s world, it’s incredibly important to support Latin artists,” said Leguizamo. “There is a lack of Latin representation in Hollywood, and it’s important to showcase Latin superheroes.” “John has been a multitalented artist for such a long time it was exciting to hear that he wanted to bring some of those talents into our comic industry and to help give a voice to a certain segment of society,” said McFarlane. “John is well regarded in the Latino entertainment world and we are both hoping that his character not only makes an impact here but across the globe, regardless of your background. Cool comic books should have a place everywhere.” *PhenomX* #1 will be available at [comic book shops](#) and digital platforms, including Amazon,

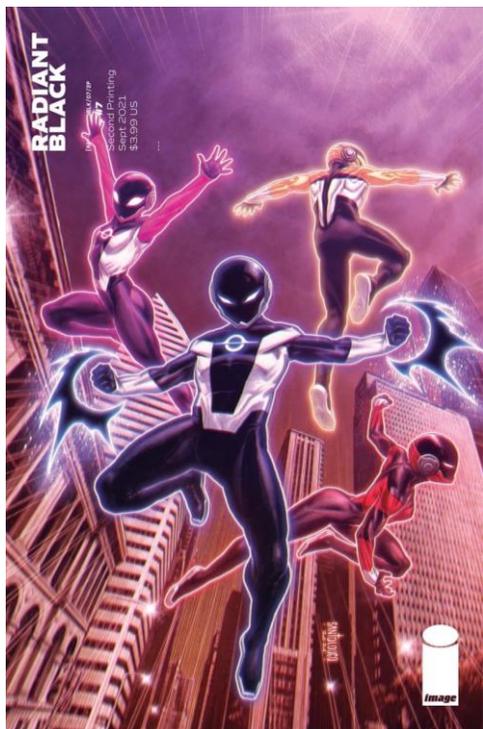
Kindle, Apple Books, comiXology, and Google Play on Wednesday, November 3 (SRP \$6.99):

- *PhenomX* #1 Cover A by Muñiz - Diamond Code [SEP210031](#)
- *PhenomX* #1 Cover B by McFarlane - Diamond Code [SEP210032](#)

## ABOUT JOHN LEGUIZAMO

John Leguizamo is an actor, director, producer, playwright, screenwriter, author & comedian. He rose to fame with a co-starring role in *Super Mario Bros.* (1993) as Luigi. He notably appeared in the films *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* for which he was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor. He has also appeared in *Spawn*, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Summer of Sam*, *Chef*, *John Wick*, *John Wick: Chapter 2*, *The Happening*, and *Romeo + Juliet*. He has provided voice-work for Sid the Sloth in the animated commercially successful, hit film *Ice Age* film series (2002–2016). He had a recurring role on *ER* and was a series regular on *The Kill Point*. He is also known for his role as Ozzy Delvecchio on *Bloodline*. He has appeared in over 75 films, produced over 10 films, directed 1 & has starred on Broadway in several productions (winning several awards, including a Tony Award). He has been nominated for four Primetime Emmy Awards, winning one in 1999 for his performance in *Freak*.

# RADIANT BLACK KICKS OFF NEW STORY ARC AT FULL SPEED, SELLS OUT COMPLETELY AT DISTRIBUTOR



reprint by Image in order to keep up with the high rate of reorder activity. "Team Radiant Black continue to be blown away by the support of our readers," said Michael Busuttill, Editor and Designer on the series. "We've got some huge things planned as we head into our second arc, and we're beyond thrilled to be able to send yet another issue back to the printer with a stunning new cover by the totally radical Mateus Santolouco." Picking up after the previous story arc's jaw dropping cliffhanger, *Radiant Black* #7 follows Radiant Black as his life just got a whole lot more complicated. Pursued by a new enemy and not sure who to trust, will our hero escape with his life? Or is this the beginning of the end for Radiant Black?

- *Radiant Black* #8 Cover A by Felipe Watanabe - Diamond Code [JUL210256](#)
- *Radiant Black* #8 Cover B by Jose Carlos - Diamond Code [JUL210257](#)
- *Radiant Black* #8 Cover C 1:25 by Tyler Kirkham - Diamond [Code JUL210258](#)

*Radiant Black* #7 will also be available for purchase across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, comiXology, and Google Play. **Select praise for *Radiant Black*:** "The perfect superhero comic for anyone missing INVINCIBLE..." – **Robert Kirkman**, *The Walking Dead*, *Invincible*, *Oblivion Song* "Too much fun – classic superhero greatness remade brightly and brilliantly for a new generation!" – **Scott Snyder** "The most fun I've had reading a new superhero comic in years. It's the sort of book I've been dying to have on my pull list again." – **James Tynion IV**

PORTLAND, Ore. 08/26/2021 – *Radiant Black* #7 by Kyle Higgins and Marcelo Costa has sold out completely at the distributor level. This issue marks the beginning of a new story arc in the bestselling series and will be fast-tracked for a

Available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, September 22:

- *Radiant Black* #7, second printing - Diamond Code [JUL218737](#)



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# MUSIC STUFF

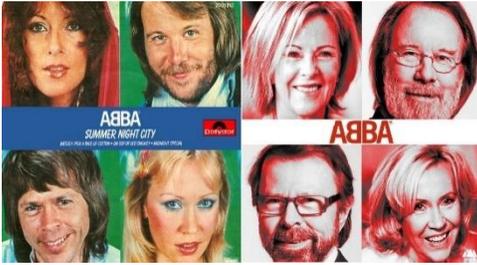




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# ABBA are back!

## Group Announce First Album in 40 years - Plus New Concert Experience



**ABBA** will release their first album in 40 years on November 5. The legendary Swedish pop group last put out an album in 1981 when they released 'The Visitors', but it has now been confirmed they will officially make a comeback later this year with a brand-new record titled 'Voyage'. ABBA - comprised of Agnetha Fältskog, Björn Ulvæus, Benny Andersson, and Anni-Frid Lyngstad - have also announced plans for a

revolutionary comeback concert which will see the band performing digitally with a live 10-piece band. The 'Thank You For The Music' hitmakers have teamed up with an 850-strong team from Industrial Light & Magic - the company founded by George Lucas - to create digital versions of themselves for the concert, using months of motion-capture and performance techniques. ABBA's 'Voyage' concert experience will open on May 27 2022 at the ABBA Arena, which is a state-of-the-art 3,000 capacity arena located at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London. The concert will feature ABBA's two new tracks, 'I Still Have Faith In You' and 'Don't Shut Me Down', as well as songs from their upcoming album. Producers Svana Gisla and Ludvig Andersson said in a statement: "The magic of ABBA and the herculean efforts of this whole magnificent team reaches a long-

awaited milestone today. To be able to finally share this endeavour with the world is a proud moment for us and we can't wait to welcome you to our arena in East London, a place where we are so happy to be." While Baillie Walsh, the director of the concert, added: "I watched ABBA win the Eurovision song contest in 1974, and never did I imagine that 47 years later I would be with them on this extraordinary voyage. Life is weird and wonderful sometimes." Pre-registration for tickets opens at 6pm on Thursday (02.09.21) on [abbavoyage.com](http://abbavoyage.com). For fans who pre-order the 'Voyage' album, tickets will be available from Sunday (05.09.21), while those who pre-register their interest for tickets will be able to purchase one from Monday (06.09.21) before they go on general sale from Tuesday (07.09.21).

## Sir *Elton John* performing at BST Hyde Park 2022



Sir Elton John will perform at BST Hyde Park 2022. The 'I'm Still Standing' hitmaker is set to bring his 'Farewell Yellow Brick Road - The Final Tour' to London as part of the summer concert series, performing at Hyde Park on Friday 24 June, 2022. Jim King, CEO of European Festivals at AEG Presents, said: "American Express presents BST Hyde Park has

always stood for the world's biggest and most loved artists bringing not just a performance but a truly one-off and memorable event. "Elton John has provided the soundtrack to the lives of so many of us and to know that his last tour is coming to Hyde Park, possibly the last time many of us will ever see him play, is one of the most important and 'must see' nights of BST Hyde Park ever." American Express cardmembers are able to access presale tickets from 10am on Friday 3 September, whilst tickets go on general sale from 10am on Friday 10 September 2021. Tickets start at £70 each per booking fee. It comes after it was revealed Elton will release an album of collaborations titled 'The Lockdown Sessions'. In a statement, Elton said: "The last thing I expected to do during lockdown was make an album. But, as the pandemic

went on, one-off projects kept cropping up. Some of the recording sessions had to be done remotely, via Zoom, which I'd obviously never done before. Some of the sessions were recorded under very stringent safety regulations: working with another artist, but separated by glass screens. But all the tracks I worked on were really interesting and diverse, stuff that was completely different to anything I'm known for, stuff that took me out of my comfort zone into completely new territory. And I realised there was something weirdly familiar about working like this. At the start of my career, in the late 60s, I worked as a session musician. Working with different artists during lockdown reminded me of that. I'd come full circle: I was a session musician again. And it was still a blast."



# “Can You Make it Rain Harder?”

## Greatest Half-Time Show Ever and Why it Should be in the Madden Video Game

*By Chad Womack*



*There are more iconic moments in sports history* than can ever be counted.... the same can be said for the moments in music that left us slack jawed and awestruck...but when those worlds collide, particularly when the entire world is watching, true magic happens. When Whitney threw down The National Anthem right at the beginning of the Gulf War or when Marvin Gaye did HIS rendition, they were lauded both for their impact and creative way the performance played to the artists strengths. When the stakes get raised however, is when the performer is given a larger platform, such as the Super Bowl Halftime show, that really gets people talking and legendary moments are created. Rather it be a meme worthy dude in a shark costume or an “unexpected wardrobe malfunction” the results have been varied, but there is 1 Super Bowl Halftime Show that always tops the “Best Of” lists every year and is described as a high watermark for all other acts to aspire to. Super Bowl XLI,

February 4, 2007...the year Prince...brought the RAIN!

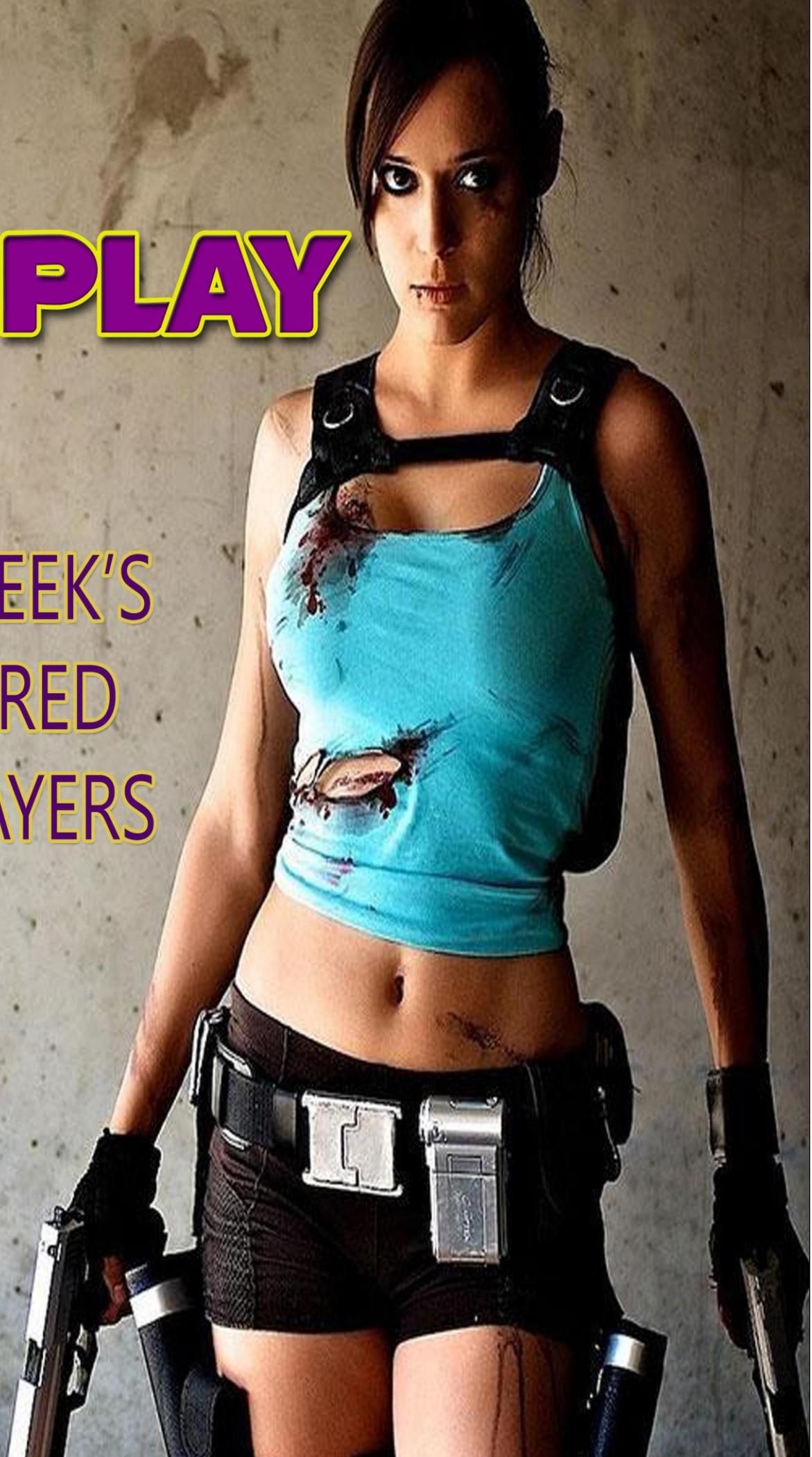
It's no secret that I'm a self-professed Prince fanatic, I've been a soldier in the Purple Army since 1984, but it took little to no convincing that when it was announced that Prince would be playing the halftime show for Super Bowl XLI, it would be nothing short of EPIC! Granted...he was in good company...but...this was PRINCE, and NOBODY can wreck a house like HE could. Somehow, he was determined to turn an appearance on the single most watched televised annual sporting event and make it BIGGER just by being a part of it. He wanted to make history, and to nobody's surprise, that's precisely what he did.

Taking the stage in an actual torrential downpour that was shaped like the symbol that he has become so synonymous with, Prince and his band proceeded to RIP through a 12 minute setlist of not just some of HIS biggest hits, but covering classics from his contemporaries like the Foo Fighters as well as his musical idols like Hendrix and Tina Turner, all while remaining impeccably dressed to the nines in a suit that reflected the colors of the host stadium's team, the Miami Dolphins, Prince never missed a beat, turning in the single most electrifying moment in Halftime Show history in a situation where everything could have gone horribly wrong, but somehow went so stunningly right. Now if there were only some way, we could incorporate all that magical energy in this year's version of Madden, it might make it worth picking up a copy...but as it is...I'll stick with last year's version on EA Play and watch Prince paint Miami purple like only he can on YouTube 4 the 1000<sup>th</sup> time. In fact EA and Madden should just make this their Half Time Show every year and permanently have the “Prince Mode” for the Half Time Show...you know I'm right!

“Rock this mutha ‘till the WHEELS FALL OFF!!

# COSPLAY

THIS WEEK'S  
FEATURED  
COSPLAYERS



Daki | Demon Slayer

CORCID  
COSPLAY



@corcidcosplay

@corcid



## About CorcidCosplay

I've been cosplaying for about 8 years, I started with a strict love of DC cosplays. Now, I tend to cosplay more Video Game and Anime characters. I love seeing how creative people are in the community because there are so many great characters to cosplay...so many characters that require a lot of detail and the ability to be creative. For those who are into costumes and showcasing their inner nerd, cosplay is perfect. I always look forward to the next costume I create. I make my home in Dallas / Ft. Worth. Follow Me on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @CorcidCosplay. Watch me on TikTok @Corcid

*"Wanda Maximoff"*

## -INTERVIEW-

### **How did you get into cosplay?**

I think my love of theater, and interest in knowing more about how characters would act in different environments! I grew up with a theater teacher as a mother, so that probably helped!

### **Who is your favorite character to cosplay and why?**

This is a tough one because the past few years I tend to make so many costumes they are hard to re-wear but I'll have to go with Harley Quinn! I have over 20 versions of her so it's something I've been able to do a lot!

### **What tips do you have on making a costume?**

If you are really new try to not stress over accuracy! You will learn so much and be proud of what you can learn, you will get where you want with time :)

### **What is your favorite memory of being a cosplayer?**

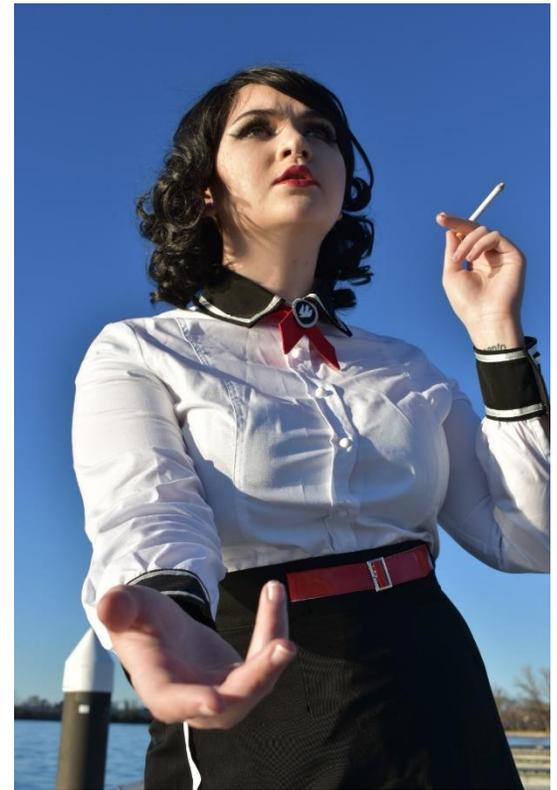
Oh man, i'm not sure if I have a favorite! I love collecting memories with all my friends in our cosplays though! 😊

### **What advice do you have for fans getting into cosplay?**

Don't let social media get you down! Comparing your talent to others will take all the fun out of wearing your favorite characters. Going to cons is a great way to meet people who love the same things you do!

### **If you could have a weapon or superpower to fight the forces of evil, what would you choose?**

Hardlight! I love the lanterns and the huge bright constructs of weird objects!



**Elizabeth | Bioshock**



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# Unravelling the Mystery of Brown Dwarfs



**Brown dwarfs** are astronomical objects with masses between those of planets and stars. The question of where exactly the limits of their mass lie remains a matter of debate, especially since their constitution is very similar to that of low-mass stars. So how do we know whether we are dealing with a brown dwarf or a very low mass star? An international team, led by scientists from the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) PlanetS, in collaboration with the University of Bern, has identified five objects that have masses near the border separating stars and brown dwarfs that could help scientists understand the nature of these mysterious objects. The results can be found in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*. Like Jupiter and other giant gas planets, stars are mainly made of hydrogen and helium. But unlike gas planets, stars are so massive and their gravitational force so powerful that hydrogen atoms fuse to produce helium, releasing huge amounts of energy and light. **'Failed stars'**

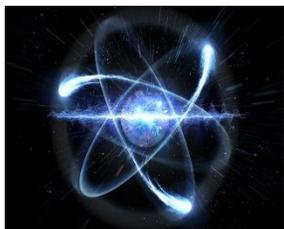
Brown dwarfs, on the other hand, are not massive enough to fuse hydrogen and therefore cannot produce the enormous amount of light and heat of stars. Instead, they fuse relatively small stores of a heavier atomic version of hydrogen: deuterium. This process is less efficient and the light from brown dwarfs is much weaker than that from stars. This is why scientists often refer to them as 'failed stars'. "However, we still do not know exactly where the mass limits of brown dwarfs lie, limits that allow them to be distinguished from low-mass stars that can burn hydrogen for many billions of years, whereas a brown dwarf will have a short burning stage and then a colder life," points out Nolan Grieves, a researcher in the Department of Astronomy at the UNIGE's Faculty of Science, a member of the NCCR PlanetS and the study's first author. "These limits vary depending on the chemical composition of the brown dwarf, for example, or the way it formed, as well as its initial radius," he explains. To get a better idea of what these mysterious objects are, we need to study examples in detail. But it turns out that they are rather rare. "So far, we have only accurately characterised about 30 brown dwarfs," says the Geneva-based researcher. Compared to the hundreds of planets that astronomers know in detail, this is very few. All the more so if one considers that their larger size makes brown dwarfs easier to detect than planets.

## ***New pieces to the puzzle***

Today, the international team characterized five companions that were originally identified with the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) as

TESS objects of interest (TOI) -- TOI-148, TOI-587, TOI-681, TOI-746 and TOI-1213. These are called 'companions' because they orbit their respective host stars. They do so with periods of 5 to 27 days, have radii between 0.81 and 1.66 times that of Jupiter and are between 77 and 98 times more massive. This places them on the borderline between brown dwarfs and stars. These five new objects therefore contain valuable information. "Each new discovery reveals additional clues about the nature of brown dwarfs and gives us a better understanding of how they form and why they are so rare," says Monika Lendl, a researcher in the Department of Astronomy at the UNIGE and a member of the NCCR PlanetS. One of the clues the scientists found to show these objects are brown dwarfs is the relationship between their size and age, as explained by François Bouchy, professor at UNIGE and member of the NCCR PlanetS: "Brown dwarfs are supposed to shrink over time as they burn up their deuterium reserves and cool down. Here we found that the two oldest objects, TOI 148 and 746, have a smaller radius, while the two younger companions have larger radii." Yet these objects are so close to the limit that they could just as easily be very low-mass stars, and astronomers are still unsure whether they are brown dwarfs. "Even with these additional objects, we still lack the numbers to draw definitive conclusions about the differences between brown dwarfs and low-mass stars. Further studies are needed to find out more," concludes Grieves.

# Quantum Networks in Our Future



Large-scale quantum networks have been proposed, but so far, they do not exist. Some components of what would make up such

networks are being studied, but the control mechanism for such a large-scale network has not been developed. In *AVS Quantum Science*, by AIP Publishing, investigators outline how a time-sensitive network control plane could be a key component of a workable quantum network. Quantum networks are similar to classical networks. Information travels through them, providing a means of communication between devices and over distances. Quantum networks move quantum bits of information, called qubits, through the network. These qubits are usually photons. Through the quantum phenomena of superposition and entanglement, they can transmit much more information than classical

bits, which are limited to logical states of 0 and 1, are able to. Successful long-distance transmission of a qubit requires precise control and timing. In addition to the well-understood requirements of transmission distance and data rate, for quantum networks to be useful in a real-world setting there are at least two other requirements of industry that need to be considered. One is real-time network control, specifically time-sensitive networking. This control method, which takes network traffic into account, has been used successfully in other types of networks, such as Ethernet, to ensure messages are transmitted and received at precise times. This is precisely what is required to control quantum networks. The second requirement is cost. Large-scale adoption of an industrial quantum network will only happen if costs can be significantly reduced. One way to accomplish cost reduction is with photonic integrated circuits. "The value of quantum technologies in industry must be favorable before it will be adopted," said author Stephen Bush. "In particular, a 'quantum advantage' must exist in which a quantum technology has the ability to

outperform a classical technology (computing, communication, or sensing)." So far, no quantum technology has demonstrated such an advantage, but scientists are working to develop benchmarks as they work toward this goal. "The ability to scale the number of quantum network interconnections is an important requirement that must be addressed," said Bush. One application area of interest for quantum networks is cybersecurity. These applications can involve a method known as quantum key distribution, or QKD, in which two parties share a random secret key known only to them that can be used to encrypt and decrypt a message. Use of QKD will, however, require standardization and certification, which is in the early stages. "Government regulations enforcing the use of QKD cannot be enacted until consensus has been reached for how security is tested and certified by a trusted organization," said Bush. Despite the challenges that must be overcome, the authors believe the industry has the technological ability to build functioning quantum networks.

# Genetic Enigma Solved: Inheritance of Coat Color Patterns in Dogs



An international team of researchers including scientists from the Institute of Genetics of the University of Bern has unraveled the enigma of inheritance of coat color patterns in dogs. The researchers discovered that a genetic variant responsible for a very light coat in dogs and wolves originated more than two million years ago in a now extinct relative of the modern wolf.

The inheritance of several coat color patterns in dogs has been controversially debated for decades. Researchers including Tosso Leeb from the Institute of Genetics of the University of Bern have now finally been able to solve the puzzle. Not only did they clarify how the coat color patterns are genetically controlled, but the researchers also discovered that the light coat color in white arctic wolves and many modern dogs is due to a genetic variant originating in a species that went extinct a long time ago. The study has just been published in the scientific journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*.

## Two pigments and a "switch" for all coat colors

Wolves and dogs can make two different types of pigment, the black one, called eumelanin and the yellow, pheomelanin. A precisely regulated production of these two pigments at the right time and at the right place on the body gives rise to very different coat color patterns. Prior to the study, four different patterns had been recognized in dogs and several genetic variants had been

theorized which cause these patterns. However, commercial genetic testing of these variants in many thousands of dogs yielded conflicting results, indicating that the existing knowledge on the inheritance of coat color patterns was incomplete and not entirely correct.

During the formation of coat color, the so-called agouti signaling protein represents the body's main switch for the production of yellow pheomelanin. If the agouti signaling protein is present, the pigment producing cells will synthesize yellow pheomelanin. If no agouti signaling protein is present, black eumelanin will be formed. "We realized early on that the causative genetic variants have to be regulatory variants which modulate the rate of protein production and lead to higher or lower amounts of agouti signal protein," Tosso Leeb explains.

## Five instead of four distinct coat color patterns

The gene for agouti signaling protein has several initiation sites for reading the genetic information, which are called promoters. Dogs, on the one hand, have a ventral promoter, which is responsible for the production of agouti signaling protein at the belly. On the other hand, dogs have an additional hair cycle-specific promoter that mediates the production of agouti signaling protein during specific stages of hair growth and enables the formation of banded hair.

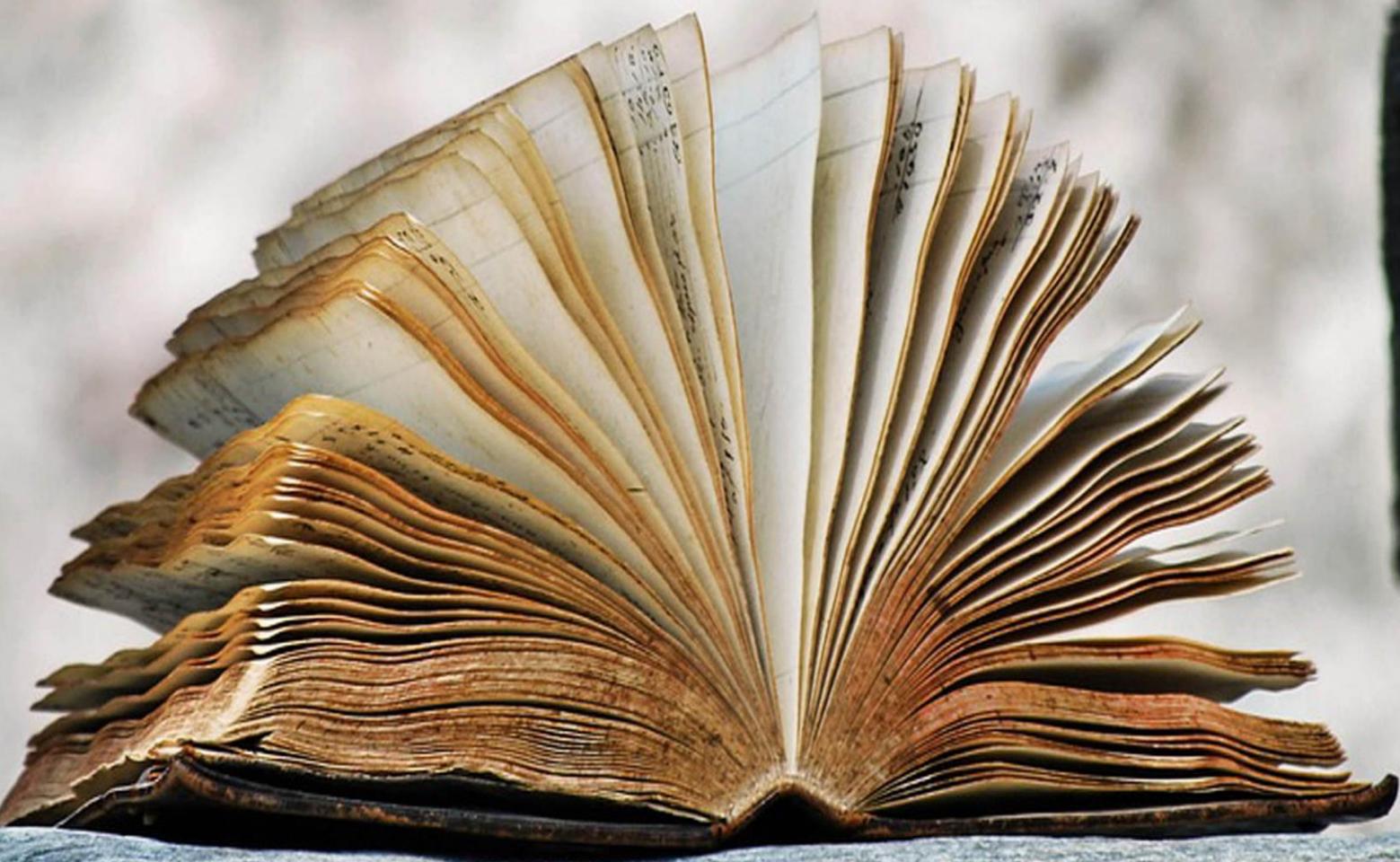
For the first time, the researchers characterized these two promoters in detail, in hundreds of dogs. They discovered two variants of the ventral promoter. One of the variants conveys the production of normal amounts of agouti signaling protein. The other variant has higher activity and causes the production of an increased amount of agouti signaling protein. The researchers even identified three different variants of the hair cycle-specific promoter. Starting with these variants at the individual promoters, the researchers identified a total of five different combinations, which cause different coat color patterns in dogs. "The textbooks have to be rewritten as there are five instead of the previously accepted four different patterns in dogs," Leeb says.

## Unexpected insights on the evolution of wolves

As many genomes from wolves of different regions on earth have become publicly available, the researchers further investigated whether the identified genetic variants also exist in wolves. These analyses demonstrated that the variants for overactive ventral and hair cycle-specific promoters were already present in wolves prior to the domestication of modern dogs, which started approximately 40,000 years ago. Most likely, these genetic variants facilitated adaptation of wolves with a lighter coat color to snow-rich environments during past ice ages. Today, the completely white arctic wolves and the light colored wolves in the Himalaya still carry these genetic variants. Further comparisons of the gene sequences with other species of the *canidae* family yielded very surprising results. The researchers were able to show that the overactive variant of the hair cycle-specific promoter in light-colored dogs and wolves shared more similarities with very distantly related species such as the golden jackal or the coyote than with the European grey wolf. "The only plausible explanation for this unexpected finding is an ancient origin of this variant, more than two million years ago, in a now extinct relative of wolves," Leeb says. The gene segment must have been introgressed more than two million years ago into wolves by hybridization events with this now extinct relative of wolves. Thus, a small piece of DNA from this extinct species is still found today in yellow dogs and white arctic wolves. "This is reminiscent of the spectacular finding that modern humans carry a small proportion of DNA in their genomes from the now extinct Neandertals," Leeb adds.

The study was enabled by a sabbatical done by Prof. Danika Bannasch at the University of Bern with its longstanding research focus on the genetics of coat color in domestic animals. Bannasch, a professor in veterinary genetics at the University of California Davis, filtered the relevant promoter variants from thousands of other functionally neutral genetic variants. The evolutionary analyses were conducted by Christopher Kaelin and Gregory Barsh of the HudsonAlpha Institute and Stanford University. The study was financially supported by grants from the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF, Maxine Adler Endowed Chair Funds, Jane and Aatos Erkkö Foundation, and the Academy of Fin

# Storytellers





*Enrique Meseguer*

# Lifer

by Clint Stutts

Deon read the same *Popular Mechanics* issue he'd read two months before, and inwardly wished somebody in the prison's administration would make it their life's purpose to ensure that all inmates at Louisiana State Penitentiary were provided with up to date reading materials at all times. He knew it would never happen though, and he really couldn't blame them. He was a lifer, convicted of killing his wife and her lover almost ten years before. He didn't just kill them though. Oh no, he made a real mess of it. Between his wife and her lover, Deon had left over three hundred stab wounds. That's what got him the ten consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole. The funny thing was that he didn't remember any of it. Deon was thirty seven now, so he figured he'd make it through about two and a half of those life sentences before he died. That was only if he was lucky.

Deon's bunkmate, Jerry Pangborn, was another lifer, but not because of cold blooded murder. Jerry was a child molester, and had been quite busy before he was finally caught. By the time Jerry's day in court came around, twenty seven victims, all boys, had come forward to testify against him. Jerry was handed down twenty five life sentences, with no possibility for parole.

Deon was paired with Jerry because the warden and the guards all figured Jerry was the least likely to kill the pervert. Anybody who knew Deon knew he really wasn't a killer, he just flipped out for about an hour ten years ago. They also knew he had an idiot attorney who couldn't even get him off on an insanity plea. That was just the way things played out for poor black folks in the south, Deon supposed. Deon understood well enough that he had murdered two people, and he grieved for what he'd done, but deep down inside he knew he'd never be capable of it again.

Deon got along with Jerry most of the time. They even had some good conversations about such things as politics, religion, fast cars, and the good old days of their youth. Sometimes, though, Jerry wasn't all there. This usually happened when he looked at a picture of a little boy he'd torn out of a magazine some months ago. He'd sit and stare at that picture for hours without saying a word or moving at all. It was during these times Deon felt sure he was seeing the real Jerry, and right now was one of those times.

"Jerry, you okay down there?" he asked. No response came from the bottom bunk.

"Alright then, I'll leave you alone."

Deon shut his magazine and threw it toward the foot of his bed. He jumped down to the floor and eyed the toilet in the corner of the cell. He really had to take a dump, but Jerry's gaze was toward the toilet. Deon knew Jerry was actually looking at the picture, but still...

"Hey Jerry, you mind turning around or something? I gotta take a crap." No answer, no acknowledgement, nothing. "Geez, man, at least lay down and stare up at my bunk or something. I don't wanna go with you looking my way like that. It gives me the creeps."

Jerry suddenly snapped out of his coma and locked eyes with Deon.

"I have to tell you something," he said, his voice quivering.

"So? Say it so I can take a crap."

"I met this boy today. I know it sounds crazy, but I really met him today. He lives in Cooper, Alabama, just like the photo caption says. I swear to God man, I met him. Why are you looking at me like that?" Deon's clean shaven face showed a look of concern for Jerry.

"I'm looking at you like this because you haven't left my sight all day long. You've been spaced out for about two hours now, looking at that picture. I just hope you didn't molest that poor boy in your mind."

"No! No, you got the wrong idea. Yeah, I have those kinds of thoughts, but I won't act on them. Swear to God I won't. But you gotta believe me. I was *there*, Deon. I talked to him, shook his hand, and wished him luck."

"Wished him luck for what?" Deon asked.

"In his baseball game. His team was playing in a tournament today. He's the first baseman."

"Man, you've got yourself an overactive imagination. If I had an imagination like yours, I wouldn't miss T.V.," said Deon.

Jerry grimaced. "Please, you have to believe me. Have I ever lied to you before?"

"Not that I know of," Deon replied.

"Then just listen to what I have to say." Deon sat on the toilet lid opposite Jerry. He wore an impatient look on his face. "Go ahead, I'll listen," he said.

"I've been looking at this picture for months now, and you've even told me that I space out when I do it. You say I don't talk or move or anything. That's because I'm not here. And I'm not talking about my imagination, either. When I'm spaced out, I'm hovering like a spirit over the location in this picture."

He held the page out to Deon so he could see it. Deon judged the boy in the picture was about ten years old. He was dressed in a baseball uniform, and a baseball field was behind him.

"It's always the same day when I'm there. I don't know what the month or year is when I'm there, I just know I travel to the time and place in the picture. This little boy's team is always playing a game, and it's a beautiful day. I usually just fly around and enjoy the air and sunshine, but sometimes I watch the little boy's game. His name is Brock Crews, and he plays first base for the Tigers. Anyway, I sometimes fly around and watch the game from a birds eye view, but today I wished I could watch it from the ground. I wished it so hard, I suddenly felt myself descending. I descended right into a guy sitting by himself in the stands. I don't know his name or anything, but I *possessed* that guy today. I left him after the game was over, but Deon, I think I can possess someone forever."

Deon didn't know what to think. Jerry had always been straight with him, and it sure explained a lot about his fits, but Deon was having a hard time swallowing what he'd just heard.

"I could've done it today. I could've stayed. But I came back to tell you about it so you could come with me."

"Come with you? I ain't even sure if you're going!"

"You know I'm not lying. You know I'm not crazy. We can go tonight if you want. We can leave this place forever and have new lives."

"But what makes you able to leave?" asked Deon. "How do you do it?"

"It's the picture," said Jerry. "When I saw it in that magazine, I somehow knew there was something special about it. I don't have special powers or anything, and you don't need them either. All you have to do is look at the picture with me and just want to be there."

"What happens to us if we stay in Cooper forever? What about our bodies here?"

"We won't need them. We'll have different bodies. We'll just want to make sure to possess somebody who's at the baseball field by themselves. And after the game, I think we have to leave town and start new lives. It would be impossible for us to live that person's life without sticking out like a sore thumb."

Deon nodded. He wasn't skeptical anymore. Jerry was a perv, but he'd always been open and honest with Deon. If it worked, that'd be wonderful. If not, he'd just have more of the same right here in his cell, and he'd have confirmation that Jerry had a few screws loose.

"Let's do it," said Deon. "Let's get out of here."

Deon's need to relieve himself was pushed to the back of his mind. All he cared about at the moment was getting free of the place that had held him for so long. No matter how crazy the idea sounded, even the smallest glimmer of hope was enough to get Deon on the bandwagon. Deon got up from the toilet seat and sat down beside Jerry.

"I think we both need to have our hands on the picture for this to work," said Jerry. Deon grasped one side of the page with his right hand. "Now," said Jerry, "look at it and wish you were there. When you find a person to possess, just wish real hard that you can do it and it'll happen. When that happens, just stand up where you are and I'll come find you."

Deon looked and wished, and suddenly he had a feeling that was disturbing at first, then comforting. He was flying, as if in a dream, over a green field that must have been the park in the picture. The baseball field was a short distance away, but Deon could see people were sitting in the stands and the teams were either warming up or already playing a game.

Deon tried to look at himself, but he had no body. He could feel that his limbs were there, but they were invisible, or simply insubstantial. Everything was controlled with his thought. If he wanted to steer himself in a particular direction, he simply thought about it and it happened.

As he got closer to the stands, he could see several people who were sitting by themselves. One individual stood out from the others. It was a man in his middle forties, and in great shape. He looked to be the type that worked out frequently, as his muscles rippled through his red t-shirt. Deon decided he'd like to be in good shape in his new life, so he wished to possess him.

Suddenly, he felt like he was falling uncontrollably, and he fell right on top of the man he wished to possess. When he opened his eyes and looked down at himself, the fantastically fit person he had admired from above was now *him*. It was *his* body now. Deon felt around in the pockets of his new body, and found a wallet in the back left pocket of his blue jeans. He looked at the ID contained inside and found that he'd possessed Hugh Perry, age 43. Hugh Perry was also loaded, as Deon found out when he checked the cash pocket of the wallet. It contained four hundred-dollar bills, a few twenties, some ones, and three uncashed checks that amounted to just over seventy thousand dollars. A cache of business cards in one of the other pockets in the wallet revealed that Hugh was the owner of a major contracting company called Perry Construction. *Son of a gun*, thought Deon. *I couldn't have picked a better guy to possess.*

Just then it occurred to Deon that he'd forgotten all about Jerry. He looked all around the stands trying to see if anyone was standing up. Sure enough, Deon spotted a half bald guy with a beer gut standing up about two sections over. Deon stood up and looked directly at who he supposed was Jerry. The man waved at him after a few seconds and beckoned him to come over. Deon obliged and picked his way through the half full stands to where Jerry was.

"I told you it would work," said Jerry, and Deon was surprised by the voice. He was used to Jerry's throaty high pitched voice, but this guy was definitely fit for singing bass in a choir.

"It worked like a champ, man," replied Deon, smiling like an idiot.

"We're free forever," said Jerry. "We never have to go back. All we have to do is live. By the way, my new name is Dave Price. What's yours?"

Deon told him, and as he did he noticed a woman sitting several rows down who was looking at them queerly. Deon realized they had been talking too loud.

"We might want to cool it for now," he said. "Let's just sit down and watch the game. I haven't seen one in years." Jerry nodded his agreement and they sat down to watch the rest of the game. The Tigers and the Dolphins were playing, and the Dolphins were getting nailed to the wall.

When the game was over, the two newly freed men began making their way out of the stands when one of the boys on the Tiger's team began running toward them and yelling, "Dad! Hey Dad, did you see me?"

Neither of the men knew exactly what to do, and the faces of both registered looks of surprise and confusion. "Dad," the boy yelled again, "did you see me catch that ball?" The kid was almost to them now, and neither Deon nor Jerry had made the slightest move to acknowledge him. They just stood there with stupid looks on their faces. When the boy finally reached them, however, he threw his arms around Jerry. Deon felt relieved at first, but then an overwhelming feeling of dread came over him. *Child molester*, he thought. *Jerry is still a child molester.*

"Did you see the catch I made, Dad?" the boy asked again.

Jerry smiled and answered, "I sure did son, and I'm so very proud of you." Jerry reached down and picked up the young boy and gave him a huge hug. Deon felt sick just watching.

"Let's go home and tell Mom how bad we beat the Dolphins!" the boy cried. Jerry smiled again as he took the boy's hand and the little boy pulled him toward the parking lot. Jerry had apparently forgotten all about Deon.

"Hey, Dave, wait a sec," said Deon. Jerry turned around, his eyes glazed over. He was in heaven now. He just needed someone to pinch him, and Deon planned on doing the pinching. "Can I talk to you alone for a minute?" asked Deon. Jerry told his new son to wait for him in the stands while he spoke to his friend, and the kid obeyed. Deon guessed the kid's father was a good one, and he suddenly found himself feeling guilty for stealing the new body he had. Did Hugh Perry have a wife and kids? Was he a good father? Could his family get along without him? He found himself fighting back tears of grief and shame. Jerry interrupted his train of thought.

"What's up, Hugh?" he asked. "I've got a family to get home to, ya know. Probably got a big dinner waiting for me, judging by my ample layers of fat."

"That isn't what we agreed on, and you know it. We're supposed to leave town and start new lives. That was the deal."

"Things change, my friend. I like what I have here, so I think I'll stick around for awhile."

It took every ounce of restraint Deon had not to punch him at that instant. "And just what the hell do you think you're going to do? Work this guy's job and manage his family? You don't even know your wife, much less your son. They'll know something isn't right pretty quick. No, we need to go, and now."

Jerry's smile faded. "Like I said, I like what I have here. You can just go on your merry way and do whatever you want. I'm doing what I want to do now. I'm free, remember? Nobody tells me what to do anymore."

The stands were empty of people and the parking lot was almost in the same shape, so Deon began raising his voice a bit. He didn't care if the kid heard. If Deon was lucky, the kid would get a clue and run away.

"I can't let you go home with that kid, Jerry. I just can't. I know what you'll do."

"If you think I'm gonna have my way with that kid, you're wrong. I'm never doing that again. I have thoughts, but I'll never do anything about them, swear to God."

"I don't care how much you swear to God, you're still a child molester. I'd bet all the money my new body has that you won't even make it home with him before you try something. I can't let that happen. I can't just leave you alone knowing you'll hurt that kid."

Jerry's face showed fear at first, then rage. Deon was depriving him of his pleasure, and it wasn't sitting well with him. Without a word, Jerry wheeled around and hurriedly made his way toward the boy. The kid's smile was gone and a look of worry had surfaced on his face. He knew something was wrong.

"C'mon son, we're leaving," Jerry said to him. Deon didn't think, he just ran. He was almost upon him when Jerry's head cocked and he spun around just as Deon's massive right shoulder crashed into his solar plexus. Jerry went down as the wind rushed out of him. Deon went down, too, amazed at his own strength and the success of his attack. Somewhere in the background he could hear the boy screaming for his Daddy, but Deon had to ignore it and focus on the task at hand.

Deon got back to his feet and turned toward Jerry to ascertain the damage. Jerry had managed to role over onto his stomach. He seemed to be reaching for something in his pocket.

"Give it up," Deon said to him as he approached. When he was upon him, Jerry surprised him by lashing out with a pocketknife. A lightening bolt of pain ripped through Deon's left calf muscle, and warm blood flowed down into his shoe, soaking his sock. He fell backward, clutching the wound in his left hand while at the same time trying desperately with his right hand to prop himself back up. Jerry finally found his footing again and managed to throw himself on top of Deon.

There was pain again, this time in his upper left shoulder. Deon couldn't believe it. *This fat slob is going to kill me and I'm in ten times the shape he is*, he thought. Deon swung wildly with his right fist and connected with Jerry's left temple, knocking him off to the side. The knife was still stuck in his shoulder, so Deon took a deep breath and pulled it out. He looked at it as if it was something that had betrayed him, and then threw it to the ground. The pain was exquisite, but so was his anger. He kicked Jerry's face over and over again. He kicked until he was out of breath and couldn't kick anymore. Wheezing from the exertion, he collapsed next to Jerry's body and observed his handiwork.

It seemed that Deon really was capable of murder. Jerry had to be dead. His face was a bloody pulp and he wasn't breathing. Deon looked down at the wound in his left shoulder and saw that his shirt was soaked completely through. Then he heard sobs behind him. The kid had made it halfway between the stands and the scene of the fight before he collapsed in fright and went into a crying fit. He'd just watched his dad get killed right in front of him. *If only I'd stayed in my cell*, he thought.

Deon was trying to think of something to say to him when he suddenly stopped crying and stood straight up. Deon watched in horror as the young boy walked straight to the knife lying on the ground and then made his way to where Deon was kneeling.

"All you had to do was walk away, man," the kid said in his tiny voice.

*It can't be*, thought Deon. "Jerry, is that you?" he asked.

"In the flesh," he said, grinning. "Looks like you killed an innocent man. So how's that feel?"

Deon couldn't find any words to say. He'd just killed a man who'd had his whole life ahead of him. Furthermore, the body Deon inhabited was bleeding out quickly.

"I should never have brought you with me," said Jerry. "You've got too much of a conscience. It's a real pity, too. We could've had some fun."

Deon managed to laugh a little. "You know, you spend several years in a cell with someone, and you think you have them figured out," he said, shaking his head.

"Don't give me that crap, Deon. You know what I am. And I know what you are, too. I listened to all your whining over the years about how you couldn't believe you could ever kill someone. Well, just look at that poor slob beside you. You're a murderer, through and through."

"But you made me do it, Jerry. You didn't give me a choice."

"Your memory sucks, Deon. I told you to walk away. You made the choice to stop me. I didn't make you do anything."

It was hard to breathe now, and the world around him seemed to be spinning. He couldn't stay in this body much longer. He wished himself out of Hugh Perry's body and he was floating again. The pain was gone and he felt healthy, as if nothing had happened. But it had all happened. Deon peered downward at the scene he had left, and watched Hugh Perry fall face first in the dirt, probably dead. Jerry, from inside the kid, yelled, "You better just go back, Deon! You hear me? Go back or else!"

Deon didn't know anything else to do, so he did go back. He flew back in the direction he had come, and just as fast as he had been transferred from his body into spirit, he was back in his own body again. His hand was still clutching the picture with Jerry's own hand, and he quickly pulled away and pressed himself against the wall of the cell opposite Jerry's seemingly comatose body. Deon was suddenly grateful he'd come back before lights out. A guard would have surely raised a flap over him and Jerry's fixation on the picture. Jerry's eyes were glazed over and he was staring into the picture like it was the only thing in the world. Deon ripped the picture from his hands and tore it into a collection of pieces. Not satisfied, he picked all the pieces off the floor, threw them into the toilet, and flushed them. He looked at Jerry again, but nothing had changed. He was there for good. Unless...

*If he dies here*, he thought, *maybe he dies there*. Deon was saddened to find himself making the choice to murder yet again. He looked around for something to use as a weapon, but of course the prison system had made sure that could never happen. Finally, Deon approached Jerry and used the only weapon he did have: his hands. He pushed Jerry down onto the bed and wrapped his hands around his throat. It took a few moments for him to begin squeezing. It didn't feel right to choke the life out of someone who couldn't defend themselves. Choking back tears of shame and sadness, Deon shut his eyes tight and squeezed Jerry's throat as hard as he could. He squeezed so hard it seemed his fingers would pierce the flesh and plunge into the inner workings of Jerry's throat. Only when he was near exhaustion did Deon dare to let up. He wanted to be sure the deed was done.

Back in the park, a young boy found himself standing in front of the bodies of his dad and a stranger, and he was surprised to find that he was holding a knife. He dropped it and fell to his knees. Deep, silent sobs overcame him.

Deon knew none of this was happening. He could only hope Jerry was truly dead. Deon hadn't made any noise during the murder, so no one would know what had happened until the guard came by on his rounds. Soon, they would know what he had done, but they would never know why. Deon climbed up to his bunk and lay down on his back, pondering the events of the day. It didn't take long for him to conclude that the justice system had not wronged him. He was right where he belonged. Deon didn't look at any pictures for a long time.

## The Darkness

The darkness lurks among the shadows  
In every corner of my mind

It feeds on every insecurity  
And weakness that it finds

When I try to fight or resist it  
It claws long valleys across my soul

No, I can't deny its existence  
Because I can feel it staring holes

The darkness is cold and empty  
So lonely I can't describe

It haunts me when I close my eyes  
And terrorizes me at night

When I'm stumbling and shaky  
The darkness squeezes me tight

If you listen you'll hear it stalk me  
Even our heart beats are synchronized

Wakes me in a sweat when I'm dreaming  
It finds me where ever I hide

The darkness is part of the madness  
It's the madness that I understand

No, there's no use in me pretending  
It consumes me whenever it can

~ Patricia Baker

**WORD**

**games**

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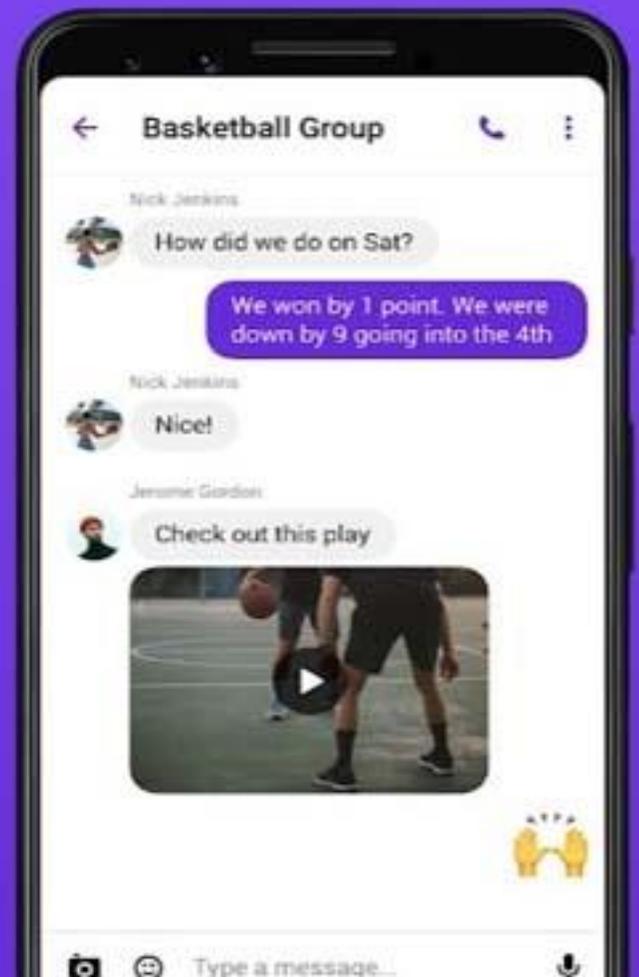
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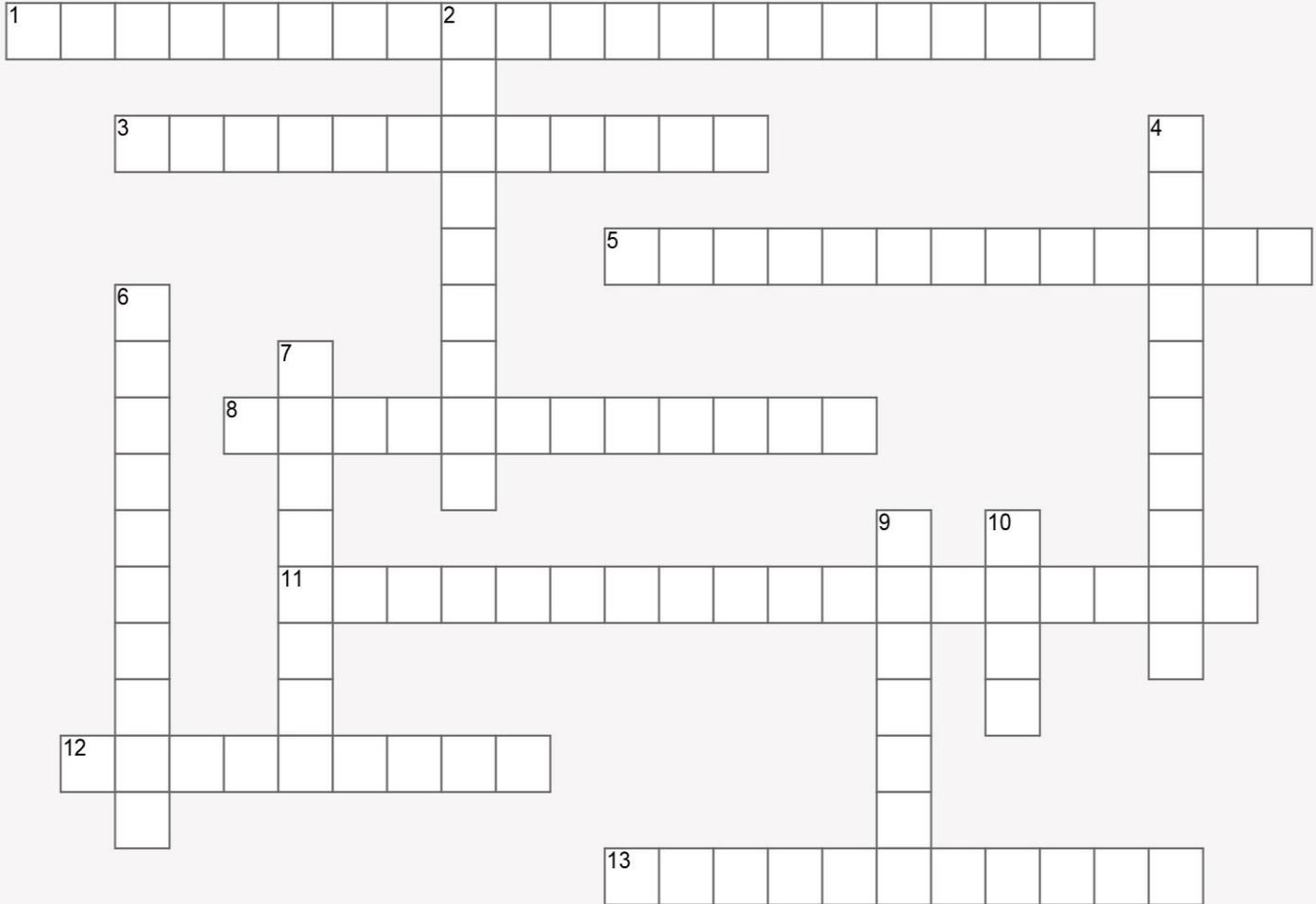
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7. Finch have access to the Machine through a \_\_\_\_\_.
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9. The woman who is the head of the ISA's operation regarding the Machine.
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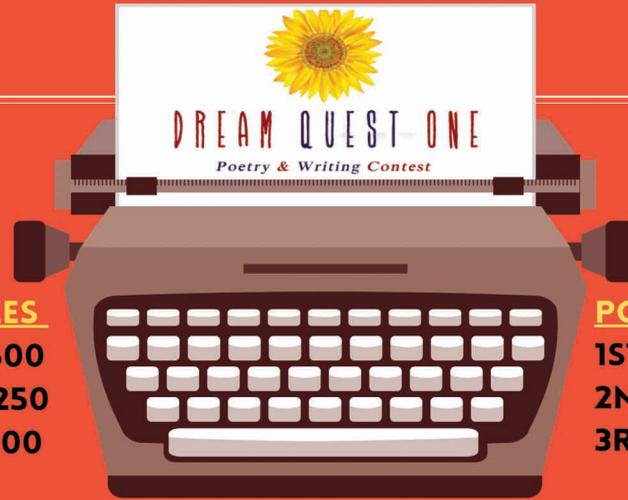


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