

That Nerd Show



MONTHLY

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Vol. 18

CELEBRATING
20 YEARS OF

firefly



Football vs. Fútbol
Which is Better, Madden 23 or FIFA 23
By Marcus Blake



REVIEWS &
WHAT YOU SHOULD
BINGE-WATCH



Nathan Fillion

Zoe Lister-Jones

Kaylee Frye

Morena Baccini

Alan Tudyk

River Tam

Simon Tam

firefly

Alison Balthasar

Created by Joss Whedon

THE TIME OF HEROES IS OVER

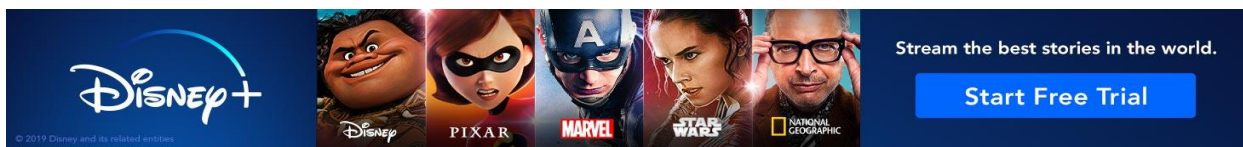


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Table of Contents

"Celebrating 20 Years of Firefly: The Greatest Show That Never Lasted!"	Pg. 5
Film and TV News	Pg. 11
Monthly Movie Reviews	Pg. 14
<i>"The Woman King" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 14
<i>"Goodnight Mommy" Review by Alex Moore</i>	Pg. 15
<i>"Don't Worry Darling" Review by Julie Jones</i>	Pg. 15
<i>"Clerks 3" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 16
<i>"Pinocchio" Review by Allison Costa</i>	Pg. 17
<i>"Honk for Jesus" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 18
<i>"Orphan: First Kill" Review by Alex Moore</i>	Pg. 18
<i>"Samaritan" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 19
<i>"Look Both Ways" Review by Danielle Butler</i>	Pg. 20
<i>"Day Shift" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 20
<i>"Bodies, Bodies, Bodies" Review by Alex Moore</i>	Pg. 21
What You Should Binge Watch	Pg. 27
<i>"Cobra Kai: Season 5" Review by Alex Moore</i>	Pg. 27
<i>"Only Murders in the Building: Season 2" Review by Allison Costa</i>	Pg. 28
<i>"Echoes" Review by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 29
Gaming News	Pg. 35
<i>Football vs. Fútbol: Which is Better, Madden 23 or FIFA 23 by Marcus Blake</i>	Pg. 43
Comic Book News	Pg. 47
<i>Cosplay: The Best of Firefly Cosplay</i>	Pg. 53
Music Stuff	Pg. 57
<i>Purple Ruminations: "The Style of Prince" by Chad Womack</i>	Pg. 59
Science News	Pg. 62
Storytellers	Pg. 65
<i>Firefly Fan Fiction: "Body Shots" by The Frisky Firelily</i>	Pg. 67
Word Games	Pg. 71
<i>90's Pop Culture Wordcross</i>	Pg. 72



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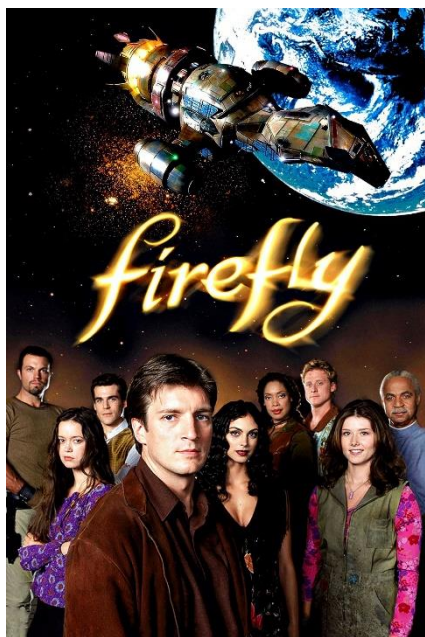
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Celebrating 20 Years of *Firefly*

From the Staff of That Nerd Show



20 years ago, one of the best science-fiction shows premiered on TV! It is sometimes referred to as the greatest show that never lasted. Created by Joss Whedon, *Firefly* was supposed to be the next big show for FOX and the perfect replacement for the X-Files, which had ended in May of 2002. Sadly, it never happened, but despite a shortened season one and an early cancellation, *Firefly* became a cult hit among sci-fi fans. *Firefly* has stood the test of time and it's still a show that we watch today, despite the mishandling of a network that had a hit on its hands and didn't even realize it.

The biggest mystery may be why the show never lasted and didn't become the hit that it was supposed to be, but an even bigger mystery may be why it became one of the greatest shows that fans still binge-watch 20 years later. In fact, it's still one of the most watched classic TV shows on Hulu. But how did this Joss Whedon creation become such a cult hit? Perhaps it was a little bit of luck and storytelling that was ahead of its time. If you're a fan of the *Mandalorian* then you should automatically be a fan of *Firefly* even though it's not *Star Wars* because this show was the *Mandalorian* before the *Mandalorian* ever premiered on Disney +!

Coming off the success of supernatural fan favorite, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Joss Whedon was looking for his next project and created *Firefly*, a science fiction show set 500 years in the future with a western motif that followed a renegade crew of mercenaries who like Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leon's spaghetti westerns, became antiheroes that we could all identify with. The captain of the ship was more Han Solo than even Han Solo himself. It had elements of all great sci-fi shows from *Star Trek*, *Stargate SG-1*, *Babylon 5*, and even *Lost* in space. But it was different, something we had never really seen on a major network before. More importantly, it had great storytelling with a motley cast of characters that were more than just mercenaries. This crew also had a preacher and a prostitute, as well as a very well-respected doctor evading the law. Plus, it gave us a really cool ship only rivaled by the *Millennium Falcon* set in the wild west of space. It had all the makings to be a hit and should have been the perfect replacement for the X-Files on FOX, but the network that promoted the show as a great replacement for their number one hit couldn't

have screwed up this show more if they had tried harder. From the marketing to how the show was released, to the worst schedule you could give a highly anticipated new show, it's almost as if FOX wanted to destroy the creation they intended to be their next big hit from the get-go! The story of how they screwed up *Firefly* is so comical that it's tragic, but how the show became a cult favorite is magical!

Most fans know by now that the biggest mistake FOX made was showing the series out of order. The original 2-hour pilot wasn't even shown until the end of the series. It was the back door pilot that got the network to greenlight the series. However, it's not uncommon that the first pilots are not often used for TV series. Probably the most famous example is the original *Star Trek* series. If you remember the original pilot of *Star Trek* had Captain Pike commanding the starship *Enterprise* and the only character to carry over from the original pilot to the second pilot was Spock. In the case of *Firefly*, the second episode titled "The Train Job", was the pilot episode used and the first episode to premiere, which, while it is a great episode, it doesn't properly introduce all the characters and why River and Simon Tam join the crew of *Serenity*. Joss Whedon had planned on seven seasons to fully tell his story which is about how many seasons, he had gotten with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. His series was meant to be in a certain order because it fits a certain timeline. Whether the network realized that or just didn't care, everything was shown out of order, so it really didn't make sense. We take that for granted now because when we go back and binge-watch *Firefly* everything is in the proper order. For fans who discovered *Firefly* on DVD that's how

the DVDs presented it. When you're telling an overall story, there's a certain order to tell that story or it doesn't make sense. Everybody knows this even TV networks or at least they should! One of the other factors as to why the show never took off is it premiered on a Friday. Friday night timeslots are a death sentence to TV shows even 20 years ago because who stays home on a Friday to watch network TV. As a replacement for The X-Files, it should have taken its time slot, which was on Sunday night, but FOX had another hit show on their hands that became their primary show on Sunday nights, "24" starring Kiefer Sutherland. The first season premiered during the last season of The X-Files and became a runaway hit so the second season took over the X-Files timeslot.



You can make the argument that FOX never really had much faith in *Firefly*. Yes, it was a science fiction show way ahead of its time. It's a space Western that up till that time we hadn't really seen on TV before. But if you want any clear example of how the network lost face in this show that was supposed to be one of their Premier shows that year then look at the marketing. Executives simply didn't know how to market the show. This is not a joke! It was literally marketed as an offbeat comedy. That's how the network categorized *Firefly* and while there are a lot of great funny moments like the episode where Jayne is a folk hero in a crappy little town with a song memorializing his heroic acts or Shepherd book telling Malcolm Reynolds that if he takes advantage of a girl he will go to the special hell. And Alan Tudyk is pretty much funny in every scene that he's in. The show wasn't meant to be a comedy, it had a lot of dark undertones to it. 20 years later Fox always maintains that the reason the show was canceled is that it didn't have enough viewers. That's not entirely true. It had fair ratings that were good enough to give the show a second season, but it's hard to get prime ratings when you put a show on Friday night or you completely market it wrong.

Firefly had all the potential to succeed, but it was on the wrong Network. If it had been on a channel like SyFy channel or even UPN then it probably would have had a chance. In fact, when *Firefly* got canceled after 11 episodes, the small fan base it had garnered would send in postcards to try and get another Network to pick up the show. They fervently tried to get UPN to

pick it up which was coming off some very successful years of Star Trek. From Star Trek: The Next Generation to Voyager, to Deep space Nine, UPN seemed like a perfect fit for a science fiction show. Then again, the Syfy channel would have absolutely been the perfect fit. But when you have a network that completely misjudges what your show about, and then gives notes on how to make it better that's a recipe for failure.



We always complain about networks that interfere with creators. Good shows, movies, and properties suffer from executives who are not creators and don't have any vision. I think we can all agree that Kathleen Kennedy and Disney's interference with the sequel trilogy made these movies worse than they should have been especially when there wasn't a clear vision. Joss Whedon had a clear vision with *Firefly*. He had a reputation for making great scripts from the first toy story movie to Alien Resurrection and of course his hit, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but how are you allowed to create something wonderful when you get notes back from the executives like he did where they're telling him to not make the story so dark but yet they want the lead actor to shoot more people. That's not a joke, they told Joss Whedon to make the show less dark, but they wanted Captain Malcolm Reynolds to shoot more people. *Firefly* had its fair share of violence, but these characters weren't ruthless killers. The whole story centered around veterans of a galactic civil war who just wanted to be independent of the government. Not all of their jobs were honest, but by the time you get to the movie *Serenity*, you realize how heroic they really are as antiheroes. Part of the greatness of *Firefly* is that it dealt with real-life issues of creating new worlds and all the problems that came with it from what humanity would do for survival. *Firefly* didn't shy away from the fact that humans are animals by nature and that they look out for number one. They will steal and kill and even rape to survive. We accept this now with storytelling, that's one of the reasons *The Walking Dead* has been so successful as it didn't shy away from how human beings will really act when struggling to survive. That's probably not going to change 500 years in the future as

we are colonizing other planets. Civility in a lot of ways is a pipe dream, but there is honor among thieves and antiheroes who do right by people. The story of *Firefly* really is about this crew taking in two fugitives, one of them who is psychic, and the government wants to make a weapon. It's not far off from real-life issues. You have to wonder if a show like *Firefly* would survive today on a network, especially when we have shows like *The Walking Dead* where one of your main characters can be as ruthless as anyone and beat characters to death, but then again reform and become a hero. Sometimes great movies or TV shows come along that really are ahead of their time. However, with all the interference from FOX, it didn't stop this great show from becoming a cult hit and getting a movie that would wrap up the story.

After Fox canceled their show and *Firefly* went to DVD, Universal Studios got the rights and Joss Whedon made a deal with the studio to make a movie. It was intended to take *Firefly* to the big screen and have many sequels if the first one did well. Unfortunately, it didn't, but it did continue the story of the TV show with a storyline that if the show had not been canceled and had gotten a second season, we would have seen how these characters discovered the true nature of the reverse and the government's dark little secrets. The plot of *Serenity* was basically what the second season was going to be about. The movie *Serenity* came out in 2005 and there were quite a few science fiction movies that year. The main one was Episode 3 Revenge of the Sith. You also had movies like Tom Cruise's *War of the Worlds*, *The Island*, *Aeon Flux*, *The Jacket*, *Zathura*, and *The Sound of Thunder*. It was a good year for science fiction and universal hope to have some success with *Serenity*, with the Sci-Fi audience who were seeing all these other movies. It didn't quite happen that way, but what *Serenity* did was introduced a whole new audience to *Firefly*.

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A lot of fans of the show in the movie had never seen the show or even heard of it when the movie came out and it created a curiosity about the *Firefly* DVD Boxset that became one of the biggest selling DVD sets that year. And

even Netflix had a hand in giving Firefly a bigger audience that made it a cult favorite.



It's hard to imagine that at one time Netflix actually mailed DVDs and you couldn't just stream anything from your Smart TV or your Roku stick. That's how Netflix started as a company, they would mail out DVDs through a subscription service. It was unheard of but very successful and it gave people a chance to watch TV shows they couldn't get DVDs of at their local Blockbuster or if they didn't want to buy the Boxset. While it took a few years to catch on, by 2004 and 2005, Netflix became more popular than ever because ever since 2001 DVD players became a popular gift since the cost had come down. Millions of households had DVD players and which led to more renting DVDs. More movies and TV shows were coming to DVD especially box sets like the original Star Wars trilogy or Indiana Jones or The Godfather trilogy. Netflix provided a way for people to rent DVDs without having to go to a video store. At one time the man who started the company almost sold it to Blockbuster for 50 million dollars, but Blockbuster never saw it as a viable service. Then Netflix went public in 2002 and became one of the most popular services with distribution centers all over the US. This is very important because box sets of TV shows that were hard to find became popular rental items with Netflix. Two of the most hard-to-get TV series on DVD at your local video store, we're the first seasons of *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica*. More people saw the movie *Serenity* on video because it didn't stay in the theaters very long. And like all great cult favorites, word of mouth about this great sci-fi movie based on a canceled TV series made it more popular than ever, with a little help from the internet.

The truth is, this wasn't a series carried in Blockbuster on DVD. It was hard to find except for our service like Netflix. By the time the movie had been released on DVD and more people had seen it, more fans wanted to watch the series and rented it from Netflix to the point that more DVD box sets had to be made for rental services like Netflix and of course for video stores. Sometimes companies come along at the right time with a service that changes the way we view entertainment. Of course, Blockbuster was a staple of the video rental industry. It had grown so large that it had bought out mom-and-pop stores, but it didn't carry everything. Individual stores only carry

the most popular items, whereas a company like Netflix could pick up the slack by renting out TV shows on DVD. If you were to ask most fans of Firefly how they discovered the show, it was because they saw the movie and then rented the DVDs on Netflix. While *Firefly* isn't the only TV show that helped popularize Netflix as a service, its cult status among science fiction nerds help some men to service like Netflix and why it was an alternative to Blockbuster to the point that Blockbuster within the next couple of years would have its own video rental service by mail. We should also mention that by this time Amazon had moved beyond selling just books. They were five or six years into selling movies and CDs and electronics. More and more *Firefly* DVD box sets were sold through the internet than through local retailers after fans were able to rent the DVDs through services like Netflix.



Universal Studios had intended to have a few sequels beyond *Serenity* and keep the story of *Firefly* going, much like the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* movies kept the story going past the series. It didn't do enough at the box office to warrant more sequels and two of the main characters didn't sign multi-year contracts so of course their characters were killed in the movie. But the film did more for bringing fans to a canceled series that should have still been on TV at that time and if you look at *Firefly* as a whole, you have 14 great episodes and a movie. It's like an extended limited series, something you can binge-watch in a weekend. *Firefly* proved that sometimes the best shows are the ones that we discovered later through Home Entertainment. There's always been a secondary market for movies and TV shows through VHS and DVDs. Now we find classic shows on streaming services like Netflix or Hulu or Amazon. However, there was something else that made *Firefly* a fan favorite. It had genius writing. In a day and age where we get a lot of crappy shows that have too much exposition or rely too much on CGI, *Firefly* was a show that had to rely on good storytelling because as great as the special effects were at that time, it didn't overshadow shitty storytelling. Sci-fi and

fantasy nerds argue about the lack of storytelling and things like *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* now. Amazon's *Rings of Power* may end up being a colossal failure because most of its budget has gone to CGI. It looks good, but the story isn't as engaging as the films. Joss Whedon created a space western that we hadn't seen before where you root for the bad guys even though they really aren't bad. It's like having the A-Team, but in a space Western.

The show also broke certain trends such as having your mechanic be a woman and being smarter about machines than all the men or having a preacher as part of your crew that's a skilled fighter. How many shows today have a prostitute as one of your main characters who's highly respected and doesn't shy away from what she does or make it demeaning or slutty in any way. For fans of sci-fi that love antiheroes like Han Solo, Captain Malcolm Reynolds is like the TV version of that character with a really cool ship. As we mentioned before the show dealt with real-life issues of humanity that will still probably be there 500 years in the future and no matter how advanced the technology may be, the true nature of humanity never goes away. Over the last few years, we gravitated towards more classic shows because the storytelling was better. New *Star Trek* shows aren't as engaging as the Original Series or the Next Generational shows like *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine*.

The stories and *Firefly* are dark and realistic and even at the time when some considered it too dark, we can look back and say that it's pretty tame compared to what we watch now. Perhaps if the series had been allowed to continue for a few years or even made it to seven seasons, it wouldn't have been as good or we wouldn't appreciate the series like we do, but then again imagine all the stories you could tell within that universe. As fans eagerly await for the next installment of the *Mandalorian* or season 2 of *The Book of Boba Fett* because we want those space westerns that don't deal with typical heroes and villains, we get reminded of how special *Firefly* really is and how royally FOX screwed up what they had.





Could you imagine having multiple seasons of 24 and Firefly? It could have been bigger than The X-Files. But here we are 20 years later still talking about this show and a little fun fact, it's one of the most streamed TV shows on Hulu. A whole new generation of fans has discovered it. It may be the greatest show that never lasted. We may be left with what could have been if the right Network show the series as it was intended. But despite what could have been, Firefly has proven what you can do with a show when you have great storytelling and you don't rely on special effects to tell your story. It's also a great example of when you have a perfect cast where everybody shines. There are a lot of shows that were canceled early that are largely forgotten now. Some are not even good enough to be one-hit wonders and there are hundreds of

shows that we aren't talking about 20-years. However, with Firefly and the movie Serenity, we have 14 great episodes and a movie that we can still stream today and has been cemented as one of the greatest sci-fi shows ever created. Joss Whedon may not be likable anymore after all his controversies and he may never create or direct anything ever again, but it doesn't take away from a special show he created 20 years ago that still lives on because let's face it, the Browncoats (fans) always remember. No matter how bad TV shows may get with poor writing and special effects, we will always have a show like *Firefly* and it never disappoints when we binge-watch that's the mark of greatness! How many shows become legendary like Firefly?



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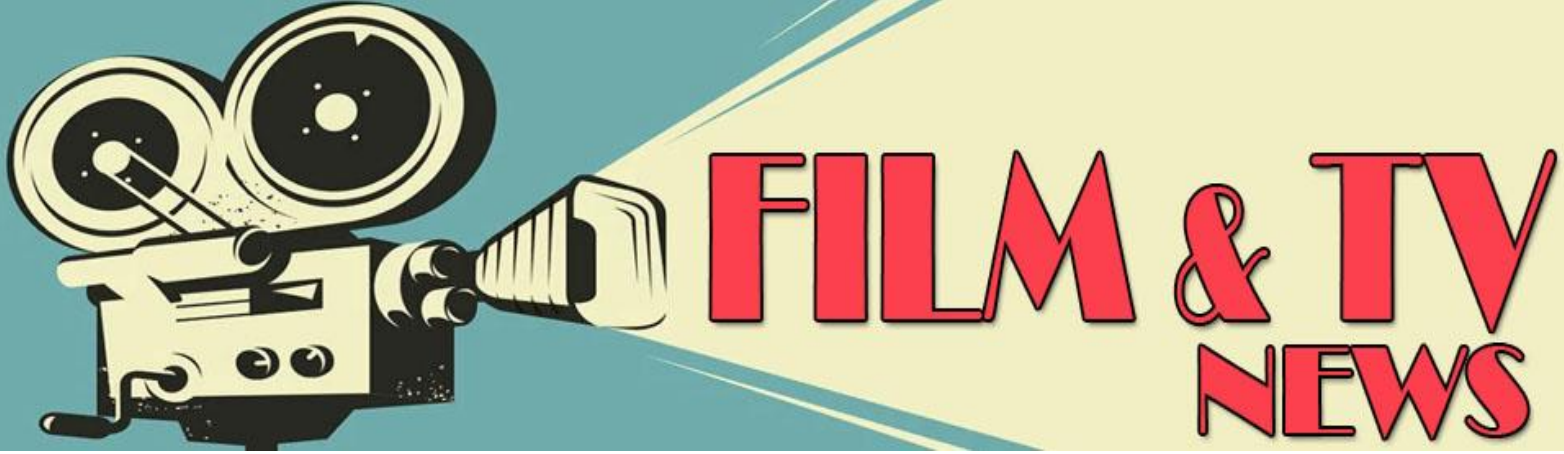
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'Constantine' Sequel a Go; Keanu Reeves & Francis Lawrence To Reunite, Akiva Goldsman Scripting & Producing With Bad Robot's JJ Abrams & Hannah Minghella



Here is a resurrection of a DC character worth getting excited over. Warner Bros will develop another installment of the 2005 supernatural thriller *Constantine*, and the studio is re-teaming star Keanu Reeves and director Francis Lawrence, who made his helming debut on the original. Akiva Goldsman will write the screenplay and produce the project through his Weed Road Pictures, alongside Bad Robot's J.J. Abrams and Hannah Minghella. When it opened 17 years ago the Reeves-starring pic based on the intricate DC character grossed over \$200 million in 2005 box office dollars

worldwide. It opened a world of potential, and fans have long been hot on a sequel. Reeves will reprise as supernatural exorcist and demonologist John Constantine, who in the original is dying but stays around to save his soul by keeping demons from hell from breaching earth. He also gets between a battle between the archangel Gabriel and Lucifer. This deal was shepherded by Warner Bros Pictures Group co-chairs Michael De Luca and Pam Abdy. Lorenzo DiBonaventura and Erwin Stoff will executive produce the project. *Reported by Deadline.com*

'Youngblood' Reimagining In Works From Aircraft Pictures & Dolphin Entertainment; Charles Officer Directing



Aircraft Pictures is teaming up with Dolphin Entertainment to produce a new feature adaptation of the 1986 sports drama, *Youngblood*, with rising filmmaker Charles Officer (*Akilla's Escape*) on board to direct. The film is slated to begin principal photography in early 2023.

Youngblood follows hockey prodigy Dean Youngblood, who joins the Hamilton Bulldogs and discovers he must face off against toxic behavior on the ice and within himself, to fulfill his dream of being drafted

into the National Hockey League. The original film, distributed by MGM, starred Rob Lowe, Patrick Swayze and Keanu Reeves in his feature debut, and has since become a cult classic among hockey fans.

Kyle Rideout, Seneca Aaron and Officer penned the script for the new film, which will be distributed in Canada by Photon Films — being made with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada and the Talent Fund, as well as Ontario Creates and the Shaw Rocket Fund. Aircraft's Anthony Leo and Andrew Rosen will produce, with Jake Yanowski serving as co-producer. Exec producers on the film include Dolphin's Bill O'Dowd and Emerson Davis, as well as Photon Films' Mark Slone and Zanne Devine.

"Quite a bit has changed since *Youngblood* premiered more than thirty years ago," said Aircraft's Co-Founder and Co-President, Leo. "With a

visionary director like Charles, and with support from our financial partners and Dolphin Entertainment, this adaptation couldn't be in better hands."

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"In revisiting the *Youngblood* story, we're given an opportunity to take this incredibly emotional and entertaining narrative and update it for an entirely new generation," said Dolphin Entertainment's

CEO, O'Dowd. "We're excited to flip the original story on its head and explore how its themes of family, coming-of-age and masculinity will resonate differently today."

"The opportunity to re-imagine the beloved classic hockey drama *Youngblood* is a gift," added Officer, "and I am excited to bring a fresh story that centers on an African American hockey prodigy to the screen."

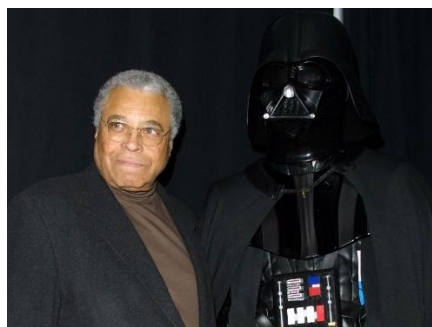
Officer is an award-winning director whose selected works include the crime-noir feature *Akilla's Escape*, which premiered at the 2021 Toronto Festival and won five Canadian Screen Awards; the recent BET+/CBC television drama *The Porter*, which he also exec produced; and *Mighty Jerome*, which earned a 2012 Emmy for Best Historical Documentary. His television directing credits include the CBS drama *Ransom*, the Netflix soccer drama *21 Thunder*, ABC's *Rookie Blue* and NBC's *Saving Hope*. The filmmaker is no stranger to hockey, having played professionally when drafted to the Calgary Flames farm team, prior to venturing into directing. He is also founding member of the first Canadian Black Screen Office.

Based in Toronto with an office in Los Angeles, Aircraft Pictures' recent projects include the upcoming Apple TV+ series *Circuit Breakers*; the Hulu Original series *Holly Hobbie*; the animated series *Summer Memories* for WildBrain; the Oscar-nominated animated feature *The Breadwinner*; three television movies based on the *Bruno & Boots* book series by Canadian young adult fiction author Gordon Korman; the supernatural comedy series *Todd & The Book of Pure Evil*; and the Kidscreen Award-winning single-camera comedy *Raising Expectations*, created by Tom Saunders (*Arrested*

Development) and starring Jason Priestley and Molly Ringwald. Aircraft received a milestone investment from Canadian media and content company Corus Entertainment Inc. earlier this year, which will prove key in supporting its growth ambitions in producing quality family-focused entertainment for the global marketplace.

Dolphin Entertainment is an Emmy-nominated creator of television, digital and feature film content. Its division is most well-known for its decade-long partnership with Nickelodeon across a slate of prime-time, live-action series and movies, including the top-rated series, *Zoey 101*. Dolphin's feature films include the Mattel co-production *Max Steel* and the Justin Bieber documentary *Believe*. In Cannes this year, Dolphin announced a partnership with Imax to co-finance, co-produce and co-distribute feature documentaries. The first project on their joint slate is *The Blue Angels*, also to be produced by Bad Robot, Zipper Bros. and Glen Powell. In addition to its legacy production business, Dolphin owns six notable Entertainment PR and Marketing agencies, including leading Film/TV agency 42West. *reported by deadline.com*

James Earl Jones Signs Over Rights To Voice Of Darth Vader, Signaling Retirement From Legendary Role



James Earl Jones – one of the most distinctive voices in the history of film – appears to have made steps to step back from voicing the *Star Wars* character, Darth Vader, after nearly 40 years in the role. *Vanity Fair* reports that the actor, aged 91, has signed over the rights to his voice to filmmakers using

new AI, technology, Matthew Wood of Lucasfilm told the magazine that the actor "wished to keep Vader alive"

"He had mentioned he was looking into winding down this particular character," Wood told *Vanity Fair*. "So how do we move forward?" Jones made his debut as the legendary *Star Wars* villain in the 1977 film, and followed this up with voicing the same character throughout the franchise up to this point on both the big and small screen. He most recently starred as the character for the new *Obi-Wan Kenobi* series on Disney+. While actor David Prowse dressed in the distinctive black uniform of the Sith Lord for the original films, it was Jones who provided the unique deep tones of the complex Vader.

Besides his work on the sci-fi epic, Jones is a celebrated EGOT. He received an honorary Academy Award in 2011, having

been nominated for Best Actor in the 1970 *The Great White Hope*. Other stars from the franchise have made a return to the franchise in recent years. Ewan McGregor, Hayden Christensen and Mark Hamill have all reprised their characters, much to the delight of fans. But it seems one of the most distinctive actors of all is finally signing off. Earlier this month, Broadway's Cort Theatre was renamed in honor of Jones, and a dedication ceremony was attended by such stage and film stars as Samuel L. Jackson, LaTanya Richardson Jackson, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Norm Lewis and director Kenny Leon. The 91-year-old Jones did not attend but had been given a private tour of the renamed James Earl Jones Theatre days prior. Reported by *Deadline.com*

'Joker: Folie à Deux' Adds Catherine Keener to Ensemble In Secret Role



Oscar nominee Catherine Keener has landed a major role opposite Joaquin Phoenix and Lady Gaga in Todd Phillips' *Joker* sequel *Joker: Folie à Deux* for Warner Bros. and DC Films. Deadline recently broke the news that Brendan

Gleeson would be joining the ensemble as well as Zazie Beetz. Warner Bros also recently announced that the film would bow on October 4, 2024. Production is expected to get underway this December. Warner Bros had no comment on Keener's casting. Phillips is returning to direct and also co-wrote the script with Scott Silver, who penned the original pic. Not much is known about the sequel, though insiders believe it will have musical elements and will be set in Arkham Asylum, which is where the first film leaves off after Arthur Fleck (Phoenix) has been sent there. It is also unknown who Keener will be playing.

Keener was most recently seen in Shawn Levy's *The Adam Project* opposite Ryan Reynolds and Mark Ruffalo. Prior to this, she appeared in a one-season arc in Nick Antosca and Lenore Zion's Netflix series *Brand New Cherry Flavor*. She also co-starred in Showtime's *Kidding*, opposite Jim Carrey, which ran for two seasons, and was also in the Amazon series *Modern Love*.

She was also recently seen in the indie *No Future*, from the Sorry to Bother You producing team and opposite *Stranger Things* star Charlie Heaton. Reported by deadline.com

'Red Sonja': Matilda Lutz, Wallis Day & Robert Sheehan Set For Millennium Media's Comic Book Film



Matilda Lutz (*Revenge*), Wallis Day (*Sex/Life*) and Robert Sheehan (*The Umbrella Academy*) have been tapped to lead the cast of Millennium Media's upcoming comic book film *Red Sonja*, from director M.J. Bassett (*Solomon Kane*), which is now in production at the Bulgarian Nu Boyana Studio, with filming at the Greek Nu Boyana Studio to follow. Inspired by the sword and sorcery comic books of the same name by Dynamite Entertainment, *Red Sonja* is based on the heroine originally created for Marvel Comics by Robert E. Howard and subsequently adapted by Roy Thomas. While the character is described as a fearsome warrior boasting a high degree of skill with a sword, details as to the film adaptation's plot have not been disclosed. Hannah John Kamen had previously been set for the film's lead role of Red Sonja, though she's stepped aside due to scheduling conflicts, with Lutz now set to play the titular character. Day will portray her wicked half-sister Annisia, with Sheehan as Draygan.

Joey Soloway (*Transparent*) and Tasha Huo (Netflix's *Tomb Raider*) scripted the film, which will also star Michael Bisping (*xx: Return of Xander Cage*), Martyn Ford (*F9: The Fast Saga*), Eliza Matengu (*Thor: Love and Thunder*), Manal El-Feitury (*Code Red*) and Katrina Durden (*Doctor Strange*). Pic's producers are Mark Canton (*300*, *Power*), Courtney Solomon (*Cake*, *After*), Luke

Lieberman on behalf of Red Sonja LLC, Millennium Media's Les Weldon, Jeffrey Greenstein, Jonathan Yunger and Yariv Lerner, and Joe Gatta (*Out of the Furnace*, *Conan the Barbarian*). Avi Lerner, Trevor Short and Boaz Davidson are exec producing for Millennium Media, alongside Dorothy Canton, Millennium Media's Tanner Mobley, Nick Barrucci on behalf of Dynamite Entertainment, Lati Grobman and Christa Campbell on behalf of Campbell Grobman Films, Eclectic Picture's Heidi Jo Markel, and Soloway on behalf of Topple. "I've wanted to make a Red Sonja movie since I was a teenager – she has been a powerful presence for me and a character that I have always wanted to bring to the screen with my own voice and vision," said Bassett. "When I met Matilda Lutz, I knew she had all the magic I was looking for and could see the complexity and depth she would bring to Sonja."

"This has been a long journey from script to screen and we are excited to go into production after assembling the best creative team, an amazing band of up and coming talent and a fun and fantastical world fueled by the Red Sonja IP," said Millennium Media's President, Greenstein. "M.J. is an amazing filmmaker with fantastic vision and Matilda was absolutely brilliant in *Revenge* that we knew she was right for this role the moment we saw her – making them the perfect duo for *Red Sonja*." "I've been working with the Millennium production team on adapting this extraordinary graphic novel since Luke Lieberman brought it to us seven years ago," added Canton. "M.J. is a fantastic filmmaker who truly understands the power of this story that will ignite audiences everywhere. In the realm of fantasy and graphic novels, there is no greater, more empowered female character who has stood the test of time. Courtney Solomon and I are privileged to be a part of this fabulous producing team."

Lutz's recent projects include Paramount Pictures' *Zone 414* starring Guy Pearce, Neon's *Revenge*, Paramount Pictures' *Rings* starring Vincent D'Onofrio, and Netflix's *Medici* starring Daniel Sharman. Her upcoming projects include Netflix's *Reptile* with Alicia Silverstone, Benicio Del Toro, Frances Fisher and Justin Timberlake; *Helen's Dead* starring Dylan Gelula and Emile Hirsch; and *Maggie*, with Daisy Ridley and Shazad Latif. Day is best known for her roles in Paramount's *Infinite* starring Mark Wahlberg, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Rupert Friend and Dylan O'Brien, E!'s *The Royals* starring Elizabeth Hurley, Syfy's *Krypton* starring Hannah Waddingham, and The CW's *Batwoman*. Her upcoming projects include Paramount's *Sheroes*, starring Isabelle Fuhrman, and the second season of Netflix's *Sex/Life* starring Sarah Shahi and Mike Vogel. Sheehan is best known for his role as Klaus in Netflix's *The Umbrella Academy*, which has him starring alongside Elliot Page, Aidan Gallagher, Tom Hopper, Emmy Raver-Lampman, David Casteneda and Rita Arya. The actor is also known for his roles in Sony's *The Mortal Instruments* franchise, starring Lily Collins and Jamie Campbell Bower; *Misfits* starring Iwan Rheon and Antonia Thomas; and Amazon's *Fortitude* starring Dennis Quaid. Bassett's past projects include the fantasy pic *Solomon Kane* starring James Purefoy, and Starz's *Power* starring Omari Hardwick. Her recent projects include Lionsgate's *Endangered Species* starring Rebecca Romijn and Jerry O'Connell; Lionsgate's *Rogue* starring Megan Fox; and episodes of Freeform's *Motherland: Fort Salem*, Netflix's *Altered Carbon*, and Syfy's *Nightflyers*. reported by deadline.

MONTHLY MOVIE



REVIEWS



The Woman King By Marcus Blake



“The Woman King” or as I like to call it the Braveheart of West Africa! The film tells the story of the Dahomey kingdom’s rise to power in the early 19th century during the height of the slave trade. It was a kingdom in West Africa that resided from the 1600s until 1904 but now makes up parts of Nigeria. But more importantly, this film tells the story of the Agoji, the all-female army that in a lot of ways were like the special forces of the Kingdom who helped make Dahomey one of the largest kingdoms in Africa by defeating the other kingdoms they pay tribute to, and at the same time became a free and independent Kingdom the dealt solely with European nations. It has a lot of similarities to Braveheart. Let me first say that I was pleasantly surprised by how good this movie is in the performances have such a wonderful cast. I didn’t think much of this movie when I saw it but loved the action and couldn’t get enough of it. Some of the best movies are the ones that surprise you and the fact that I didn’t know much about this Kingdom and it’s history, made it even better. Unfortunately, it is a Hollywood movie, so it did gloss over some important facts like how it rose to power through the slave trade, the kingdom was well known for selling the captives of defeated armies to Europeans and a big contributor to the slave trade. But the movie

also addresses the fact that for a Time the kingdom did try to move away from the slave trade until it was eventually abolished throughout the world.

Viola Davis and Lashana Lynch absolutely shine in this movie as Agoji warriors. Viola Davis plays the aging general who will eventually be made the female King with equal power to King Gezo, the ruler at that time. She is feared and respected and her story is one that deals with having to face the enemies who once captured her and raped her, and the repercussions of giving up a child that was born out of that misery. If you thought Lashana Lynch played a great Double 00 in *No Time To Die*, then she’s even better in this film has a senior warrior that everyone fears. The story centers on a young king who has come to power and how the kingdom did want to move away from the slave trade, eventually kicked slave traders out of their Kingdom. The young king is played by John Boyega who gives a powerful performance and more importantly, given the opportunity to play a character that is just as important as the main characters in telling the story and not reduced to the background like in the Disney Star Wars trilogy. He’s a great actor and he was giving every moment to shine in this film and gives a great performance. What makes this movie worth watching is not only the great performances, but fantastic action. It leaves you on the edge of your seat and you root for every swing of their swords when killing their enemies, especially slave traders. He gives you a piece of history that you may not be aware of by shining the light of an all-female army that does not often get talked about in film. The performances are powerful introduces powerful and historic culture that does not often get taught. But again, it’s a Hollywood movie so it’s not entirely accurate.

Of course, you will root for the main characters when they kill slave traders and burn down a major slave for it. There are very gritty scenes that take you back to the first time you saw *Roots* or 12 years a Slave. The film does not shy away from the brutality of the slave trade. But there are some problems with the film. Firstly, they did not spend enough time on the training of a Agoji warriors. It feels as if new recruits can easily be trained in weeks and

pass their final test, which will lead them to succeed in battle. I feel like they didn’t tell enough stories surrounding training and what they had to go through, but at the same time this movie is not about the training of warriors, but how this Kingdom becomes independent and stops its own slave trade so there are more important stories that have to be told. While the action is very gritty and good, like all movies that have a lot of action, sometimes they become victims of shaky camera footage and this movie is no exception to that. But the beautiful landscapes cover a lot of that up, so it doesn’t distract you from the overall movie. And there are times that the actors slip in and out of the accents that they’re trying to portray with their characters. I don’t know if that’s so much their fault as the editing. It’s a good movie, but a large story is condensed into two hours, and it will leave you wanting more. I wonder if this movie would have been better as a limited series. Then again, you can make the same argument for Braveheart. But these are minor critiques.

Overall, *The Woman King* is a good movie with fantastic action and even better performances by a great cast. It shines the light on the history of an African nation that most people will not know about and even though it does gloss over some very grimly facts about their involvement in the slave trade, the movie is an inspiring tale about an old female army unit that not only protects its king but kills the villains with such force that you can’t help but root for them. A documentary about their story may be better, but for a Hollywood telling of this Kingdom and the Agoji, it’s fun and inspiring. The performances of Viola Davis, Lashana Lynch, and John Boyega drive this movie. They’re definitely Oscar worthy performances. It’s a good movie and worth seeing on the big screen. The fight sequences are good despite some shaky cam footage and this story will leave you wanting to know more. I admit, after I saw the movie, I spent a few minutes looking up the history behind this film. *The Woman King* is worth the price of a movie ticket, check it out, you won’t be disappointed.

Final Grade: 8 / 10 (Good)

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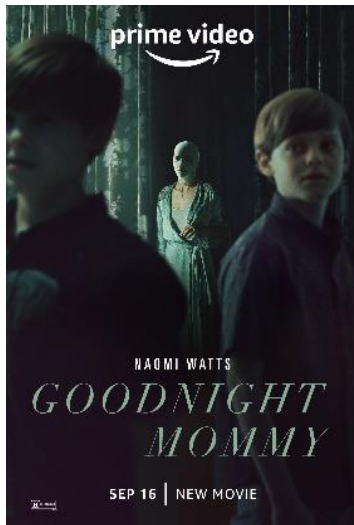
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Goodnight Mommy

By Alex Moore



Where do I begin? Ah, yes, Amazon Prime. Amazon Studios has been in existence since 2010. Where does that compare to, say, Netflix? Honestly, I do not know, but it is bugging me and some day, I will find out. Have I digressed for long enough yet?...

So, as it happens, "Goodnight Mommy" is a remake of an Austrian movie from all the way back in 2014. Have I reminded myself and others before about the lack of original material in the world of cinema? Well, I am doing so, yet again.

In any case, this is what they, if you know whom I mean by "they," have decided to do with their time and money. Actually, I have no problem with remakes, in general. If it is good, then who cares? That should not matter, should it? This one is directed by Matt Sobel and written by Kyle Warren, which was adapted from the aforementioned film by Veronika Franz & Severin Fiala ("The Lodge"). The cast is limited to just a handful of actors, primarily comprised of Naomi Watts ("This is the Night") as Mother and Cameron and Nicholas Crovetti as Elias and Lukas, respectively. Naomi Watts is also listed as the Executive Producer for the project.

Elsewhere, Jeremy Bobb ("South of Heaven"), as Gary, and Crystal Lucas-Perry, as Sandy, represent a team of police officers,

though their presence is minimal and hardly relevant to the story. Peter Hermann ("13") plays a small part as Father, as well. Again, his role is small and pretty irrelevant.

Elias and Lukas, who are twins, are coming to live with their Mother in a very isolated and serene environment, which has plenty of room to play, but there is a minor caveat or two, especially when it comes to the barn, outside and off into the distance of the main house. Apparently, something dangerous lurks within those walls; something Mother does not want her sons exposed to...

One thing that is never truly explained is why the Mother and Father have separated. I suppose, once the end of the story is revealed, it is easier to imagine what could have led to this, but the details are sketchy, at best. A specific song is repeatedly sung by, both, the Mother and the twins, as well. However, there is a lapse in the timeframe as to when each character chooses to sing the song. The Mother could be heard singing it in videos from the past, but only the twins sing it, now, presently.

As time rolls along, it becomes clear who is the leader and who is the follower between the twins. It reminds me of "Single While Female." The psychology surrounding twins is something that has not been explored enough, over the years, but it is done so much more effectively in THAT movie versus THIS one.

So, as the two boys are beginning to determine what is going on with their Mother, they are also at odds with how to treat her. One is more purposeful and the other is more passive. Either way, Mother is different and we do not know why. At least, not until the end. You may have noticed that on several occasions, I have mentioned "the end." Well, the end is everything to this film and, for the most part, nothing really matters before that. All of the potential scares and disturbing images disappear after that, from my perspective.

I should quickly point out that there were a couple of other details, involving Mother, which made me think of superior movies: a short dance in front of the mirror was reminiscent of a sequence in "The Silence of the Lambs" and a nightmarish dream sequence was reminiscent of "Black Swan." Maybe you will want to rewatch those films, instead.

The big payoff, at the end, was actually pretty good, but by that point, I was not all that interested to see it unfold. When a renowned actress, like Naomi Watts, cannot save the movie from falling beneath the horizon line of mediocrity, hope seems quite fragile. I can think of at least two moments in which I was laughing aloud and I do not think either one of those moments were actually intended to be humorous. If I had been sitting in a crowded or sparsely-populated theater, that might have been a series of awkward timing for me. At least it would have been memorable. Instead, I sat in watch, solo, as is customary for streaming services and their meaningful releases. It does not change my final thoughts: this movie is not

good and you should only watch it if you wish to compare it to the original or simply have nothing better to do with your time. I did you all a favor, in my estimation.

Final Grade: 4 / 10 (Below Average)



Don't Worry Darling

By Julie Jones

FLORENCE PUGH OLIVIA COOK GEMMA ARTERTON KAT WALKER NICKY KATT CHRIS PUGH STYLES WILDE CIBRY JAYNE KROUL PINK



Don't Worry Darling
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I've never been a fan of drama. I know a lot of girls say that, but as someone who is both introverted and neurodivergent, I really try to avoid it. So, when the drama behind Don't Worry Darling made the headlines, I was pretty sure I was just going to avoid the film all together. It felt like what was happening behind the scenes took over and eclipsed the film in a way I haven't seen since Gigli, and wasn't that a huge turd? However, I saw the trailer and thought the concept sounded interesting. I couldn't help but wonder if it was a good film that just got a bad rap because of the tension on set.

Don't Worry Darling is a film about a couple that lives in a private community. They are married and enjoying life, the husband working on a project that requires them to live in this housing development. What the men do on this project is a secret, but they come

Clerks 3

By Marcus Blake



home and have wives ready with dinner and martinis at the door. All the wives live the same lives and are friends, doing almost everything together and the same. But, one day Alice starts to wonder about things that are happening and the world they live in. And that's when she seems to have more questions than she can answer.

The acting is decent, though I think Florence Pugh shines the most in this cast. Everyone else seems to hold their own, but you really get a sense of her character and what she is going through while watching her on screen. I wasn't impressed by Harry Styles or Olivia Wild and thought everyone else was pretty stationary. The direction is nothing fantastic. It felt inconsistent and bland. There were a few moments when I thought there could have been a good director at hand, but it seemed more that the cast just knew what they were doing without that guidance. That's nothing against Olivia Wilde, she is a good director, but Don't Worry Darling is not her best work.

The cinematography was pretty boring. There were some good frames, but really it just fell flat. The aesthetic is something that's good, clean and feels authentic. I thought it was well balanced and the color palette really worked well with the storyline. There were muted colors that felt like a pretty veneer that wasn't allowed to reach its full potential, which works well with the film.

The storyline had a lot of potential, but it just never got there. When I saw the trailer, it seemed interesting and when I watched the film, I thought the same. The problem really is trying to fit ten pounds of shit in a five-pound bag. This film felt like something that should have taken its time and could have been measured and thought out. Instead, it felt like it was rushed. So, you had a movie that felt like it wanted to take its time but was rushed out the door.

Overall, I thought it was an ok movie. There was a lot of negativity because of the drama, but I also think it could have been a lot better than it was. A story like this would have done with someone like Tia West or Ari Aster directing it and A24 would have had a great cult classic on their hand. Hopefully, it will inspire someone who actually knows what to do with a plot like this one in the future and other filmmakers will learn from its mistakes. Out of ten, I would give it a seven. I can't rate it too low, because I didn't think it sucked. However, it wasn't that good of a film either good. Then, I feel like I can't stress enough how good it could have been, but that isn't enough reason to give it a great review or a higher rating. Is it worth seeing, sure, but go someplace that serves drinks, to make the pill a little easier to swallow and ease your regret after!

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)

When Kevin Smith made Clerks 2, somehow you knew he would end up making a third film to complete his trilogy. Maybe it shouldn't have taken so long, but it's nice to revisit this story 16 years later and nearly 30 years since the original film. I'm a huge fan of Kevin Smith. Not every one of his movies are great but then again, great filmmakers don't always make a movie. They don't stay perfect. When I look at Clerks 3, it's like a 30-year high school reunion for everything comes full circle while reminiscing about the moments that made your life great. In a nutshell, this film is about what made the original Clerks film great and why it stands the test of time. As I watched it, I wonder if Kevin Smith just wanted to make a film that showed the behind-the-scenes of making his opus. That's not necessarily a bad thing because making a movie about the process of making a movie can be very funny. State and Main is a great example, and a film called The Amateurs with Jeff Bridges where a group of filmmakers tries to make a porn film and it all goes to hell. Then they end up making a film about them trying to make a porn film. Clerks 3 is really just about the process he went through to make the first film but to examine all of the things that made up that story like the absurdity of humanity shown through the customers or the mundane atmosphere of working in a convenience store. None of these things are bad, but I think that you have to understand what this film really is and why it's not on par with the original Clerks or even Clerks 2. Don't get me wrong, I very much enjoyed it, but not through the lens of discovering an up-and-coming filmmaker who has a brilliant voice, but as a fan of a filmmaker who wants to reexamine the things he did great and therefore come full circle with his life.

The basic story of Clerks 3 is Randall Graves has a heart attack and decides that he wants to make a movie about his life working in

a convenience store. Sound familiar! Yes, it's a movie within a movie. The hilariousness of this film is seen in everything they go through to make an independent film and to put a script together of all these funny moments from their life that also include embarrassing moments of ex-girlfriends. It's nice to have Veronica back from the original film. In fact, when you watch this movie, you'll also see the original actors who portrayed customers come back and be in this film as well. However, as funny as Clerks 3 is, there are also some very heartwarming moments where these characters have to come face to face with where their lives are now and did they move on from certain tragedies. I'll leave it there because I don't want to spoil anything.

I feel like in some ways these heartwarming moments kind of slow down the film and while they are necessary to make us reconnect with these characters and make them endearing, sometimes it goes on a little too long. When I watch a Kevin Smith film, I don't want to feel sad and unfortunately, there's too many moments where I do feel sad, but what makes it really work is Kevin Smith's flair for comedy and his commentary on the absurdity of humanity is still within this film. Maybe it's not as good as with the other two Clerks movies, so what, it still works. But if you're a movie fan we all know that the third movie in a trilogy is usually the worst and that's certainly fits for Clerks 3 compared to the other two films.

If there is a true message to Clerks 3, I think it's for the character of Randall who learns to see the value in his life and of course he'll put that into film that's basically becoming the Kevin Smith of the story. But every great storyteller pick moments from their life to show to the world. It's no secret that artists put themselves in their work. However, this film really is just about us revisiting these characters and seeing where they are 30 years later, hence the high School reunion reference. I think my biggest critique is that a lot of the comedy was sacrificed for these very emotional scenes where the characters are coming face-to-face with their own mortality and what their lives have become. It just lingers a little too long, but it's also a necessary for this story to come full circle.

Here's what makes this movie worth watching. Kevin Smith's zany comedy also provides a great commentary not only on life but on movies and pop culture. He's the ultimate geek that we all agree with. He's like our nerd guru so some of his fantastic references for kids who obviously grew up in the '80s are brilliant and you can't help but laugh when Randall Graves is telling the doctor played by Amy Sedaris all about the Mandalorian series which obviously she's in. I feel like Elias was funnier in Clerks 2, but him becoming a Satanist in this film and the changing of all his weird outfits going from cyberpunk to goth to things that I can't even figure out we're great. He is the comic relief that changes the mood with all his

outfits because he's finally exploring different lifestyles. There's enough comic relief that makes this feel like a Clerks's movie and allows us to revisit what we've loved about these films that makes the third one worth watching. But this is also very clearly Randall's film. I wish there had been more done with Dante, but you also understand why it's very much Randall's story by the time you get to the end, and it should be. Clerks 3 is not the best film that Kevin Smith has ever made. It's not his best-written work, but it was fun to revisit the characters that we met in 1994. It's nice to have that reunion with them because if you grew up in the 80s and are about the same age as these characters in your late 40s approaching 50 then you're trying to answer the same questions. Did we do enough with our life? Is our life even worth telling in a movie? Clerks 3 is a good enough film that gives a great ending to the story of Clerks, but you should also understand that the first and second acts of their story are the best parts. If this was the film where we were introduced to Kevin Smith as a filmmaker and we probably wouldn't give him a second thought, but its commentary on his original film is brilliant and perfectly bookends the story of Clerks. Even an adequate film is still worth watching, especially when we get to revisit characters that we have grown up with and it's still better than any high school reunion that you would ever go to. It's a great send-off to the beloved characters of Dante Hicks and Randall Graves and their story at the Quick Stop.

Final Grade: 6 / 10 (Adequate)

Pinocchio

By Allison Costa



It seems, that for some reason, Disney is dead set on re-doing a live-action version of every major motion picture they have ever done. The latest in this sequence being Pinocchio, starring Tom Hanks as Geppetto. Even though it is a fairly good rendering, I fail to see how this live action version is any better than the original. The story follows the original animated story almost exactly with the exception of 2 new characters—a seagull named Sofia, and another puppeteer named Fabiana. Other than these two new characters and a slightly different ending (spoiler alert) where Pinocchio is not transformed into a “real boy”, it is basically exactly the same as the original version only with humans and a few more songs.

One starts to wonder, what is the benefit of live-action films? Why the immense desire to keep re-doing old classics? The one thing I think it does is shine light on these classics that many of the younger generation doesn't know. It also in some instances, like Dumbo, lets Disney re-create the narrative of their former storylines to fit in with society's ever-changing values and morality.

For example, some of the practices that were allowed as “normal” when these films originally debuted are now quite taboo and seen in a negative light. By “re-doing” them in a live-action setting I believe that Disney is attempting to right their wrongs so to speak. Personally, I don't feel a huge attachment to any of the live-action films that have come out so far; Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, Dumbo, Lady and the Tramp, Mulan, Aladdin, and now Pinocchio.

In my opinion Aladdin and Beauty and the Beast were probably the best in the repertoire. Pinocchio was hard to feel incredibly attached to because although Geppetto and Lampwick are actual human beings, Pinocchio is still a CGI puppet, and Jiminy Cricket as well as Honest John and other

characters are all CGI as well. So it didn't feel like true “live-action” to me. More a blend of CGI and a few human actors. Probably our favorite part of the film was the different rendition of Monstro. In the original film Monstro is just a huge whale, but in this telling Monstro is a true sea-monster that is part whale and part beast and the CGI is actually quite good. It's still a cute family film, but I think the original is just as cute. In the end it simply comes down to personal choice and opinion, and if you prefer watching humans and CGI vs. old-school animation, because all in all the story is the same. Next up Disney will be releasing The Little Mermaid and it does look somewhat promising as more of a stand-alone film, but I guess we will see!

Final Grade: 5 / 10 (Average)

Honk For Jesus

By Marcus Blake



Religious satire makes for great comedy! I'm a huge fan of religious satire. Any movie that makes fun of religion and shows it's hypocrisy within humanity, I'm there! Honk for Jesus is one of those movies that after the long week, I needed a good laugh. It may not be the best when it comes to religious satire or poking fun at mega-churches, but there's a lot to like about this movie. Sterling K. Brown and Regina Hall keep you laughing all the way to the end and even have a way of making you feel sympathetic toward the hypocritical mega-church ministers that they play in the movie. Now, while I do not have the African American experience when it comes to Baptist churches, especially mega-churches in the south, there's a universal theme within this movie that makes it worth watching. You can literally put any mega-church pastor as a character in this film and it would work just the same. Normally, a story like this would just be sad and leave you

shaking your head, but it does take two great performances to make us as an audience feel sympathy for the main characters

The story is about a mega-church pastor and his wife who are forced to close the doors after a sex scandal hits the pulpit! It's not just any kind of sex scandal. A minister getting caught committing adultery with the church secretary would be too common, but it's a homosexual sex scandal regarding a mega-church pastor that rails against homosexuality. That's when you have comedy gold. The movie is done in a mockumentary style as this pastor and his wife try to reopen the church on an Easter Sunday while most of their congregation have flocked to a rival Baptist Church who are opening a second location on the same Easter Sunday. That's when the comedy of errors start to happen. The best thing about this movie is it being told in a mockumentary fashion. I don't know if it would have worked any other way, but the dry sarcastic sense of humor brought on by the documentary style makes this movie 10 times funnier than it probably should be.

Throwing great performances by Sterling K. Brown and Regina Hall and you got a winner. Great casting can make or break a movie, and both were perfect in these roles. Don't get me wrong, I still want to see Sterling K. Brown play a demon hunter at Supernatural, but he makes a great mega-church pastor that's easy to ridicule. The film's audience is probably a predominantly African American audience, but like I said before, it has a very universal theme so it's a movie that I think everybody should see and would laugh at.

Now, it's not a perfect movie, there are quite a few times where scenes should have been cut down. The film has its fair share of awkward moments that aren't really funny when they should be. And it certainly has some pacing issues, but honestly, that's probably more due to the particular style of the film. Documentaries do make you feel uncomfortable at times. They're not meant to be a slapstick type of comedy because you're not watching a film like *The Naked Gun* or *Airplane*, it does have some pacing issues. It's not enough to make you not watch this movie. I'm just saying that it could have been better. Even though the film doesn't go out of its way to say that it's Atlanta, the city is very much an important character in the film, especially with the African American community. Probably the biggest flaws really do come down to editing. But these flaws don't take away from the overall humor. The film starts out strong and then falters a bit in the middle but ends on a high note and finishes strong.

Overall, the film does its job of making you rethink religion and whether you should go to a mega-church or give them money. Sure, the film does have a bit of political commentary when it comes to religion, but the film knows it's audience! I enjoyed the movie because it is religious satire and although there are some issues that could be fixed if they ever came out

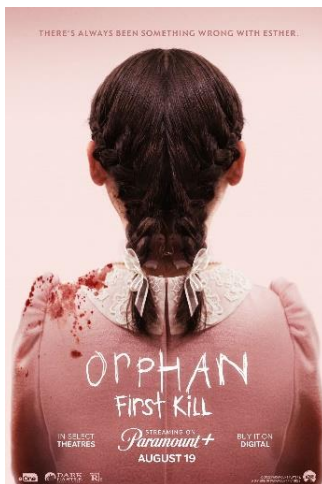
with a director's cut or decided to do a sequel at the end of the day it's a hilarious film that's worth watching. Maybe it's not worth the price of a movie ticket, but if you have Peacock streaming then add it to your list of things to watch this weekend. With great performances and a fantastic subject that feels way too common in American society, *Honk for Jesus* will certainly make you laugh. And if people are offended by the film, they probably don't have any sense of humor at all anyway. I highly recommend this movie to anybody who loves to make fun of religion or has a dark sense of humor. If you're worried that it will only appeal to an African American audience, you're wrong. Its universal theme makes it a film that everybody should check out. I can't wait to watch it again on Peacock.

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)



AUGUST MOVIE REVIEWS

Orphan: First Kill By Alex Moore



Each decade has its share of moments that we all remember, whether it be something we recount in a positive manner or a negative one. As the first decade of the new millennium was closing out, there was an unexpected psychological horror that took me by surprise. I first heard about "Orphan" by watching a short video pertaining to it on a CNN television at the DFW International Airport. The detail that still stands out in my mind was when the reviewer warned of an opening scene that would shake us to our cores (in my own words; not verbatim). Actually, the opening scene had less to do with the titular character and much more to do with the real heart of the story: tragic loss giving way to hopeful redemption, but being swallowed up by surprising tragedy all over again. If you have NOT seen this particular movie as of now, do yourself a favor and watch it before you try too understand what my vague terminology is all about. Frankly, if a prequel is released in the ordinal of a sequel, it should be viewed as such, at least the first time around. In other words, do NOT watch "Orphan: First Kill" before seeing "Orphan." Deal? I have digressed long enough...

I first read about the premise of this prequel two or three years ago. I was intrigued because "Orphan" had slowly become a favorite of mine from the previous decade. However, we are now in the decade beyond that one. Yes, 13 years have passed, and typically when a follow-up film takes that long to unfold, it does not yield great results. I will never forget how much I wanted to forget seeing "Dumb & Dumber." It was as though I wanted to just keep the original movie as a solo project (in my memory) for the rest of my natural life. It was THAT bad. However, I still prefer to judge each case independently. So, what of THIS one?

For starters, the only people who have returned for the new project are: David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick and Alex Mace, who provided the original screenplay of the previous film; Isabelle Fuhrman ("Escape Room: Tournament of Champions"), who is reprising the role of the titular character. Consequently, Alex Mace also is on the books as a producer for this current movie. What stood out to me once I heard about the impending release of "Orphan: First Kill" is that they were electing to use old school effects to pull off the trickery for 'Esther,' which was the orphan's actual name in "Orphan." Regardless of what you know or do not know about the 2009 film, the use of traditional effects, such as makeup and lighting and forced perspective all make sense from a practical level. If you ARE aware of what went on in "Orphan," I think you ought to be as intrigued as I was when I first heard about all this.

Unlike the original movie, this story is more centered around 'Esther,' who is going under the name Leena Klammer. She is now in Estonia, two years prior to the events of "Orphan," with no surprises to her behavior,

like before. Lighting and shadows hide her appearance and stature and it is pretty effective, here. The cinematic style has something of a throwback vibe and I like it. I could, also, sense something off about this character, which is to be expected, but the overall awkwardness had me wondering how much of that was deliberate and how much of it is due to the acting of Fuhrman. She navigates her way out of the Saarne Institute, where she lives, manipulating other peers, as well as the staff, via seduction and clever movements.

That same awkwardness, from before, carries over with Leena as she makes her way to Connecticut, as a long lost daughter to a family there, comprised of: Julia Stiles (“The God Committee”) as Tricia Albright, Rossif Sutherland (“Possessor”) as Allen Albright and Matthew Finlan as Gunnar Albright. Again, I was wondering if the awkwardness was intended or if it was just the way the actors/actresses were getting along with each other onscreen. Well, as it turns out, the former might well have been true. A startling revelation, though not nearly as big of a payoff compared to “Orphan,” comes to fruition and changes the entire tone and energy of the film (for the better). Note, the only, other significant character from this point forward is played by Hiro Kanagawa (“Every Breath You Take”) as Inspector Donnan. His demise overlaps with the unexpected turning point in the story.

The rest of the film is mostly about who is going to do what to whom within the constraints of the Albright family. ‘Esther’ does not possess the same level of menacing prowess due to the way the tables are turned on her and it almost creates an atmosphere which could elicit sympathy for this character, though it did not do so for me. It IS interesting to see how certain details about ‘Esther’ have come about and when you recall them from the first movie, they make sense and are well-executed as story elements in this film.

What bothered me, once the story really became more intriguing, was the plot holes that simply did not add up, overall. Could a family that has not seen their presumably missing daughter for several years truly buy an imposter if they were compelled by emotions to do so? As it so happens, this really only applies to one member of the family and it makes this person seem truly naïve and gullible. However, as I sit here, now, that concept is not so different from what was seen by the end of “Orphan.” The key difference is that we, the audience, are not fooled in the same way we were back then. Perhaps, this can be chalked up to a fundamental flaw, rather than bad writing or a plot hole, as aforementioned.

Overall, I did not hate “Orphan: First Kill,” but I was, also, let down just a bit. The turn in the plot was pretty absurd, in my view, and did not do anything to advance my feelings for Leena Klammer. If anything, it made me think less of her as an iconic horror character. I cannot recall the last time I felt so conflicted or

mixed about a movie, which might mean that this one deserves another watch before totally making up my mind, but writing a review is not about summing up emotions after multiple viewings; it is about addressing the experience after a firsthand account. Would I be willing to rewatch this movie and change my mind about what I think of it? Yes, I am fairly certain of that. Would I be open to a sequel next time around, despite the ending of “Orphan” maybe not being ambiguous enough to fully warrant such a project? Yes, indeed I would. For now, I am stuck in the middle, wanting more than what I originally “got” from this prequel.

Final Grade: 5 / 10 (Average)



Samaritan

By Marcus Blake



From Rocky to Rambo and now a superhero, I guess Sylvester Stallone has really done it all. But maybe we could have done without the last thing he’s done. Sylvester Stallone made a superhero film called Samaritan, which premieres on Amazon Prime. While he was in Guardians of the Galaxy 2, he wasn’t necessarily a superhero in the film, so this is his first foray into the superhero universe. I like the idea of Sly being a superhero, but unfortunately, it wasn’t well executed. Sure, the premise is an interesting idea about brothers

who are superheroes, one evil and one good, battling it out until the last one standing goes into hiding. For 25 years the people of the city within the movie wondered if Samaritan whatever come back until a young kid being bullied thinks he’s discovered the long-lost superhero. That’s where our story takes off.

Admittedly, I was interested in Sylvester Stallone being a superhero. Why not, he’s great as Rocky, fantastic as Rambo, and the Expendable movies where he’s essentially every action star, he’s ever been wrapped up in one character are a lot of fun. So, it stands to reason that he could be a superhero. But even if you have a good story, you have to make it interesting and unfortunately for Sylvester Stallone, it feels like he just phoned it. The premise of this movie would have been better for an aging Rocky who disappeared and then discovers another young boxer. Could also probably work for a Rambo movie. Then again, that is essentially the plot of Rambo 4 where he was hiding out in Thailand until he was called upon to rescue some Americans. That was a much better story!

We know that Sylvester Stallone is an action star so you’re not going to have a lot of witty dialogue. It’s not like he hasn’t been able to pull that off because as the straight-laced, Wall Street type Cop in *Tango and Cash*, he was great. But in Samaritan, he mostly pushes people around and protects a little kid with very little dialogue. As I said, it seems as if he phoned it in because he wanted to do a superhero movie. I’m not saying that the movie is a complete disaster, it’s worth watching at least once for the interesting twist at the end. But this definitely isn’t Sylvester Stallone’s best movie, and we really didn’t need him in the superhero genre.

What does make the movie worth watching is the fact that you do get a lot of good action and the fire scenes are pretty intense, very reminiscent of *Backdraft*. The rest of the cast is pretty good and they’re the ones that make this movie worth watching. Javon ‘Wanna’ Walton, Dascha Polanco, Moises Arias are great. And Pilou Asbæk is fantastic as the villain. Of course, he would be because he was great in Game of Thrones. As I mentioned before, there is an interesting twist at the end, but the 90-minute, build-up almost isn’t worth it just to get to a few good scenes at the end. Samaritan is a good one-timer. I definitely wouldn’t have paid money to see it in the theater, but it’s good for streaming services. You can entertain yourself for 90 minutes on a Sunday afternoon and not entirely be disappointed, but it’s not the kind of superhero movie that you will revisit.

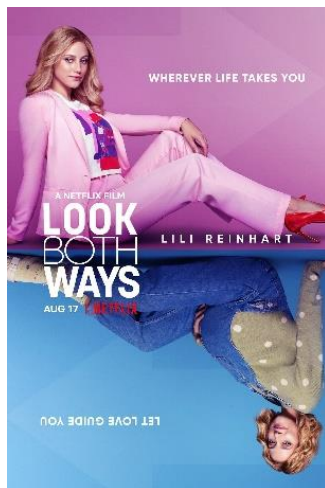
Not every superhero movie can be great. There are plenty of Marvel movies leading up to the infinity Wars that are not that good, but they were made to tell a superhero’s origin story. If this were a trilogy of films, this would be an okay starting point because you really don’t know a whole lot about Samaritan except for the

fact that two brothers fought in a great battle and one disappeared. There's not much of a superhero origin story and you really do need that to make us connect to the character. There isn't anything that makes us connect to Samaritan. At the end of the day, this doesn't feel so much of a superhero movie as watching an aging Rocky or Rambo take a young kid under his wing. In fact, it would have been a much better movie if we had seen either one of those characters within the same storyline. Perhaps Sylvester Stallone just doesn't make a good superhero and that's okay. Sometimes you can just be a good action star and that's all you need to be in Hollywood.

Final Grade: 5 / 10 (Average)



Look Both Ways
By Danielle Butler



The movie *Look Both Ways* is a dramedy that answers the question what if. This is a question many 20 somethings and all of us really have asked ourselves. What if things had gone differently, what if I had gotten the job and moved away? What if I stayed in that relationship or that situation went the other way. In Natalie's case, what if she had gotten pregnant. One scenario showing her life after a negative pregnancy test and how she proceeds to graduate, and moves to LA to pursue her career under her five year plan. The other

scenario is she moves home to live with her parents as she decides to keep the baby. This Netflix original movie, directed by Wanuri Kahiu from a screenplay written by April Prosser is an hour and 50 minutes of lighthearted fun. Natalie a 22-year-old recent grad played by Lilli Reinhart. True to real life scenarios, her friend and the father of her baby, Gabe, played by Danny Ramirez is on-screen as dad to the child they have a child together. Natalie's best friend Cara, played by the spunky Aisha Dee adds a dynamic duo depth as Natalie's bestie/partner in crime with the best insight when it comes to advising Natalie in both scenarios. She is a fun supporting character. Natalie's parents were hilarious and relatable. I'm not saying I'm a parent, but Natalie's mom, played by Andrea Savage is my spirit animal and Luke Wilson as Natalie's dad is always enjoyable to watch.

Unlike movies showing time jumps, flashbacks, and foreshadowing, this movie goes back and forth between alternate realities showing the a and b story unfold. The unique time sequence is that in this movie we see right off the bat how two different scenarios play out from beginning to end. This is an enjoyable, easy watch with a fast-paced plot will keep you hooked. Spoiler alert (!) and one of my favorite things about this movie is the ending. I won't tell you exactly what happens, but I will say that the audience is never told which scenario is Natalie's truth. In fact, we understand by the end that it really doesn't matter and that made for a lovely message about making the most of all the little moments that add up to your life. Watch this for good feels and perspective on your own "what ifs." Lili Reinhart is charming in a cute and sweet All-American Girl kind of way. This is not supposed to be a comparison of actresses by any means, however, does anyone does anyone else think that Lili looks so much like the late Brittany Murphy? Resemblance-wise, she reminds me of Brittany Murphy!

I have to say the characters and actors that really stood out to me were Natalie's parents played by Andrea Savage and Luke Wilson. The duo added a wholesome comedic take on what it means to be a supportive yet tough love parents when their responsible and academically motivated daughter becomes pregnant unexpectedly. It was fun watching how they lovingly and comically navigated supported their daughter. Another shout out to Aisha Dee for her role as Cara. She always adds a delightful ease to the characters she plays, and I love to see it! Last but not least, Natalie's love interest and eye candy David Corenswet. His beard was not the only dishy thing about him. I rate this movie 8 out of 10, Sure, it's predictable but that's not why we watch. I hope you enjoy walking down the different forks in the road with Natalie and reflecting on the choices that make our lives ours.

Final Grade: 8 / 10 (Good)

Day Shift
By Danielle Butler



Vampire Slayer movies are fun! They don't have to be great. They don't have to be in the same realm as *Citizen Kane* or *Schindler's List*. They're simply fun movies and that's the best way I can describe *Day Shift* with Jamie Foxx and Dave Franco. It's just a fun vampire Slayer movie on Netflix with two great comedic actors that will entertain you right till the end. Also, the movie is made better by having Snoop Dogg in the movie as a seasoned Vampire Slayer. How would you not watch this film to see Snoop Dogg slay vampires? We always give Netflix movies a hard time for not being the greatest of movies compared to some of the movies we see in the theaters, and I think that's okay. We mostly get fun movies that entertain us and that's all they need to do. Every once in a while, we'll get a movie on Netflix that will make us think or inspire us, but if there's one thing the streaming service does really well, it gives us entertaining movies or pure escapism. That's what I mostly liked about *Day Shift*.

The story is about a vampire Slayer, played by Jamie Foxx, who masquerades as a pool cleaner and has been thrown out of the Vampire Slayer Union so he's having to fight for menial wages when it comes to hunting vampires. After he gets back in the Union on a probationary period, that's when all hell breaks loose. His family doesn't know he's a vampire Slayer, but he's trying to raise enough money to send his daughter to school and to keep his wife from moving away. And because he's on a probationary period by the head of the Union who doesn't like him, he gets saddled with a union rep who is logging every mistake he makes so the union can kick him out for good. On top of that, there are vampires who are wanting to take over the Valley outside of LA. The heroes in the story will have to take them down. That's the basis of the story and you've probably seen it before, but so what!

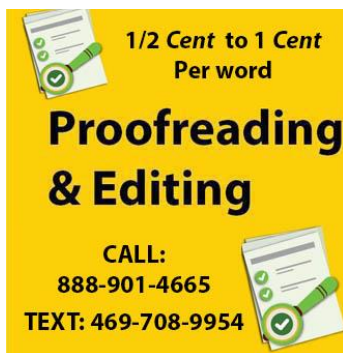
What makes this movie worth watching is Jamie Foxx just being a badass and Dave Franco being comical as usual.

But put Jamie Foxx and Snoop Dogg together as Vampire Slayers, and you're going to get a lot of entertainment. The action is good. The cast will make you laugh. And you will get all the thrills that come with vampire slaying. It's your typical horror-action movie. Jamie Foxx and Dave Franco do not disappoint. Snoop Dogg definitely doesn't disappoint especially with Big Bertha. Just watch the movie and you'll find out what I'm talking about.

Day shift is not a great movie, we've seen this kind of movie before. There's nothing truly original about it and that's okay. But I think the main reason it's on Netflix and not in theaters is that the story is not very original. You get a great cast that gives you a lot of great action when it comes to hunting vampires and that's essentially the movie. Well, a movie without any originality can't really be a great movie. Films like this are largely forgettable, but the one thing it does have going for it is it is on Netflix and if you're looking just to escape with a good movie on a weekend afternoon where you don't have to think too hard, this one will entertain you. The pacing is fine, although it's kind of a short movie. You get just the right amount of action to fill up 90 minutes. And unfortunately, there's nothing special about the characters that make you connect to them. You like Jamie Foxx and Snoop Dogg because they're awesome vampire slayers and that's it.

Overall, it's an okay movie and it is worth watching one afternoon even if you never watch it again. There are better vampire action movies like the *Underworld* series or the *Blade* Trilogy. There are even better horror-comedy movies, but *Day Shift* will entertain you just enough to make it worth having a Netflix account. It's like one of those great B-horror movies that really isn't great, but it's fun and entertaining which is what they are supposed to do as films. From that standpoint, *Day Shift* succeeds as a movie. You even got some great buddy cop-type action like you're watching *Beverly Hills Cop* but with vampire slayers. I'm not telling you not to watch it, but don't expect much from this film. Just know that you'll be entertained by a great cast and then you'll probably forget you ever watched the movie. However, Netflix could do a sequel or even maybe a series, which might be a good thing to watch on Netflix. Jamie Foxx, Snoop Dogg, and Dave Franco do just enough to keep you entertained, but that's it. And you know what, that's good enough when it comes to entertainment. I like *Day Shift* for what it is and the fact that it's not trying to be anything else than what it is as a film. *Day Shift* is entertaining but forgettable!

Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)



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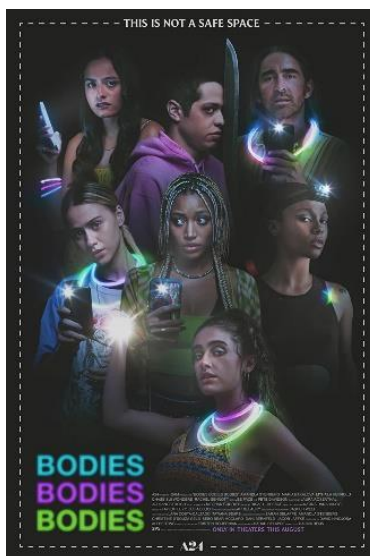
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Bodies, Bodies, Bodies

By Alex Moore



Alice Cooper, the legendary musician, once said that horror is supposed to be funny. Well, for the better part of the past 100 years of cinema, that was not usually the case. Seemingly, however, in the late '70s/early '80s, a trend began that is still with us today. Yes, dark/black comedies have been around for longer than that, but moviemakers began to make horror films that were also quite funny. Think about "An American Werewolf in London" or "Creepshow." The fans know these classics not just for being scary, but for also being funny. So...

"Bodies, Bodies, Bodies" is something of an accidental horror movie, which is fundamentally a part of what makes it funny. You will need to watch the film all the way to the end to truly understand why, but you will likely treat the movie as though it were a horror flick because that is how it is presented. The direction and screenwriting were undertaken by a pair of ladies: Halina Reijn ("Instinct"), who is also an actress, over in The Netherlands, and Sarah DeLappe. This might explain why the focus of the story is mostly on the women involved,

though there are a couple of men in the mix, too.

Almost everybody on screen is in their mid to late 20s, aside from one, Lee Pace ("Captain Marvel"), as Greg. Whatever the male equivalent is for a cougar, that is what he is. The other guy is Pete Davidson ("The Suicide Squad") as David. The two of them show a little bit of tension while they are in the same venue and, eventually, disappear from the story, but not mysteriously, mind you. The rest of the cast consists of: Amanda Stenberg ("Dear Evan Hansen") as Sophie, Maria Bakalova ("Women Do Cry") as Bee, Myha'la Herrold ("Plan B") as Jordan, Chase Sui Wonders ("On the Rocks") as Emma and Rachel Sennott ("Shiva Baby") as Alice. Everyone came with somebody, romantically, and is there to have a hurricane party. However, it is when a game, played in the dark, commences, in which things take a weird turn...

One by one, each player, if you will, dies in a bizarre manner. At first, it seems like someone is watching from the outside and is offing everyone in the order by which they have been eliminated from the game, but sooner than later, the remaining players begin to point the finger at one another, for various reasons. The paranoia ensues. The humor unfolds within the supposedly dramatic dialogue between the ladies. They represent common themes and mindsets of the day, particularly for those belonging to Gen Z. It would be interesting to see how this is all viewed by people born later on. Will people who are now in their 20s look back on these times, once they are approaching their 40s with markedly different eyes? I wonder...

A couple of the murders take place out in the open and tend to serve the audience, as well as the characters in the cast, with independent thoughts about the capabilities of each person. Hypothetically, if someone has been in the military, could that same person have an easier time killing another just because of his or her training? If someone, also hypothetically, has killed another person out of self-defense, could that, potentially, open the door for future, violent actions with greater ease, somehow? While these are serious topics to consider, they are both treated with a darkly comedic spin and it works very well. If one's expectations are to laugh as you watch this film, you should not have any trouble finding reason to laugh, even if they are not huge laughs, typical of slapstick or potty humor. Everything is pretty subtle, in other words, but it IS a dark comedy, after all.

As time unfolds and the numbers continue to dwindle, we are left with the same, two people at the end that we saw at the very beginning. Has their relationship progressed in a positive way or has it disintegrated? Have our personal opinions of them been altered? You will have to find out for yourself. At least they DO uncover what was going on all along. I think the payoff was worth the fun overnighted, personally.

I found, early on, that one particular actress was easy to sympathize with. I noticed this when she was simply brushing her eyebrow and I quickly realized that I was doing the same thing, without even thinking about it. Connecting to the characters is vital. The moviemakers have succeeded in a big way, in my estimation, when that sort of thing occurs. She also reminded me of another actress, whom I have liked for years; Sarah Paulson. Let us find out if anyone else agrees with me. Oh,

would anyone else agree that Lee Pace has a bit of a Hugh Jackman sort of vibe to him, as well?

While it is no secret to those who know me that I very much enjoy a great, black comedy, I believe that the sub-genre has suffered in more recent years. It comes down to execution, no pun intended. The audience has to know what the intent of the film is or else it will not work. I think that "Bodies, Bodies, Bodies" did it the right way and I am happy to report that I liked this movie very much. It is too early, still, to award the best of the best for 2022. In fact,

August is usually deemed as a garbage month and I do not just mean for film. No offense to my Leo friends or family, of course. However, if you do not mind sexuality, across the spectrum, and a few unsightly images, which are expected in nearly any horror project to begin with, then you ought to make time for "Bodies, Bodies, Bodies" and enjoy it, as well.

Final Grade: 8 / 10 (Good)



The “Witcher” Season 3 and “Blood Origins” get Netflix Release Dates



Netflix is making 2023 the year of “The Witcher.” Announced at the streamer’s fan event Tudum on Saturday, the “Witcher” spinoff series “The Witcher: Blood Origin” will debut on Dec. 25, and Season 3 of the main “Witcher” show will follow in the summer of 2023.

Fans last visited “The Witcher” universe nearly one year ago, when Season 2 of the Henry Cavill fantasy series dropped in December 2021. Since then, it’s spawned even more

spinoffs. In addition to the “Blood Origin” limited series, an anime feature is on the way and a family-friendly “Witcher” series is in the works. Not much is known about “The Witcher” Season 3, but it will continue the story of Geralt of Rivia (Cavill), Ciri (Freya Allan) and Yennefer (Anya Chalotra). Joining the cast are Robbie Amell, Meng’er Zhang, Hugh Skinner and Christelle Elwin. Amell plays an elven fighter named Gallatin, who leads an army of guerrilla Scoia’tael fighting on behalf of Nilfgaard. Zhang is Milva, a human adopted by the dryads of Brokilon Forest who is a fierce and talented huntress. Skinner plays Prince Radovid, a royal playboy and the younger brother to King Vizimir (Ed Birch). Elwin is Mistle, a member of The Rats, who are a gang of misfit teenagers who steal from the rich and give to themselves. Set in an elven world 1,200 years before the events of “The Witcher,” the prequel series “Blood Origin” will tell a story

lost to time, including the creation of the first prototype Witcher and the events that lead to the pivotal Conjunction of the Spheres, when the worlds of monsters, men and elves merged to become one.

It stars Michelle Yeoh as Scian, the last member of a nomadic tribe of sword-elves on a mission to retrieve a blade stolen from her people; Sophia Brown as Éile, a warrior of the Queen’s guard who leaves to become a traveling musician; and Laurence O’Fuarain as Fjall, a man born into a clan of warriors sworn to protect a king who instead sets out to seek vengeance. The rest of the cast includes Mirren Mack as Merwyn; Lenny Henry as Balor; Jacob Collins as Eredin; Lizzie Annis as Zaccaré; Huw Novelli as Callan “Brother Death”; Francesca Mills as Meldorf; Amy Murray as Fenrik; Nathaniel Curtis as Brían; Zach Wyatt as Syndril; and Dylan Moran as Uthrok One-Nut.

‘Blade Runner 2099’ Series Greenlighted By Amazon With Ridley Scott Executive Producing



Blade Runner 2099, Amazon Studios’ live-action series set in the *Blade Runner* universe, has been picked up to series for [Prime Video](#). [Ridley Scott](#), who directed the original 1982 *Blade Runner* movie, is executive producing the live-action limited series, a follow-up to the feature film sequel *Blade Runner 2049*, which was released in 2017 and directed by Denis Villeneuve. Silka Luisa (Shining Girls) wrote the script and is executive producing *Blade Runner 2099*, which comes from Alcon Entertainment in association with Scott Free Productions and Amazon Studios. The project, which marks the first *Blade Runner* live-action series, [had been in priority development](#) at Amazon Studios. “The original *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott, is considered one of the greatest and most influential science-fiction movies of all time, and we’re excited to introduce *Blade Runner 2099* to our global Prime Video customers,” said Vernon Sanders, head of global television,

Amazon Studios. “We are honored to be able to present this continuation of the *Blade Runner* franchise, and are confident that by teaming up with Ridley, Alcon Entertainment, Scott Free Productions, and the remarkably talented Silka Luisa, *Blade Runner 2099* will uphold the intellect, themes, and spirit of its film predecessors.”

1982’s *Blade Runner*, which is an adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, is set in a dystopian LA in 2019, in which synthetic humans known as replicants are bio-engineered by the powerful Tyrell Corporation to work on space colonies. When a fugitive group of advanced replicants escape back to Earth, a cop reluctantly agrees to hunt them down. Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, Sean Young and Edward James Olmos starred. The 2017 sequel, which is set in 2049, starred Ryan Gosling as a replicant blade runner, who uncovers a secret that threatens to destabilize society. Ford and Olmos reprised their roles from the original and it also featured Ana de Armas, Dave Bautista and Jared Leto.

As indicated by *Blade Runner 2099*’s title, the latest installment of the neo-noir sci-fi franchise will be set 50 years after the film sequel. “We are delighted to continue our working relationship with our friends at Amazon. And we are beyond excited to

continue to extend the *Blade Runner* canon into a new realm with the provocative storyline that Silka has created,” added Alcon Entertainment co-CEOs and co-founders Andrew Kosove and Broderick Johnson. “Audiences first discovered Ridley Scott’s brilliant vision for *Blade Runner* 40 years ago, and since then, it has become one of the most influential science-fiction films of all time. Denis Villeneuve’s follow-up sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, then became one of the best reviewed sequels of all time. So, we recognize that we have a very high bar to meet with this next installment. Together with Silka and our partners at Amazon, and Scott Free Productions, we hope that we can live up to that standard and delight audiences with the next generation of *Blade Runner*.” Elsewhere in the franchise, *Blade Runner: Black Lotus* is an anime series that debuted late last year on Adult Swim and Crunchyroll. It is set in 2032 and centers around a female replicant, voiced by Jessica Henwick. Kosove and Johnson are executive producing the series along with Michael Green, who wrote *Blade Runner 2049*, Ben Roberts and Cynthia Yorkin as well as Scott Free Productions’ David W. Zucker and Clayton Krueger, Frank Giustra, and Isa Dick Hackett. Tom Spezialy has joined the writers room and will also serve as an executive producer. Reported by [Deadline.com](#)

'Ironheart': Shakira Barrera Joins Marvel Studios' Disney+ Series



Shakira Barrera (*Sprung*, *GLOW*) has joined Marvel Studios' *Ironheart* as a series regular, Deadline has learned. Marvel reps declined to comment. The six-episode series created by Chinaka Hodge will star Dominique Thorne as Marvel character Riri Williams, a genius inventor and creator of the most advanced suit

of armor since Iron Man. Previously announced cast also includes Anthony Ramos, Manny Montana, Alden Ehrenreich, Regan Aliyah, Shea Couleé, and Zoe Lister-Jones. Sam Bailey and Angela Barnes are directing, with Ryan Coogler's Proximity among the production entities. Coogler, *Ironheart* head writer Chinaka Hodge, Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian serve as executive producers alongside Marvel Studios' Kevin Feige, Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso, Brad Winderbaum, and Zoie Nagelhout.

Barrera currently can be seen as a series regular in the Freevee series *Sprung* opposite Garrett Dillahunt and Martha Plimpton. She also recently wrapped a recurring arc in OWN's

legal drama *All Rise* as part of the show's third season. She is notably known for her portrayal of lady wrestler Yolanda in *GLOW* and Lulu in *It's Bruno*, both for Netflix. Other TV credits include TNT's *Animal Kingdom*, Showtime's *Shameless*, and USA Network's *Queen of the South*. On the film side, she appeared in Daniela Garcia's short film *Huella*, *The Collection* opposite Alex Pettyfer, and *The Knocking* opposite Shiloh Fernandez. Outside of acting, Barrera serves as a goodwill ambassador for organizations that specialize in humanitarian aid in Nicaragua. Reported by Deadline.com

'King Kong' Live-Action Series In Works At Disney+ From Stephany Folsom, James Wan's Atomic Monster & Disney Branded TV



An iconic monster is headed to Disney+. Disney Branded Television is in very early development on *King Kong* (working title), a series for Disney+ tracking the original story of the famous ape. Deals have just closed for the project, from James Wan's Atomic Monster, which would mark the first live-action series set in the Kong universe.

Written by *Paper Girls* creator Stephany Folsom, *King Kong* is a serialized action-adventure drama that brings the classic monster story into the modern age, with a return to Skull Island and the dawn of a new Kong. The series will explore the mythology of King Kong's origin story and the supernatural mysteries of his home based on IP from Merian C. Cooper's original books and the new King Kong novelizations by Joe DeVito.

Folsom executive produces alongside Wan, Michael Clear and Rob Hackett for Atomic Monster and Dannie Festa and Marc Manus for World Builder Entertainment.

The Merian C. Cooper Estate had teamed with DeVito to produce new novelizations that are being used as source material for the series, along with the original book IP.

A live-action series, *King Kong Skull Island*, was in development at MarVista Entertainment and IM Global Television five years ago with a different creative team, also based on Cooper's *King Kong* and DeVito ArtWorks' *Skull Island*, with Festa executive producing. It did not come to fruition.

King Kong, a 90-year-old character with an entangled web of rights, has been the subject of a slew of movies, most recently featured in Legendary/Warner Bros' *Monsterverse*, which only uses the Kong part of the gorilla monster's moniker for its titles: 2017's *Kong: Skull Island*, 2019's *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, and 2021's *Godzilla vs. Kong*, followed by a Netflix anime series, *Skull Island*. Reported by Deadline.com

'Stranger Things' Final Season Will Not Muddy The Waters With New Characters



There will be no strangers on the final season of *Stranger Things*, according to EPs [the](#)

[Duffer Brothers](#). In a new interview with [IndieWire](#), they claim the focus will be on the existing cast. "Whenever we introduce a new character, we want to make sure that they're going to be an integral part of the narrative," Ross Duffer said. "But every time we do that, we're nervous, because you go, 'We've got a great cast of characters here, and actors, and any moment we're spending with a new character, we're taking time away from one of the other actors.' So we're just very, very careful about who we're introducing."

Matt Duffer echoed that. He said they'll try their best to avoid mixing too many characters into the last season. "I just like shaking it up, so we shake it up by changing the plot or adding in a new monster. We're doing our best to resist [adding new characters] for Season 5. We're trying not to do that so we can focus on the OG characters, I guess." *Stranger Things* is poised for a memorable farewell. It now has more than a billion hours of watch-time, the second-most in Netflix history after *Squid Game*. Reported by [deadline.com](#)



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WHAT YOU SHOULD BINGE-WATCH

Cobra Kai: Season 5 By Alex Moore



“A Unanimous Hit with That Nerd Show”

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

So, what is the key to not only turning things around, but also lifting oneself from the mat and succeeding? Well, in the context of THIS series, it begins with how the new season touches off. One of my biggest gripes about Season 4 was that there seemed to be far too much exposition, from the outset. Did they try to give too many characters their “fair share” of screen time? Perhaps, but let us compare that to Season 5: the first two episodes place us in

Mexico, as Miguel Diaz (played by Xolo Maridueno) searches for his long lost father, but is also, in turn, being searched for by his potentially-surrogate father, Johnny Lawrence (played by William Zabka). He has, also, enlisted the support of his biological son, Robby Kane (played by Tanner Buchanan). Through a series of unfortunate events, no reference intended, Miguel loses most of his money and is nearly beaten down by some Mexican hoodlums, NOT associated with his actual father. Johnny is hot on his trail, but gets some slightly different results. What can we say about Mr. Lawrence? You can take the man out of the fight, but you cannot take the fight out of the man, right?

Meanwhile, back in California, Chozen Toguchi (played by Yuki Okumoto) has made himself at home with Daniel LaRusso (played by Ralph Macchio) and his family. All I will say is that various people have their own ideas about where the line is drawn when you “make yourself more comfortable” and it can lead to some humorous results, although Amanda LaRusso (played by Courtney Henggeler) is not amused by the situation.

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

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

Episode 3, ‘Playing With Fire,’ resurrects another character from “The Karate Kid Part III,” Mike Barnes (played by Sean Kanan). I could see the misdirection from a mile away, but it was still funny and had a number of

references that any fan could understand, if you know the movies well enough. At this point, I was already thinking that the new season is better than the previous entry, but could it rise above Season 4’s predecessor?

As it turns out, the next three episodes are the best in the season, with Episode 5, ‘Extreme Measures,’ being the ultimate standout. There are montages connected with fine, ‘80s memories and the animosity between Daniel and Terry is growing to a feverish pitch. We can see the devilish masterminding of Terry as it takes over an entire room, captivated by his wealth and charisma. Daniel can seemingly do nothing to slow it down, as even his wife falls prey to Terry’s charms and manipulation. If you were a fan of Raymond “Stingray,” get ready, cause he is back and as great as ever. There is almost nothing as satisfying as watching a loser parade around as though he is a winner, especially when he or she has still not won at anything, truly to speak of. Sometimes, playing the system is good enough to be rewarded and is all a specific person is looking for. Stingray is a shining example of that kind of guy. You might be surprised to see a dynamic, if brief, behavioral switch. Between Daniel and Johnny. Believe me, it is totally appropriate and fun to watch unfold, even if we have seen this before, in smaller doses. At this stage, Terry has turned into something of a James Bond type of villain. I would love to see a scene in which homage is paid to this observation. Maybe some other time, huh? Is it alright if I bring up Tory Nichols (played by Peyton List)? Her character development continues to intrigue me. The inner conflict is perpetually written all over her pretty face. Not only is she still at odds with Samantha LaRusso (played by Mary Mouser); she has also struck a cord with Robby and it has caused some friction in their young romance. Tory, apparently, has maintained a quiet contact with John while he is in prison. I still wonder what motivated this, to begin with. Could there still be a hidden agenda, later on, that will “wow” us as an audience? The theme of John’s re-entry into the story continues, thematically in Episode 6, ‘Ouroboros.’ Is he finally wrestling his inner demons, as he reflects on his past, important connections? Again, only time will tell.

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

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

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

The development of Chozen is one of the things that surprised me the most, in a good way, for this season, but I do not know how much more we can expect to get out of him in the future. Terry is, surely, not done, either, but neither is John, of course. Maybe some of them SHOULD have been done, but that is only my personal opinion.

I look forward to the inclusion of characters from "The Karate Kid" universe. So far, none of the rebirths have been a disappointment. I would, also, like to assume that we will have a new lead villain, or should I say villainess, played by Alicia Hannah-Kim as Kim Da-Eun. I refer to her as the "Dragon Lady." Yes, she IS that scary, but I digress. Overall, the series has continued to strike a nice line between nostalgia and substance. However, my colleagues and I pretty much agree that this series is reaching the end of its course. There is one little detail from this season which usually indicates that a story is running out of new ideas and it has been a staple of television series for years upon years. I will not say who, but someone is about to have a new baby. Netflix, we thank you for keeping a great thing going, but do not let it go on for any longer than. It needs to. I was ready to proclaim Season 5 of "Cobra Kai" as the best season since Season 2. It might be even better than that, due to a little bit of recency bias. What the hey, Season 5 IS the new king of "Cobra Kai," but it is pretty close and it is not a bad problem to have.

Final Grade: 9 /10 (Great)



Only Murders in the Building: Season 2
By Allison Costa

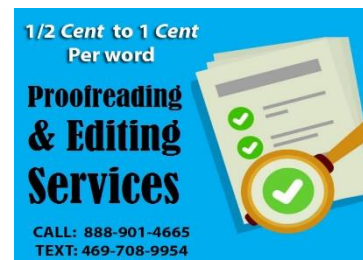


I can't say exactly why the trio of Steve Martin, Martin Short and Selena Gomez work so well together, but honestly their chemistry is magic! We all know that Steve Martin and Martin Short are long-time friends, but who knew that Selena Gomez had such great acting chops in her?? After falling in love with this quirky and eccentric cast and storyline in its first season, I was thrilled to hear the second season was coming out, and it didn't disappoint! While the second season picks up right where the first left off, with the murder of Bunny and the incarceration of our famous Trio, the pace of this season is slightly different than the last. I don't actually mind the difference in pace though. We are introduced to new characters, like Lucy, and also get to know some of the other tenants in the apartment complex more intimately than we did in Season 1. The only thing I found odd was that Oscar, Selena's love interest in season 1, completely disappears with barely a mention in season 2. This of course is to keep her free to explore a new relationship with Alice. It lets us see a "new" side to her character as well as introduce this brand new artsy and mysterious character of Alice, that we are not sure if she is sincere or deranged until the final episode I know there are a lot of spoilers out there and I don't want to do that in this review, BUT I will say that the finale is excellent! It is so well done and clever that I really loved all of the twists right up until the very final moment. So much of this show has to do with clever writing, incredible acting and an eclectic group of people that characterize New York perfectly. We find these flawed and crazy people endearing, and exciting.

Once again the season ends with yet another murder (don't worry it takes place about a year later), that sets us up for a great Season 3! It's hard to say who the real star of this show is, because they work so well together. It depicts what it's like to have a random group of strangers become like family in a lovely way.

I think it's also beneficial that the episodes are short and intriguing—makes it very binge-worthy and addicting. If you are still on the fence about checking out this fan favorite, I encourage you jump right in! I will caution you against the foul language (I mean they are New Yorkers, so no surprise), and the adult themes. Not appropriate for children of course, but if you are an adult who loves mysteries and comedy it's perfect!

Final Grade: 9 /10 (Great)



Echoes: Limited Series By Marcus Blake



Echoes is a new limited series on Netflix starring Michelle Monaghan. It's the story of twin sisters who swap lives and get tangled up in all sorts of criminal activities. I have to admit, by the end of it, I still didn't know who was who! After seven episodes, I had more questions than answers and while I do like a good mystery, all things should be answered by the end. It is an interesting story, that may be the best description I can give it, but what should have been built to a great twist, leaving you on the edge of your seat, it's a story that fizzles out pretty quickly after two episodes and feels more like a soap opera than anything else. Honestly, I feel like I've seen this particular story in an episode of *As the World Turns* when I watched it with my grandmother as a kid. Yes, that's a whole nother story! Limited series

stories should have a great starting point and have a clear ending. There's a lot of good ones based on Harlan Coben novels. But this particular series left me more bewildered than anything else. I'm not saying that you shouldn't check it out if you're looking for something interesting to watch because you've watched everything else on Netflix, but its not as good as it should be.

The best thing about *Echoes* is Michelle Monaghan. Her dual performance playing both sisters is fantastic. She's a great actress to begin with and she plays this role brilliantly. She plays the character so well that you probably are more confused by the end and that's not necessarily a bad thing which leads to an interesting twist. But she's really the only bright spot to this series.

While it does have a great cast with actors like Matt Bomer from *White Collar* and Karen Robinson from *Schitt's Creek*, it's not enough to keep you vested in the series. For me, I finished it because I wanted to get to the end, but it's not anything I would ever go back to. However, the performances are good and Victoria Abbott, who plays the younger version of the twins does an amazing job as well. But the thing is you still need a good story to make a show like this worth watching.

Mostly what doesn't work is the story itself. Yes, it's interesting to have twins swap lives and give a bit of a backstory to why they started doing it, but if the main plot boils down to a soap opera-ish storyline about twin sisters basically being jealous of one another and the lives they had, that's not really interesting. That's boring. I'm trying to give away spoilers, but that's essentially what the story is, jealous twin sisters. Again, I'm pretty sure I've seen

that in an episode of *As the World Turns* or was it *Guiding Light*, who knows they all have the same stories. One thing that really did annoy me is that I literally kept getting confused about who was who between the sisters. Which one really had the breakdown, which one had it all together and fell in love with the boy from high school who was an outsider? Because the characters switch lives so often, it's hard to keep up even until the end because you don't really know which sister ends up back home with her therapist husband. I almost expected both sisters to show up and kill the one person who knew what they really did. Now I'm not saying that storylines with twin sisters swapping lives can't be interesting, but the plot needs to be more believable than what you would see in a soap opera. It's an interesting 7 episodes. I'm glad it was a limited series because trying to stretch out this storyline for multiple seasons would have been ridiculous and would have moved beyond "jumping the shark." The story works for seven episodes and while it does keep you guessing until the end, I have to admit, once the story is over, you'll be more glad that it's over than feeling excitement over the twist at the end. However, the one bright spot is the brilliant performance by Michelle Monaghan, she gives an award-winning performance even if the story isn't that good.

Final Grade: 5 /10 (Average)

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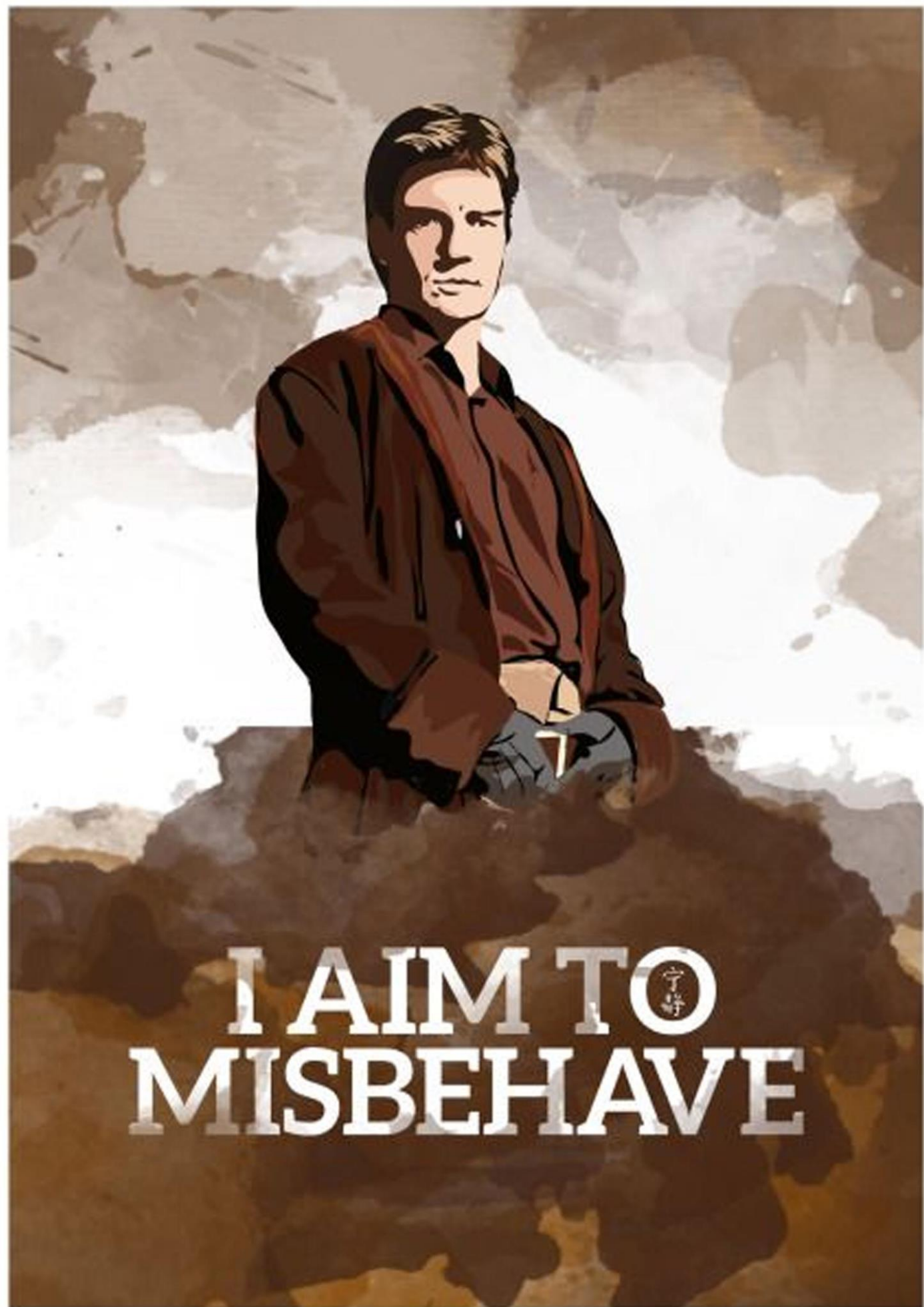
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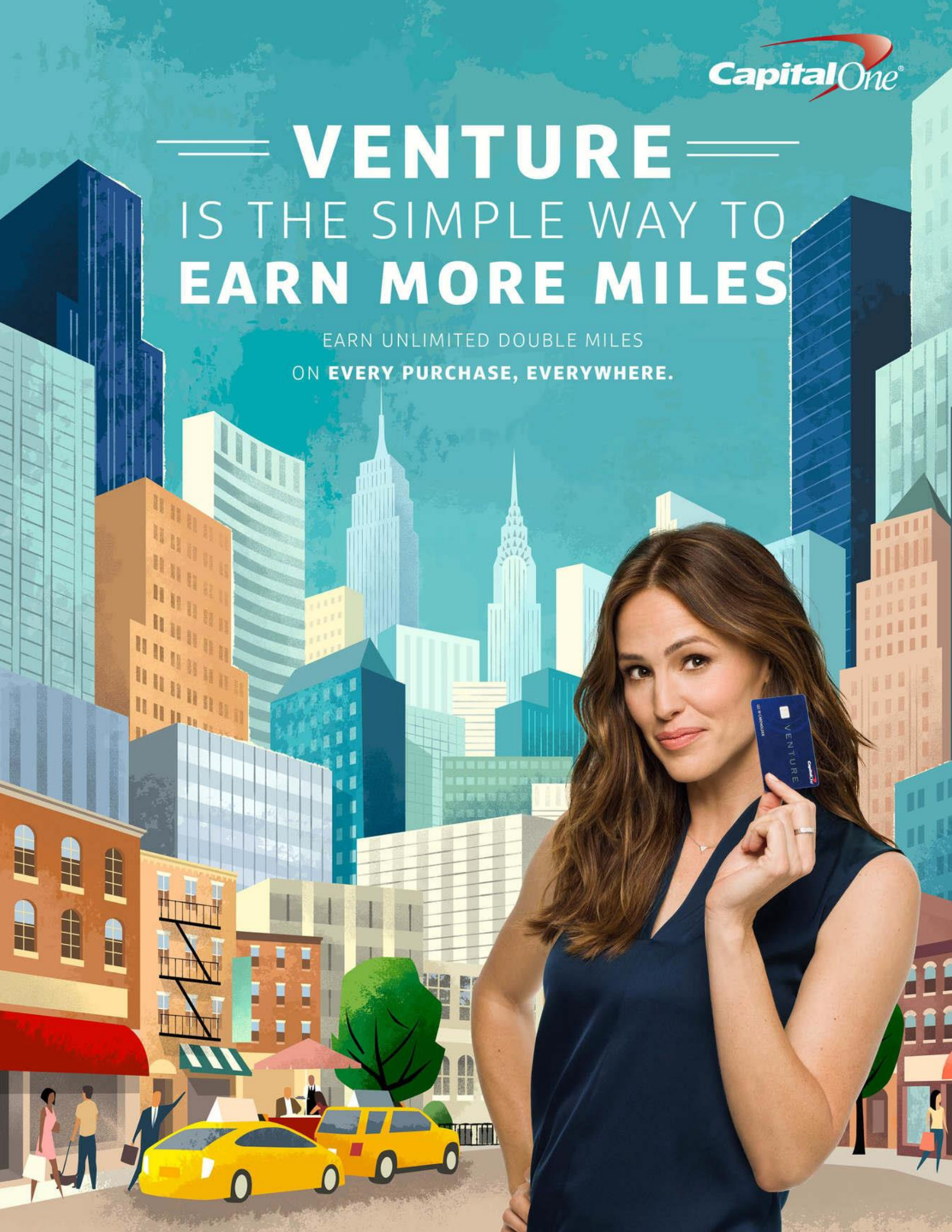
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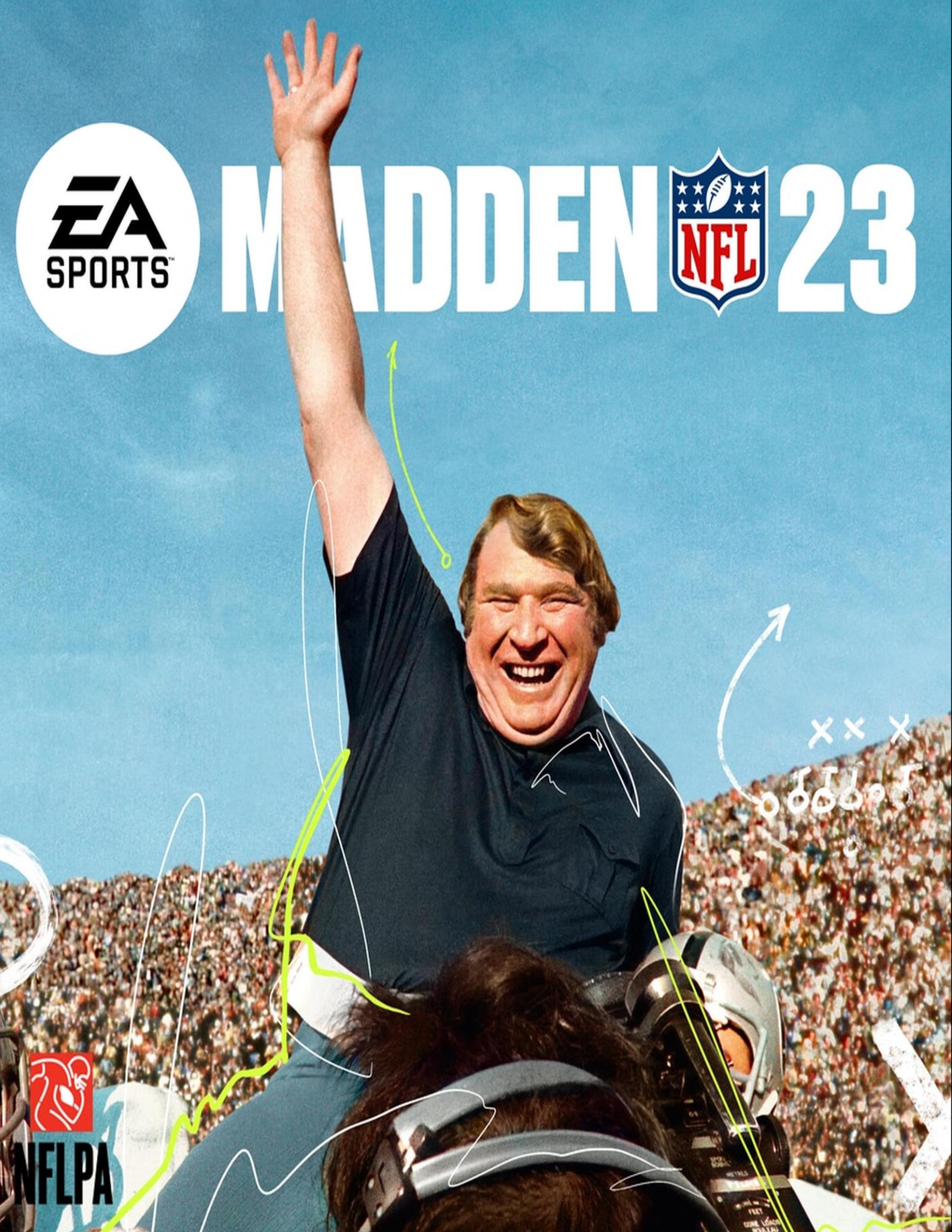
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GAMING NEWS

Obsidian's *Grounded* Enters the "Home Stretch" Full Coming September 27th



The *Grounded* team is officially in the Home Stretch toward the full release on September 27 with their latest update to the game. The team is hard at work building the final game that a community of over 10 million players has helped define over the last two years. While that 1.0 launch will be the biggest update to the game yet, the Home Stretch update brings some major new features of its own for players to try out in the meantime.

First up is a big one that a lot of players have been waiting on: Shared Worlds. Shared Worlds let players store their worlds in the cloud, allowing friends to play that specific world even if the owner is offline. A player can own three Shared Worlds at a time, and have up to 50 worlds shared with them. Standard Worlds

that players currently have will be convertible to Shared Worlds via the Save/Load menu.

In addition to these expanded opportunities to share the backyard with friends, players will also be able to share their adventures with a new in-game friend as they can tame a gnat as a pet. The little insects that bump into players because they can, will do so out of love now. The helpfulness of pets has also increased with tuning of their passive buffs and the ability to increase their health by gearing them up with armor. Further benefits for players include updates to everyone's favorite robot friend, BURG.L, who has now acquired enough chips to remember he can roll his treads to inspect the Oak Lab and fulfill his assistant duties.

Speaking of assistance, another new addition coming in the Home Stretch update is the cookery. Meals will be craftable at the cookery instead of the oven, so players no longer have to have that odd feeling of mushroom bricks tainting their quesadillanlion anymore. The cookery is an earlier crafting unlock as well, allowing players access to meal recipes early on in their exploration of the backyard.

This isn't the only change to crafting, however, as Armor and Weapon upgrades have also received a revamp in response to community feedback. The new upgrade system introduces Fashion Nuggets and Tough Nuggets, material types that players can use to craft and upgrade armor and weapons, respectively. This change dramatically improves the early-game experience for new and returning players.

Lastly, after tiring themselves out with all this crafting and cooking, players will be able to see the new Rest Timelapse which shows time passing in the yard while a player sleeps.

Grounded will enter its full release on September 27, 2022 on Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, Windows 10/11, and Steam for \$39.99. It's also available with Xbox Game Pass, PC Game Pass and Xbox Cloud Gaming (Beta).

Grounded is also expanding its universe beyond the game as Bardel Entertainment, Kinetic Media, and SC Productions recently announced production of an animated television series based on the backyard world we've built. To learn more about *Grounded*, check out the latest Developer Vlogs on the Obsidian YouTube Channel or visit the official website.



THE KING OF IRON FIST TOURNAMENT RETURNS IN FULL FORCE IN “TEKKEN 8”



Leading video game publisher and developer Bandai Namco Europe S.A.S. today announced *TEKKEN™8*, the new entry in the legendary *TEKKEN* franchise. *TEKKEN 8* brings the fight to the next generation, using Unreal Engine 5 and coming exclusively to

PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S and PC. Developed by Bandai Namco Studios, *TEKKEN 8* pushes the envelope for fighting games taking full advantage of the power of the latest generation of consoles by creating one of the most visually stunning and immersive titles in the genre yet. *TEKKEN 8* picks up after the gruesome battle that ended in Heihachi Mishima’s defeat, focusing on a new rivalry, pitting father against son as Jin Kazama stands in defiance against Kazuya Mishima’s quest for world dominance.

“We are very excited to show the next generation of *TEKKEN*”, said Katsuhiro Harada, Chief Producer at Bandai Namco Studios. “The team at Bandai Namco Studios has been hard at work to bring groundbreaking

new features to *TEKKEN 8*, pushing the feeling of power in battles continuously further by harnessing the power of the latest generation of consoles. We can’t wait to show you more in the months to come!” “For more than 25 years now, *TEKKEN* has meant so much in terms of innovation and uniqueness for the fighting genre. *TEKKEN 8* marks the true continuation of this innovation trend, and we are happy to finally be able to announce it,” says Arnaud Muller, Bandai Namco Europe S.A.S CEO. “We are looking forward to showing the exciting features, characters and stories that this episode will bring to continue pushing the fighting game genre forward.

Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising Strikes First on Video Games Consoles & PC This Fall



Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising, the new action video game based on the fan-favorite comedy series, is coming this fall, to PlayStation®5, PlayStation®4, Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and PC via Steam. Get your first look at *Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising* right now with its new gameplay reveal trailer and pre-order it today at major retailers for \$49.99.

The Nemesis Edition of *Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising* is also available to pre-order for \$59.99 exclusively through the PlayStation Store, Microsoft Store, Nintendo eShop, and Steam. The Nemesis Edition enables you to play as any of five enemy boss characters in the All Valley Tournament Mode! Go to the mat with Hammer, Bo, Gabriel, Skeleton Lord, and even Terry Silver! It also adds a bonus jukebox feature so you can listen to your favorite tracks from the game’s original score by *Cobra Kai* composers Zach Robinson and Leo Birenberg. *Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising* continues the intense rivalry at the heart of the *Cobra Kai* saga. Choose your dojo – Eagle Fang, Cobra

Kai or Miyagi-Do – and build up a team of hard-hitting fighters from the series to battle anyone who stands in your way to victory. Master powerful fighting styles across a variety of game modes to secure your legacy as the All Valley Karate Grand Champion!

KEY FEATURES

- 28 Playable Characters: Play as your favorite characters from the show’s expansive roster and use their special skills and abilities on your path to victory!
- Choose Your Dojo: Select from Eagle Fang, Cobra Kai or Miyagi-Do dojos. Recruit and train new students to take into battle and dominate your rivals.
- Multiple Game Modes: Fight your way to the All Valley Tournament in an exciting new storyline in Story Mode, or play *Cobra Classics* and relive epic moments from the show and more.
- Crush Your Enemies: Brawl across Valley Fest, the High School, L.A. Beach, Coyote Creek and other locations from and inspired by the series.
- Build Your Team’s Power: Collect chi and coins to improve your skills and seal your destiny as the Grand Champion of the All Valley Tournament.
- Compete in the All Valley Tournament: Jump into All Valley Tournament mode and play online or locally

offline against the best competitors to secure the All Valley Championship.

About GameMill Entertainment

GameMill Entertainment, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a third-party publisher of console and mobile games for passionate fans around the world. Development platforms include PC, Nintendo Switch, Microsoft consoles including the Xbox Series X|S and Xbox One, Sony consoles including the PlayStation®5 and PlayStation®4, and mobile devices. With development across the globe, GameMill is a source of entertaining and fun games for all ages. For more information, visit <https://gamemill.com>, as well as [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About Cobra Kai

Following the shocking results of the All Valley Tournament, Terry Silver is expanding the *Cobra Kai* empire and trying to make his “No Mercy” style of karate the only game in town. With Kreese behind bars and Johnny Lawrence setting karate aside to focus on repairing the damage he’s caused, Daniel LaRusso must call on an old friend for help. *Cobra Kai* is written and executive produced by Josh Heald, Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg via their production company, Counterbalance Entertainment. Will Smith, James Lassiter and Caleeb Pinkett executive produce for Westbrook Entertainment along with Susan Ekins in association with Sony Pictures Television. Ralph Macchio and William Zabka also serve as executive producers.

Destiny 2, Fortnite, and Fall Guys; an Epic Collaboration



Fortnite outfits coming to Destiny 2, while iconic Destiny characters join the Battle Bus and Guardian classes assume Bumbling Bean form.

When we started talking about launching Destiny 2 on the Epic Games Store, the goal was to make the game even more available to people all over the world, no matter what platform they preferred. But as soon as Bungie and Epic started talking, they realized they were huge fans of each other, and things started snowballing. This is how we ended up with a crossover spanning three games, six characters/outfits, a map recreation, and three Guardian classes reimagined as rock-em-sock-em jellybeans.

Epic Firsts

Both studios were embarking on new territory. Destiny 2 doesn't have characters that come from other games. And on Epic's side, although they celebrate welcoming a huge collection of recognizable faces into their universe, *none* of their original Fortnite outfits have appeared in any other game... until now. "When we started talking about who would be coming to Destiny 2 from Fortnite, we knew we wanted iconic, instantly recognizable outfits that were also fan-favorites," said Joss Price, director of strategic partnerships at Bungie. "We came up with our short list and when we went to Epic, they were already on the same page." The list read: Drift, Black Knight, Oblivion. Since the teams at Epic and Bungie are big fans of each other's games, it wasn't surprising that they saw eye to eye when choosing outfits. It was easy to imagine the sleek and streamlined Oblivion as a Hunter. In other cases, it wasn't

just that Drift's long coat matched a Warlock's silhouette, the fact that they're imbued with magic also came into play. Black Knight as a Titan? Easy choice.

At Home in Destiny

In a well-established universe, it can sometimes be hard to specify what makes something click into place or stick out like a sore thumb. Luckily, both Destiny 2 and Fortnite have been getting regular updates for years now and both teams have gotten really good at identifying when something blends seamlessly with the universe. Justin Dazet, Destiny 2's commerce area lead, spoke glowingly about the team of artists working at Bungie. "Our artists are incredible at taking something that might not seem like it fits on paper and approaching it from a place we could have never imagined. We hold our art pillars very close, and I think you can see that in the consistency of our releases. Our goal is to ensure that you're never pulled out of the fantasy."

There's no single way to be a Guardian. And although they take many forms and have an infinite variety of styles ([#ThreadsOfLight](#)), we share the community's respect for the Destiny universe, and can sense when something feels out of place.

We also share the community's passion for playing with non-canonical elements—after all, we never stopped being fans. Our goal is to strike a balance that allows us to flex our creativity in new ways while mindfully reeling things in until they feel at home.

Price remembers, "A guiding phrase for us was, 'Authentically Destiny 2, unmistakably Fortnite.' We were blending two universes and we knew that staying true to both was possible or we wouldn't have attempted it."

Landing in Fortnite

Flying in the opposite direction (possibly in a Battle Bus) we find three iconic Destiny 2 characters: the Titan Vanguard, Commander Zavala; the Warlock Vanguard, Ikora Rey; and the time-traveling Exo Stranger.

"Just like us, Epic has a very good idea for how things should fit in their game and what their design principles are," said Bungie Art Lead, Josh Deeb. "The fact that they're fans of Destiny 2 made remaining faithful to what makes our characters special easy—it felt like we were speaking the same language." The

teams identified features that make each character instantly recognizable, and sought to preserve those key aspects:

- Zavala's glowing eyes which are a feature of the Awoken race.
- Ikora's facial expressions—a signature of the Warlock's intimidating and studious personality.
- The Exo Stranger's robotic elements distinguish her from her two biological companions.

PWR Joins the Squad

In addition to the three Destiny 2 characters making their Fortnite debut, Epic also worked with creator team PWR to build an entire Destiny 2 map in Fortnite. "Javelin-4 is one of the most iconic and well-played maps and it ported really well," said Price. "The team at PWR are huge Destiny fans, and the map was extensively playtested until it struck a balance that felt true to both games."

As life-long fans of Bungie and avid players of Destiny 2 and Fortnite, it has been an incredible opportunity to work alongside such talented teams," said PWR's creative director of game development Boomer Gurney. "Bringing these two iconic games to life in one experience was challenging and only possible thanks to the passion of everyone involved. This project has been our most playtested game to date, and while it was invaluable to help fine-tune and capture the spirit of both titles, I think everyone was just having a lot of fun playing. We're very proud of what we've been able to create together and excited for players to experience it live in Fortnite." Dima Goryainov, Destiny's universe concept art lead, spoke about one of the biggest challenges PWR faced with the recreation of Javelin-4. "PWR did an incredible job of finding really creative ways to use the existing Fortnite asset library and Creative toolset to very closely match the visuals of Destiny 2. Some areas of the map look nearly identical to the original Javelin-4 and even for something as specific as the rocket, enough similar pieces were creatively utilized in order to still get the overall feel across. They absolutely nailed the look in terms of visual design, detail density, and lighting."

Crank the Cute Slider to 100

Joining the party and adding a little extra chaos to the crossover, Mediatonic made the Fall Guys collab as painless as a pillow fight.

As developers of Fall Guys, Mediatonic are all pros at this and have nailed adding new characters to their universe plenty of times. But for us, this was untraveled territory. We've never seen the three Destiny classes represented as Bumbling Beans before—most of us had never even considered what that might look like—but as soon as we witnessed Mediatonic's eye-opening implementation from concept art to adorable playable characters, the approval on our side was a breeze. I mean, c'mon:

As if that wasn't enough, Katie Lennox, director of consumer products at Bungie, hinted at something both teams are working on, "I can't say much now, but we're really excited to be partnering with our friends at Fall Guys on some extra special squishy offerings for fans that will be revealed at a later date!"

Follow [Fall Guys](#) and the [Bungie Store](#) on Twitter to make sure you get updated when the announcement happens.

Sharing a Love for Games

In hindsight, this partnership was a no-brainer. There's a lot of crossover between communities; people who like to play Fortnite end up liking Destiny and vice versa. In fact, it was easy to find examples within both our studios. Here at Bungie, Dazet can't start his day without a game of Fall Guys. Destiny 2's Game Director, Joe Blackburn, loves playing Fortnite with his family, and Epic's Chief Creative Officer, Donald Mustard, has said that Destiny 2 is one of his favorite games of all time.

When you combine fandom with a passion for creativity, the results can be astounding; just look at the incredible work that comes out of both communities. That magical combination was found throughout this collaboration.

"Although this was our first game of collaboration, it felt like we were at the World Series," Said Deeb. "And to stretch the analogy a bit, when you work in games, it often feels like you're in the same sport's league. So, it's understandable that some people might see that as a hyper competitive landscape, but it's the opposite. We're all fans of playing the game, so to speak, and getting to partner up like this is incredibly fun."

And so, as you prepare to take your new Black Knight ornament out for a Nightfall spin, throw a fluffy-fisted haymaker, or leap out of the Battle Bus with signature Sparrows and sword-themed pickaxes in hand, count yourself among the hundreds of fans that made this a reality. We hope you love playing what we made as much as we do.

We're all Guardians, now. See you starside.



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Need for Speed Heat | PS4

Hustle by day and risk it all at night in Need for Speed Heat, a white-knuckle street racer, where the lines of the law fade as the sun starts to set. By day, Palm City hosts the Speedhunter Showdown, a sanctioned competition where you earn Bank to customize and upgrade your high-performance cars. At night, ramp up the intensity in illicit street races that build your reputation, getting you access to bigger races and better parts.



Granblue Fantasy: Versus | PS4

Legendary fighting game studio Arc System Works brings the Granblue Fantasy universe to PlayStation in an action-packed, head-to-head fighter. Granblue Fantasy: Versus features a colorful cast, each with a unique fighting style. Also includes an RPG mode that features an all-new, original story. Play solo or team up with a friend to fight waves of enemies in thrilling action-RPG combat.



Toem | PS5

Set off on a delightful expedition and use your photographic eye to uncover mysteries in this hand-drawn adventure game. Chat with quirky characters, solve their problems by snapping neat photos, and make your way through a relaxing landscape.

Atlas Fallen: Upcoming Action-RPG Lets You Turn Sand into Coarse, Rough, and Irritating Weapons



Hi everybody! James Lowe here, Art Director at Deck13. We just revealed our upcoming game, *Atlas Fallen*, a high-octane action-RPG set in an engrossing epic-fantasy world. It's an original universe based around one main concept... I'll let you in on it right now!

First there was sand

Giving life to a brand-new universe is an incredibly challenging and exciting journey. Ideas come and go and so much changes... yet we're quite proud to have kept the same initial concept we wanted to place at the center of the game from the very beginning. And this concept is... sand! More precisely, it was the idea of an elemental force hidden within the world, something as mysterious as it is powerful. Once we'd caught that one concept which perfectly fused everyone's brainstormed ideas, sand quickly imposed itself as a perfect image to represent it. Sand is an eminently versatile element, at once solid and fluid; tiny and gigantic; quiet as death and menacing like the most terrible storm; and with the potential to transform into any shape!

A hero to liberate mankind

Sand is everywhere in *Atlas Fallen*. It's a timeless world with a vast landscape of dunes where you'll encounter a few human settlements, as well as the scattered ruins of an ancient civilization. Little is known about the origins of this devastated world at the beginning of the game, only that mankind lives under the oppression of gods. A large part of humanity is known as the Unnamed; deprived of identity, the individuals who share this status spend their existence digging Essence from the soil – what seems to be the source of Earth's energy. Starting out as an Unnamed, our hero's journey begins when he discovers the Gauntlet: a weapon infused with Essence, whose power can command sand. Once acquired, our hero has the power to rise against the oppressors and liberate mankind! So that's just what you'll set out for when you play *Atlas Fallen*, using the Gauntlet to create powerful, sand-shaped weapons, to lift buried structures from the ground, and to glide through the sand and in the air.

Fight, glide, customize!

Atlas Fallen is all about challenging powerful gods and exploring the depths of an obscure world – customizing your playstyle along the way. You will battle against hateful creatures known as the Wraith. These mythical, monstrous creatures serve the gods and make sure humans don't venture anywhere they should not go, but the Gauntlet and gliding abilities of the hero are no joke against them. You'll encounter different Wraith archetypes, smaller and... huger ones! With all different traits and abilities, you will have what it takes to take them on by customizing the sand-shaping power of the Gauntlet to best face their respective strengths and weaknesses. The importance of exploration in *Atlas Fallen* balances the pace of the game and allows you to look for fragments of the past, as well as the materials needed to customize your playstyle. Even if the main visual theme is the sand-covered desert, you can also expect to explore a nice array of environments, including castles, caves, epic cities, divine structures, and even forests! I hope you liked this glimpse of *Atlas Fallen's* world... Stay tuned to keep scratching its sand-covered surface with more posts from our team in the lead up to the release! *Atlas Fallen* will release on Xbox Series X|S in 2023. Wishlist the game now and stay tuned for more news



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REVIEWS

Football vs Fútbol

Which is better: Madden 23 or FIFA 23



It's a battle between Madden 23 and FIFA 23!

If you could only buy one football game this year, what would it be? Hardcore enthusiasts who play all sports games will probably end up buying both, but it's fun to talk about which one is the better purchase. I feel like every year that's the big question because there aren't vast improvements in sports games every year to warrant paying full price. This is a constant debate with That Nerd Show! So, let's start with Madden 23. Is it worth buying? But before we really dive in let's be clear that EA Sports have finally started truly making sports games for the PlayStation 5 and the Xbox Series X where the graphics in the gameplay are phenomenal or at least should be. I can at least admit that the graphics are phenomenal and have gotten better this year.

Madden 23

Were there really any big improvements from last year's version? The simple answer is no except for one thing, and this is where EA put all of its marbles in creating this year's version of Madden. So, the only thing to really talk about is the new FieldSENSE engine that makes gameplay more accurate. We'll get to that here in a moment. I've played my season and taken the Chicago Bears to the Super bowl. For me, it's the second year with Justin Fields as the quarterback. The graphics on the Xbox series X and the PlayStation 5 are virtually the same as last year's version. I couldn't tell any difference. Both games look phenomenal and other than new rosters and a new season, you don't get anything different. It's not like the Bears have new uniforms or are playing in a new stadium. But what made me enjoy Madden 23 more this year is the game playing and that comes down

to FieldSENSE. This was a new attempt by EA to make passing more accurate more head-to-head battles with the defense better along with better 360° animation and making the game more realistic. They succeeded in a lot of ways. My playbook completely changed because a lot of the plays that I was successful with from last year's version weren't working since the defensive coverage was better and my receivers weren't able to catch balls as easily as they did in Madden 22. I had to be more precise and unfortunately, I threw some ugly interceptions.

The flip side of that is I was better on defense and wasn't easily scored upon because as soon as the ball was thrown by the opposing team's quarterback, I was immediately switching players and they were bumping and knocking balls out of receiver's hands and even intercepting a lot easier than they did in last year's version. That I enjoyed. Just like every time they create Madden in a new engine, it's vastly different from the last version playing on

the old engine and there is a lot of those aspects with the new field sense in Madden 22. But I honestly can't say that it was worth \$60 for the game. Every year I argue that the only thing you really need to do is charge \$30 for a new season and a new roster and some simple updates including gameplay. That's all they needed to do with Madden 23. While there is a lot of difference in the gameplay from this year's version compared to last year's when it comes to gameplay, it isn't enough to make me want to pay full price because I'm just as satisfied going through the season again in Madden 22. Madden 23 is different enough that you can play this version for the next couple of years.



The only thing that I have really enjoyed when it comes to FieldSENSE and the improvements they've made is knowing that they'll probably put them in the new NCAA Football game coming out in 2023 and that's exciting, but from somebody who plays Madden every year, there just isn't enough differences to warrant the full price. I enjoyed Madden 23 and I like being able to perform better on defense. It was exciting being able to keep Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers at bay so he doesn't steal the game from you, but I was able to do that in last year's version too. Madden 23 is a beautiful game for the NexGen consoles and still looks fantastic on the older generations. It was still a lot of fun to play even on a first gen Xbox one which we still use for tournaments. But if you're going to buy Madden 23 then wait until it has at least a 50% discount. Madden is getting to the point where it's really a game you buy every 3 years. And that statement is even more true after they have made vast improvements in the game for the Next generation consoles because you know they won't make significant improvements over the next few years to warrant buying the game at full price. **Final Grade: 7 / 10 (Okay)**

FIFA 23

This is the better purchase of these two games. In FIFA 22 EA introduced what they called their Hypermotion engine where it increased the frame rate and gameplay with 4000 authentic football animations. FIFA 22

looked phenomenal. It really did. It was the first version of FIFA that they made truly for the Next Generation consoles but like the first-year version of any new engine, it came with a lot of bugs and the game wasn't very good in the beginning until a lot of patches fixed it. By that time FIFA 22 was already free on PlayStation Plus. EA has increased hyper motion to over 6,000 authentic football animations that make the gameplay phenomenal. It truly looks better and the view of the field, while you're playing, is incredible to the point that cameras actually zoom in on specific plays. It looks fantastic. And you can definitely see the improvement in the Hypermotion technology. If you are a FIFA fanatic, you've already bought this game and it should be pointed out, FIFA is always the better value because you can play so many different teams and over 50 leagues throughout the world. Plus, this year FIFA 23 is made even more special because it's a World cup year and you'll get to play the women's international cup along with the men's international cup which will be available through DLC as we get closer to November. FIFA has also increased the number of teams that are available including the fifth tier of English football, the National League. Why is this important because there is a phenomenal show on Hulu right now called Welcome to Wrexham about how Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenny bought this lonely 5th-tier English football team and are trying to get it back to the upper tiers of English football. It's a modern-day Ted Lasso story. While you could have always played Wrexham in FIFA for the last few years... You actually have more teams from the National League so if you are wanting to take Wrexham to the top of English Football and have to play your way through all of the leagues, there's better options!

Probably the most exciting part of this year's FIFA is Ted Lasso. If you are a fan of the hit show on Apple + where an American football coach comes over to England and takes on coaching an English Premier League team then you'll love the fact that you can play the fictional team from the show in FIFA 23. That's right you can play AFC Richmond and Jason Sudeikis who plays Ted Lasso can be seen strolling the sidelines. All of the players from the fictional team including all the likenesses of the actors are in the game and it's a lot of fun. With new Hypermotion technology, EA has captured the likenesses really well and it makes the gameplay more fun. I don't necessarily think this is the best version of FIFA, but for a version built truly for the NextGen consoles, it's a gorgeous game and the animation is incredible... The gameplay is a little lacking compared to FIFA 22 because I find myself not being able to cut back and change direction as easily, but let's be honest that's probably a

simple issue that'll be fixed with the first couple of patches. FIFA 22 had that problem when first released and they made the game better within the first couple of months. EA has made a lot of strides to make FIFA better.



So, if you're going to spend full price on a football game this year, which one do you get Madden 23 or FIFA 23? The easy answer is FIFA 23. It always has better value than Madden because of all the teams that you can play and with their new hyper motion technology, I think it's a vast improvement on the FIFA series compared to the FieldSENSE engine that was introduced in Madden that made minimal improvements. There's so much more to FIFA, especially in a World Cup year that you will always get your money's worth, and with all the improvements they've made despite the fact that it's not completely perfect, yet, it's still a lot of fun. And you shouldn't worry about a few bugs, FIFA 23 won't start out as bad as FIFA 22, and it will only get better throughout the year. At the end of the day, FIFA 23 is definitely worth the price and while the PlayStation 5 version and the Xbox series X version are great, the PS4 and the Xbox One versions will still play phenomenally with all the improvements they've made. This is a sports game you should spend full price on day one. But just remember, if you have Game Pass or you signed up for a play then you will get a 10% discount for a digital copy. That discount is still not enough to make Madden 23 worth buying even a month after its release. Get it at a discount if you want to play this year's season, but as we have said before the biggest football game by EA is coming next year with the release of a new NCAA football game so hopefully, all the improvements they've tried to make with Madden will be in that game. And even if you're not a huge FIFA fan but you're a fan of Ted Lasso, this is the kind of game that's worth playing just so you can play your favorite fictional Premier League team and see Ted Lasso and Coach Beard strolling the sidelines while getting to play with Roy Kent and Jamie Tartt. It's the kind of game that'll even make little sisters who don't play video games want to play because they love Ted Lasso. That may be the best part of FIFA 23!

Final Grade: 9 / 10 (Great)



DEATH IS A RITE OF PASSAGE



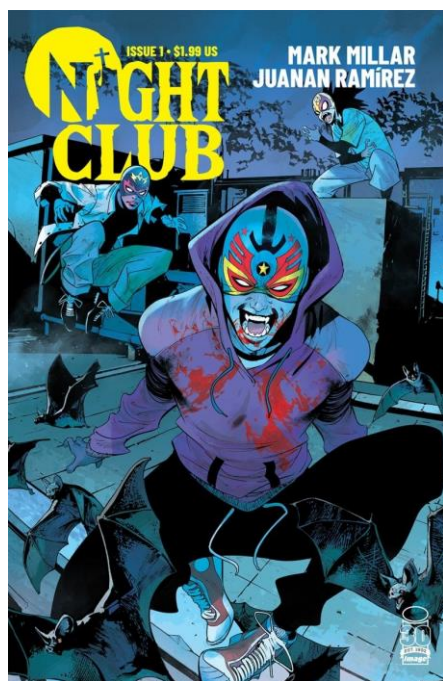
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COMIC BOOK NEWS

NIGHT CLUB: MARK MILLAR AND JUANAN RAMÍREZ SIRE NEW VAMPIRE SERIES THIS DECEMBER



Bestselling writer Mark Millar (*The Magic Order*, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*) and fan-favorite artist Juanan Ramírez offer up a new series for readers to sink their teeth into with the launch of *Night Club*. This upcoming series will take flight in December from Image Comics and will join Millar's growing line of popular comics owned by Netflix. Each issue of the series will boast an incredibly low price point of only \$1.99.

"It's funny. I haven't launched a new superhero comic out there in about ten years, despite superhero comics being what I'm best known for with things like *Civil War*, *Red Son*, *Old Man Logan*, etc," said Millar. "But I wanted to wait until I had a genuinely fresh take because I love these things and it had to be something really different and I wanted an artist who's work just jumped off the page. We're also trying an experiment to see if a full size 24 page comic-book can work at \$1.99 every month. We think readers are going to LOVE this package."

In *Night Club*, a group of unsuspecting 17-year-olds is bitten by a vampire and suddenly imbued with superheroic powers. The story unfolds as it asks: *Now what? Do you live in the shadows and drink human blood? Or do you use your newfound abilities to become the costumed vigilante you've always dreamed of instead? You're bulletproof, you can crawl up walls, and you can turn to mist, bats, or even a wolf. Why not have a little fun?*

Night Club #1 will be released on Wednesday, December 14 at [comic book shops](#) as well as across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play:



UPCOMING SERIES —“ALL AGAINST ALL”— A PRIMAL VISION OF HUMANITY GONE TERRIBLY WRONG

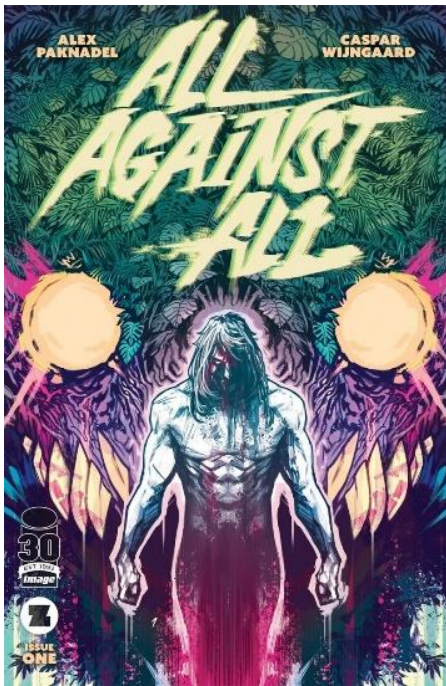


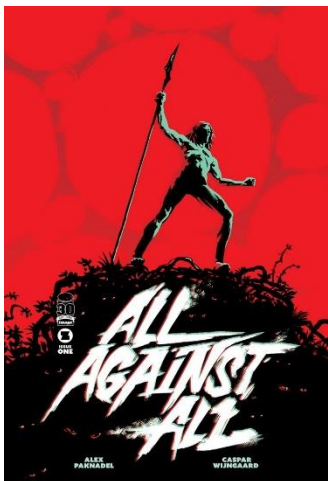
Image Comics is thrilled to introduce the upcoming, *All Against All* by writer Alex Paknadel (*Giga*), artist/colorist Caspar Wijngaard (*Home Sick Pilots*), and letterer Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou (*Rogues' Gallery*) and the latest from the Syzygy imprint. This five issue miniseries will

offer a uniquely harrowing and vividly illustrated tale and launch in December. *All Against All* is focused on a race of otherworldly conquerors in pursuit of an especially lethal predator... man. The series is set in the distant future. Earth is long gone, but a race of alien conquerors known as "the Operators" have preserved its most savage animals in an artificial jungle environment they barely understand. With no bodies of their own, the Operators move from world to world, harvesting bodies for the organic exosuits they use to wage their endless wars. Ignored and underestimated by his captors is the habitat's sole human specimen, Helpless.

However, when their efforts to find and harvest an apex predator intensify, he gives them far more than they bargained for. "*All Against All* continues our efforts at Syzygy to produce compelling books with fantastic high-concepts as envisioned by some of the most talented and inventive creators working today," said editor/Syzygy co-head Chris Ryall in [an exclusive on the announcement at AIPT](#). "Alex and Caspar weave together elements of high adventure, horror, and science-fiction into a wildly thrilling series, and the added visual flair and skill that Hassan brings to each page only completes the story in such an exciting way." [Paknadel added](#): "Heady

survival horror is very much my jam, so I couldn't be more thrilled to be making one with the great Caspar Wijngaard, whose work I've admired for as long as I've worked in comics, and Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou, one of the most diligent and formally inventive letterers working today. Add the stewardship of the visionary Chris Ryall into the mix and I'm sure readers will agree that *All Against All* is a very special book indeed." "When Alex first floated the idea of a series that's 'Alien, but the human is the xenomorph,' I was instantly onboard," [said Wijngaard](#). "It's been such an awesome challenge to bring these aliens to life, relying on their fear as a rogue human stalks the dark station. Alex is a fiercely intelligent writer with a brilliant knack for dark, nuanced humour, *All Against All* promises to deliver fast, smart and brutal story. Don't miss out!"

Adding to the series' creative luster, each issue will feature covers not only by Wijngaard, but also by an amazing array of artistic talents showcased with a line of exciting variant covers. *All Against All* #1 will be released on Wednesday, December 7 at local comic shops and available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



CYBERPUNK: DARK MAGIC COLLIDE IN UPCOMING SERIES HEXWARE

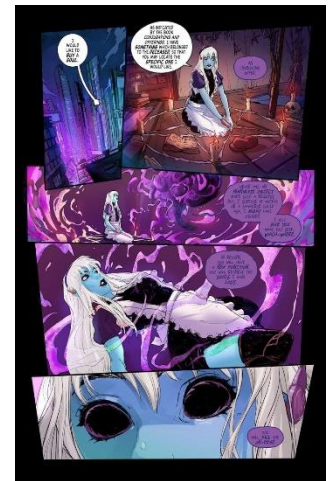
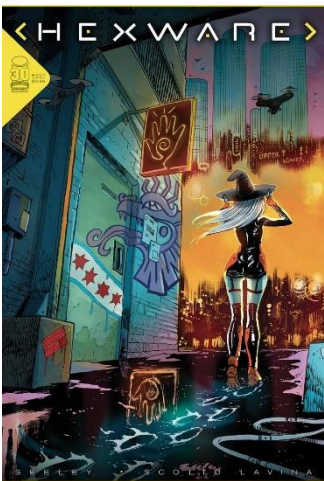


Acclaimed creator Tim Seeley (*Hack/Slash*, *Revival*, *Nightwing*, *Superman vs. Lobo*) and rising star Zulema Scotto Lavina (*Red Sonja*, *The Little Mermaid*) join forces for the forthcoming *Hexware*. This futuristic six issue miniseries is set to launch in December from Image Comics, in cooperation with the Italian media company and creative atelier Arancia Studio—house of Mirka Andolfo's bestselling Image titles, other international books, and IP. *Hexware* is a thrilling new story—with an anime flair—where *Cyberpunk 2077* gets drenched in the supernatural and goes full-throttle *Devil May Cry*.

In a corporate-ruled world where class inequality is greater than ever, a desperate, lonely populace is drawn to neo-spiritualism and hedge magic. When her teenage daughter is murdered, the Marks family is left asking the gods what they did to deserve this. But their android maid, Which-Where, has a different approach. Perhaps if she asked the

Devil..."This is an idea that's been burning in my head for a while," said Seeley. "Working with Arancia Studios and Zulema allowed it to jump onto the page, and take on all kinds of new influences like horror manga and sci-fi anime. *Hexware* is part cyberpunk, part fantasy, and all about love, loss, and dark deals. Pull up a spell book and get your cyber-pagan on."

Lavina added: "A fascinating sci-fi world—soaked with just the right amount of witchcraft vibes—this is the journey of an android, through life and death. Working with Tim Seeley is a dream come true for me and I believe the readers will like where we are going with the story!" *Hexware #1* will be available on Wednesday, December 7 at [comic book shops](#), with a cover illustrated by Lavina, a variant cover illustrated by Seeley, and a special variant cover from fan-favorite artist Mirka Andolfo. *Hexware #1* will also be available and across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play:



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RADIANT BLACK'S MASSIVE-VERSE OF SUPERHEROES TO EXPAND WITH RADIANT PINK LAUNCH IN DECEMBER



Join streaming superstar Meghan Camarena (*Radiant Black*), rising-star writer Melissa Flores (*The Dead Lucky*), and third-generation comics artist Emma Kubert (*Inkblot*) for the upcoming five issue miniseries *Radiant Pink*. This

galaxy-hopping thrill ride will join *Radiant Black*, *Rogue Sun*, *Radiant Red*, *The Dead Lucky*, and *C.O.W.L.* in the expanding shared Massive-Verse of superheroes this December from Image Comics. In *Radiant Pink*, life is good for Eva. Ever since teleporting superhero Radiant Pink (her secret alter ego) started guesting on her streams, her view count has skyrocketed—and fame and fortune are surely close behind. But when a charity appearance is interrupted by a squad of mercenaries hunting for the Radiant that powers her, Eva will find herself very far out of her comfort zone.

“I’m having the time of my life co-writing *Radiant Pink* with Meghan,” said Flores in [an exclusive on the announcement at Popverse](#). “I can’t wait for the readers to dive into this insanely fun story that stays true to the spirit of *Radiant Black*, while delivering a lot of heart and a deeper look at complex issues. Paired with Emma Kubert’s gorgeous art, this will be an incredible new adventure!” [Kubert added](#): “With Meghan and Melissa’s action-filled story and wonderful direction, I’m having a blast creating the exciting visuals of *Radiant Pink*. It’s an absolute thrill to follow Eva on this emotional roller coaster and really see all the different sides to this awesome, fun-loving character.”

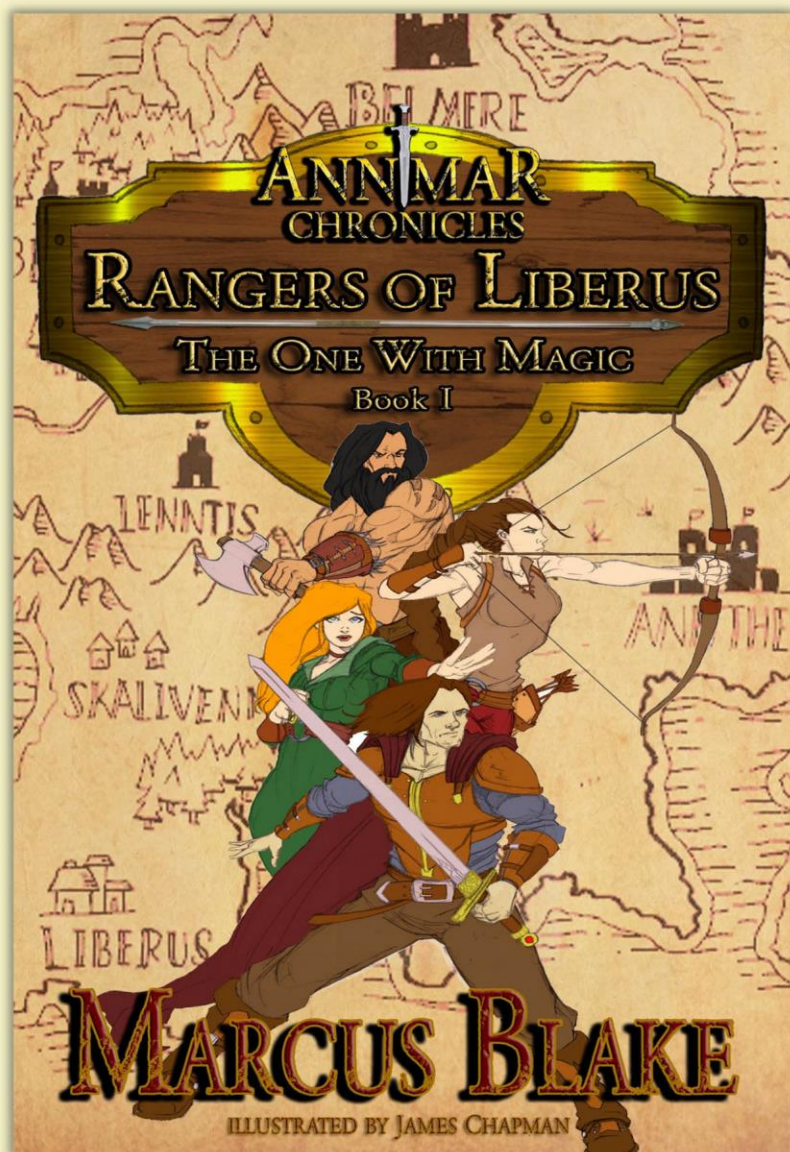
“WHO LET ME DO THIS? Oh yeah thanks Kyle! *Radiant Pink* is a tale of

self love, growth and an extra bit of chaos,” [said Camarena](#). “Sharing with you a chapter from a very vulnerable part of my life, told through Eva. Melissa Flores is bringing the angst and Emma Kubert is bringing the sparkle!” Kyle Higgins & Marcelo Costa’s breakout hit *Radiant Black* took superhero storytelling to new heights when it launched in 2021—but *Radiant Black* isn’t the only character inhabiting the growing Massive-Verse. Each character has a different story to tell, different adversaries to face... and they each occupy a very different corner of this shared superhero universe. Now’s the time to get into the Massive-Verse. “It’s been so much fun building out the *Radiant Black* side of the Massive-Verse and part of that includes having the opportunity to bring in Meghan, Melissa, Emma, Rebecca and Becca to help us explore a very different side of ‘superheroing,’” [said Higgins](#). “Similar to what Cherish, David and Miquel did with Satomi’s story in *Radiant Red*, Meghan and Melissa are sending Eva to some pretty unexpected places. I can’t wait for people to get to know her better.”

Radiant Pink #1 will be available on Wednesday, December 7 in print at [comic book shops](#) and digitally across many platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.



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Music News



Foo Fighter Chris Shiflett Talks Band's Future and Respect for Taylor Hawkins



Chris Shiflett has hinted Foo Fighters will make a new record when the time is right. The 'Best of You' rockers continue to mourn the loss of their beloved drummer Taylor Hawkins - who tragically died aged 50 in March - and honour his memory with the second of two memorial shows at the Kia Forum in Los Angeles on Tuesday (27.09.22). And in a new interview, the band's guitarist has said that once they are ready to get back on the promotion bandwagon and feel able to deal with questions about the sticksman's passing, they will likely make a new record.

The 51-year-old musician - who is joined by Dave Grohl, Pat Smear, Nate Mendel and Rami Jaffe in the rock band - said that, on the whole, people have been "respectful" about Taylor's passing, but he called out the few spreading lies about the cause of his death.

Speaking on 'The Plug With Justin Jay', he said: "Most people that I've encountered have been respectful about it or try to avoid it.

"It probably will be [more of a thing] when we ever get around to putting out another Foo Fighters record and go back into the promo boogie woogie.

"I remember that when I joined Foo Fighters, it was 1999 so it was a while after Kurt Cobain had died but I would watch interviewers twist themselves in knots trying to ask Dave [Grohl] about it but not ask. I would think it would turn into that kinda thing."

Chris added: "People are pretty respectful but it's made me reconsider everything I thought I knew about Jim Morrison dying, or Randy Rhoads or any of those rock and roll tragedies.

"Taylor was this big character and he meant a lot to millions of people so I get that fascination with [his death] but so much of what I've seen out there is so completely wrong.

"There's people out there saying s*** like Dave killed Taylor by making him get the COVID vaccine. You're going to turn it into that? F** you. I try not to pay attention to it but it does make you angry because that s*** is just disrespectful."

Metallica to Play Special Show to Pay Tribute to Couple who Signed Them



Metallica are to play a special concert to pay tribute to the couple who signed them. The

heavy metal outfit will perform at Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Hollywood, Florida, on November 6th to honour Megaforce Records founder Jon "Jonny Z" Zazula and his wife Marsha Zazula. The 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' hitmakers said in a statement: "Jonny gave us our first break in New York, released our first albums on his Megaforce Records label, and put us out on the road for our first real tour.

"With Marsha by his side, Jonny was a mentor, a manager, a label head, and a father figure to us all ... we would not be where we are today without the two of them. "Sadly, we recently lost both Jonny and Marsha, just a little more than a year apart.

"We'll be cooking up a special setlist for you full of songs from our days with Jonny and Marsha at Megaforce.

"Our main touring partner from that time, Raven, will be joining us to add to the celebration and bring back the memories."

The group - who are made up of James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett and Robert Trujillo - will donate some of the money from the show to MusiCares, a charity that provides a safety net of critical health and welfare services to the music community, in the couple's names.

Metallica released their first two studio albums, 'Kill 'Em All' in 1983 and 'Ride The Lightning' in 1984, with Megaforce Records. But the group later signed a deal with Elektra. Jonny died of chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP), a rare neuropathic disorder, in February aged 69, just over a year after Marsha died of cancer in January 2021.

FIFA 23 Soundtrack Revealed with Bad Bunny, Yeah Yeah Yeahs and more



Bad Bunny and Yeah Yeah Yeahs are on the official 'FIFA 23' soundtrack. EA Sports has confirmed the soundtrack for this year's game, with 57 new songs including the likes of MILKBLOOD, FKA Twigs, Sampa the Great and more. Raphaella Lima - Global Music Marketing Director at EA - said: "This year's soundtrack demonstrates the breadth of the world's love for the game, capturing sounds from all sides of the globe. "We wanted to emphasize the importance of our global football community through music and we're excited to partner with this incredible group of artists to provide the songs and anthems for the most expansive FIFA ever."

Rising stars Ibeyi, Pheelz, Baby Tate and more are also getting spotlighted, while the 'Volta Football' soundtrack will include tunes by the likes of Nas, Quevedo, Remi Wolf, Denzel Curry and more. In a press release, EA teased:

"The carefully curated mixture of hip hop, alternative, electronic dance and pop music transports players directly into the game of street football."

Music also plays a deeper role in the game, with artists such as Jack Harlow, ROSALIA, Pheelz and Central Cee all designing their own FIFA Ultimate Team kits. These customised kits - which are "designed to personify each artists' personality - will be available for players to unlock through certain objectives from September 27, when early access for the game mode launches. The 'FIFA 23' soundtrack is available to stream on Spotify, while EA has teased "exciting updates to the soundtrack later this fall". 'FIFA 23' will be available worldwide on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, PC, Stadia, PS4, and Xbox One on September 30.

Unlimited

music



Prime

Purple Ruminations

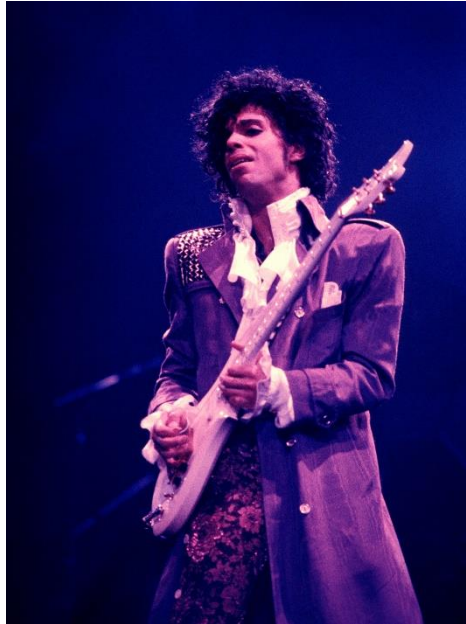
MUSINGS ABOUT "PRINCE" BY CHAD WOMACK

"Style is not lusting after someone because they're cool"

The Style of Prince

Prince was an icon in every sense of the word. A very telling song lyric boldly professed, "I don't follow trends.... they follow me" could not have been more ballsy or on point. While much has been said in this column by this author about his breathtaking abilities as a songwriter, composer, musician, dancer, and incomparable performer, about as much can be said about his unique sense of style and fashion plate. Prince could pull off a look that would look completely ridiculous on pretty much anybody else. There's a popular meme that has circulated for several years that states he's the only man that could put on makeup and heels and STILL take your woman. Somehow, I don't think that was just a wild boast...I'm positive it HAPPENED.....FREQUENTLY.

Prince was a trailblazer that changed his look with every new project he tackled, with a new hairstyle, color theme, or a completely overhauled from top to bottom. Every detail was scrutinized and calculated for maximum effect, coordinated flawlessly and custom made. This is not a guy that shopped off the rack! He employed incredibly talented fashion designers that crafted a persona that Prince flaunted both on and offstage.



He may have been known primarily as "The Purple Rain Guy" but his iconic looks covered every tint and hue in the rainbow. From the stoic silhouette of the emblematic raincoat and ruffles of the early 80s, the baby blue cloud suit from Raspberry Beret, the monochromatic halter top and bellbottoms of Parade, the leather trench and peach/black high collared look of Sign

'O' the Times, the bat logo cufflinks of the Batman album, to the infamous Chiquita yellow assless pants from the 91 MTV VMAs, he feared NOTHING! His button covered skintight pants and always matching sky-high stiletto heeled boots, bringing an overabundance of panache with every single perfectly executed spin and split.

On a much more personal note, I was recently out shopping with my wife as we were assembling our Halloween costumes for.... just so you know, we're going with a Big Bad Wolf/Red Riding Hood theme this year. As we were headed to the checkout counter, something caught my eye and made me freeze in my tracks. It was a purple trench coat.... not THE purple trench coat.... but DAMN close. Suffice it to say. it was an immediate purchase. I already had the puffy pirate/poet shirt at home.... and something truly magical happened when I put them on the hanger together. They BECAME the look that most people immediately associate with Prince, and a chill ran through me, causing my throat to lock up a little. I almost felt his presence. Imagine my surprise when I realized that very day was the anniversary of the release of Purple Rain as a single. Call me crazy.... but that can't just be a coincidence.... RIGHT?

"Style is loving yourself 'til everyone else does to!"



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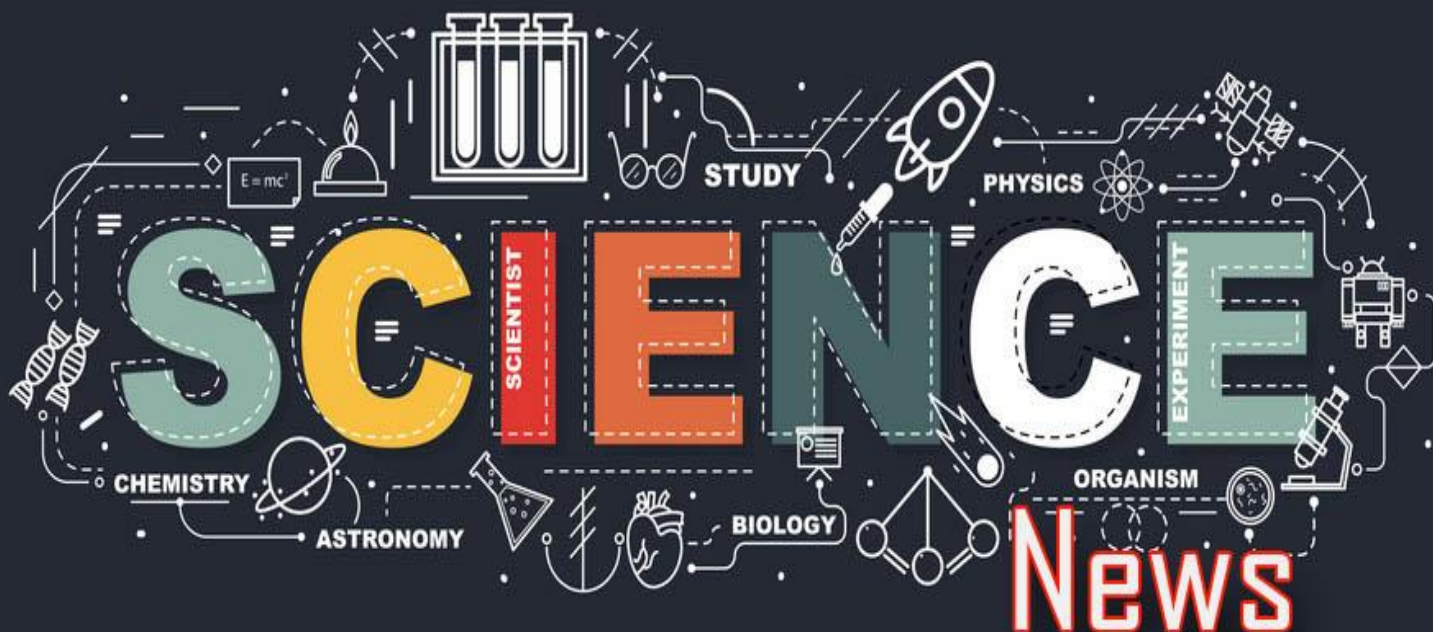
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MOXIE Experiment Reliably Produces Oxygen on Mars



On the red and dusty surface of Mars, nearly 100 million miles from Earth, an instrument the size of a lunchbox is proving it can reliably do the work of a small tree.

The MIT-led Mars Oxygen In-Situ Resource Utilization Experiment, or MOXIE, has been successfully making oxygen from the Red Planet's carbon-dioxide-rich atmosphere since February 2021, when it touched down on the Martian surface as part of NASA's Perseverance rover mission. In a study published in the journal *Science Advances*, researchers report that, by the end of 2021, MOXIE was able to produce oxygen on seven experimental runs, in a variety of atmospheric conditions, including during the day and night, and through different Martian seasons. In each run, the instrument reached its target of producing six grams of oxygen per hour -- about the rate of a modest tree on Earth.

Researchers envision that a scaled-up version of MOXIE could be sent to Mars ahead of a human mission, to continuously produce oxygen at the rate of several hundred trees. At that capacity, the system should generate enough

oxygen to both sustain humans once they arrive, and fuel a rocket for returning astronauts back to Earth. So far, MOXIE's steady output is a promising first step toward that goal. "We have learned a tremendous amount that will inform future systems at a larger scale," says Michael Hecht, principal investigator of the MOXIE mission at MIT's Haystack Observatory.

MOXIE's oxygen production on Mars also represents the first demonstration of "in-situ resource utilization," which is the idea of harvesting and using a planet's materials (in this case, carbon dioxide on Mars) to make resources (such as oxygen) that would otherwise have to be transported from Earth. "This is the first demonstration of actually using resources on the surface of another planetary body, and transforming them chemically into something that would be useful for a human mission," says MOXIE deputy principal investigator Jeffrey Hoffman, a professor of the practice in MIT's Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics. "It's historic in that sense." Hoffman and Hecht's MIT co-authors include MOXIE team members Jason SooHoo, Andrew Liu, Eric Hinterman, Maya Nasr, Shraavan Hariharan, and Kyle Horn, along with collaborators from multiple institutions including NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which managed MOXIE's development, flight software, packaging, and testing prior to launch.

Seasonal air

The current version of MOXIE is small by design, in order to fit aboard the Perseverance rover, and is built to run for short periods,

starting up and shutting down with each run, depending on the rover's exploration schedule and mission responsibilities. In contrast, a full-scale oxygen factory would include larger units that would ideally run continuously.

Despite the necessary compromises in MOXIE's current design, the instrument has shown it can reliably and efficiently convert Mars' atmosphere into pure oxygen. It does so by first drawing the Martian air in through a filter that cleans it of contaminants. The air is then pressurized, and sent through the Solid Oxide Electrolyzer (SOXE), an instrument developed and built by OxEon Energy, that electrochemically splits the carbon dioxide-rich air into oxygen ions and carbon monoxide.

The oxygen ions are then isolated and recombined to form breathable, molecular oxygen, or O₂, which MOXIE then measures for quantity and purity before releasing it harmlessly back into the air, along with carbon monoxide and other atmospheric gases. Since the rover's landing in February 2021, MOXIE engineers have started up the instrument seven times throughout the Martian year, each time taking a few hours to warm up, then another hour to make oxygen before powering back down. Each run was scheduled for a different time of day or night, and in different seasons, to see whether MOXIE could accommodate shifts in the planet's atmospheric conditions. "The atmosphere of Mars is far more variable than Earth," Hoffman notes. "The density of the air can vary by a factor of two through the year, and the temperature can vary by 100 degrees. One objective is to show we can run in all seasons." So far, MOXIE has shown that it can

make oxygen at almost any time of the Martian day and year. "The only thing we have not demonstrated is running at dawn or dusk, when the temperature is changing substantially," Hecht says. "We do have an ace up our sleeve that will let us do that, and once we test that in the lab, we can reach that last milestone to show we can really run any time."

Ahead of the game

As MOXIE continues to churn out oxygen on Mars, engineers plan to push its capacity, and increase its production, particularly in the

Martian spring, when atmospheric density and carbon dioxide levels are high.

"The next run coming up will be during the highest density of the year, and we just want to make as much oxygen as we can," Hecht says. "So we'll set everything as high as we dare, and let it run as long as we can." They will also monitor the system for signs of wear and tear. As MOXIE is just one experiment among several aboard the Perseverance rover, it cannot run continuously as a full-scale system would. Instead, the instrument must start up and shut down with each run -- a thermal stress that can degrade the system over time. If MOXIE can

operate successfully despite repeatedly turning on and off, this would suggest that a full-scale system, designed to run continuously, could do so for thousands of hours. "To support a human mission to Mars, we have to bring a lot of stuff from Earth, like computers, spacesuits, and habitats," Hoffman says. "But dumb old oxygen? If you can make it there, go for it -- you're way ahead of the game." This research was supported, in part, by NASA.

Faster in the Past: New seafloor images of West Antarctic Ice Sheet Upend understanding of Thwaites Glacier retreat



The Thwaites Glacier in West Antarctica -- about the size of Florida -- has been an elephant in the room for scientists trying to make global sea level rise predictions.

This massive ice stream is already in a phase of fast retreat (a "collapse" when viewed on geological timescales) leading to widespread concern about exactly how much, or how fast, it may give up its ice to the ocean.

The potential impact of Thwaites' retreat is spine-chilling: a total loss of the glacier and surrounding icy basins could raise sea level from three to 10 feet. A new study in *Nature Geoscience* led by marine geophysicist Alastair Graham at the University of South Florida's College of Marine Science adds cause for concern. For the first time, scientists mapped in high-resolution a critical area of the seafloor in front of the glacier that gives them a window into how fast Thwaites retreated and moved in the past. The stunning imagery shows geologic features that are new to science, and also provides a kind of crystal ball to see into Thwaites' future. In people and ice sheets alike, past behavior is key to understanding future behavior. The team documented more than 160 parallel ridges that were created, like a footprint, as the glacier's leading edge retreated and bobbed up and down with the daily tides.

"It's as if you are looking at a tide gauge on the seafloor," Graham said. "It really blows my

mind how beautiful the data are." Beauty aside, what's alarming is that the rate of Thwaites' retreat that scientists have documented more recently are small compared to the fastest rates of change in its past, said Graham. To understand Thwaites' past retreat, the team analyzed the rib-like formations submerged 700 meters (just under half a mile) beneath the polar ocean and factored in the tidal cycle for the region, as predicted by computer models, to show that one rib must have been formed every single day. At some point in the last 200 years, over a duration of less than six months, the front of the glacier lost contact with a seabed ridge and retreated at a rate of more than 2.1 kilometers per year (1.3 miles per year) -- twice the rate documented using satellites between 2011 and 2019. "Our results suggest that pulses of very rapid retreat have occurred at Thwaites Glacier in the last two centuries, and possibly as recently as the mid-20th Century," Graham said. "Thwaites is really holding on today by its fingernails, and we should expect to see big changes over small timescales in the future--even from one year to the next--once the glacier retreats beyond a shallow ridge in its bed," said marine geophysicist and study co-author Robert Larter from the British Antarctic Survey.

To collect the imagery and supporting geophysical data, the team, which included scientists from the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden, launched a state-of-the-art orange robotic vehicle loaded with imaging sensors called 'Rán' from the R/V Nathaniel B. Palmer during an expedition in 2019. Rán, operated by scientists at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, embarked on a 20-hour mission that was as risky as it was serendipitous, Graham said. It mapped an area of the seabed in front of the glacier about the size of Houston -- and did so in extreme conditions during an unusual summer notable for its lack of sea ice. This allowed scientists to access the glacier front for the first time in history. "This was a pioneering study of the

ocean floor, made possible by recent technological advancements in autonomous ocean mapping and a bold decision by the Wallenberg foundation to invest into this research infrastructure," said Anna Wählin, a physical oceanographer from the University of Gothenburg who deployed Rán at Thwaites. "The images Rán collected give us vital insights into the processes happening at the critical junction between the glacier and the ocean today."

"It was truly a once in a lifetime mission," said Graham, who said the team would like to sample the seabed sediments directly so they can more accurately date the ridge-like features. "But the ice closed in on us pretty quickly and we had to leave before we could do that on this expedition," he said. While many questions remain, one thing's for sure: it used to be that scientists thought of the Antarctic ice sheets as sluggish and slow to respond, but that's simply not true, said Graham. "Just a small kick to Thwaites could lead to a big response," he said. According to the United Nations, roughly 40 percent of the human population lives within 60 miles of the coast. "This study is part of a cross-disciplinary collective effort to understand the Thwaites Glacier system better," said Tom Frazer, dean of the USF College of Marine Science, "and just because it's out of sight, we can't have Thwaites out of mind. This study is an important step forward in providing essential information to inform global planning efforts." The study was supported by the National Science Foundation and the UK Natural Environment Research Council through the International Thwaites Glacier Collaboration. The 2019 expedition was the first in a five-year project dubbed THOR, which stands for Thwaites Offshore Research, and also included team members from a sister project called the Thwaites-Amundsen Regional Survey and Network Integrating Atmosphere-Ice-Ocean Processes, or TARSAN.

Can 'Random Noise' Unlock our Learning Potential?



Though many of us may seek a quiet place in which to study, 'noise' may play a key role in helping some people improve their learning potential.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) has investigated the effects of transcranial random noise stimulation (tRNS) in a variety of settings and found the technology could have many applications. Despite its name, tRNS doesn't utilize noise in the everyday, auditory sense of the word. Rather, it sees electrodes attached to the head so a weak current can pass through specific parts of the brain. Study lead Dr Onno van der Groen said the study showed tRNS has promise as a tool to assist people with compromised learning capabilities. "The effect on learning is promising: it can speed up learning and help people with neurological conditions," Dr van der Groen said. "So, people with learning difficulties you can use it to

enhance learning rate, for example. "It's also been trialled on people with visual deficits, such as after stroke and traumatic brain injury. "When you add this type of stimulation during learning, you get better performance, faster learning and better attention afterwards as well."

Forming new pathways

Dr van der Groen said tRNS works by allowing the brain to form new connections and pathways, a process known as neuroplasticity. "If you learn something, there has to be neuroplastic changes in your brain, which allows you to learn this information," he said. "And this is a tool to enhance this neuroplasticity." Dr van der Groen said tRNS had two effects on the brain: the 'acute' effect, which allows a person to perform better while undergoing tRNS, and the modulating effect which saw lasting results. "If you do 10 sessions of a visual perception task with the tRNS and then come back and do it again without it, you'll find you perform better than the control group who hasn't used it," he said.

"Limitless" potential?

The idea of expanding one's learning potential via tech such as tRNS raises many questions. While it's most pertinent to those with deficiencies and difficulties in learning, it also begs the question as to whether a neurotypical person can take their intelligence to new levels, similar to the concept in the movie *'Limitless'*. Dr van der Groen says the potential is there, but there are also signs it

won't create a 'new level' of intelligence. "The question is, if you're neurotypical, are you already performing at your peak," he said. "There's a case study where they tried to enhance the mathematical skills of a super mathematician; with him, it didn't have much of an impact on his performance, presumably because he is already a top performer in that area. "But it could be used if you're learning something new."

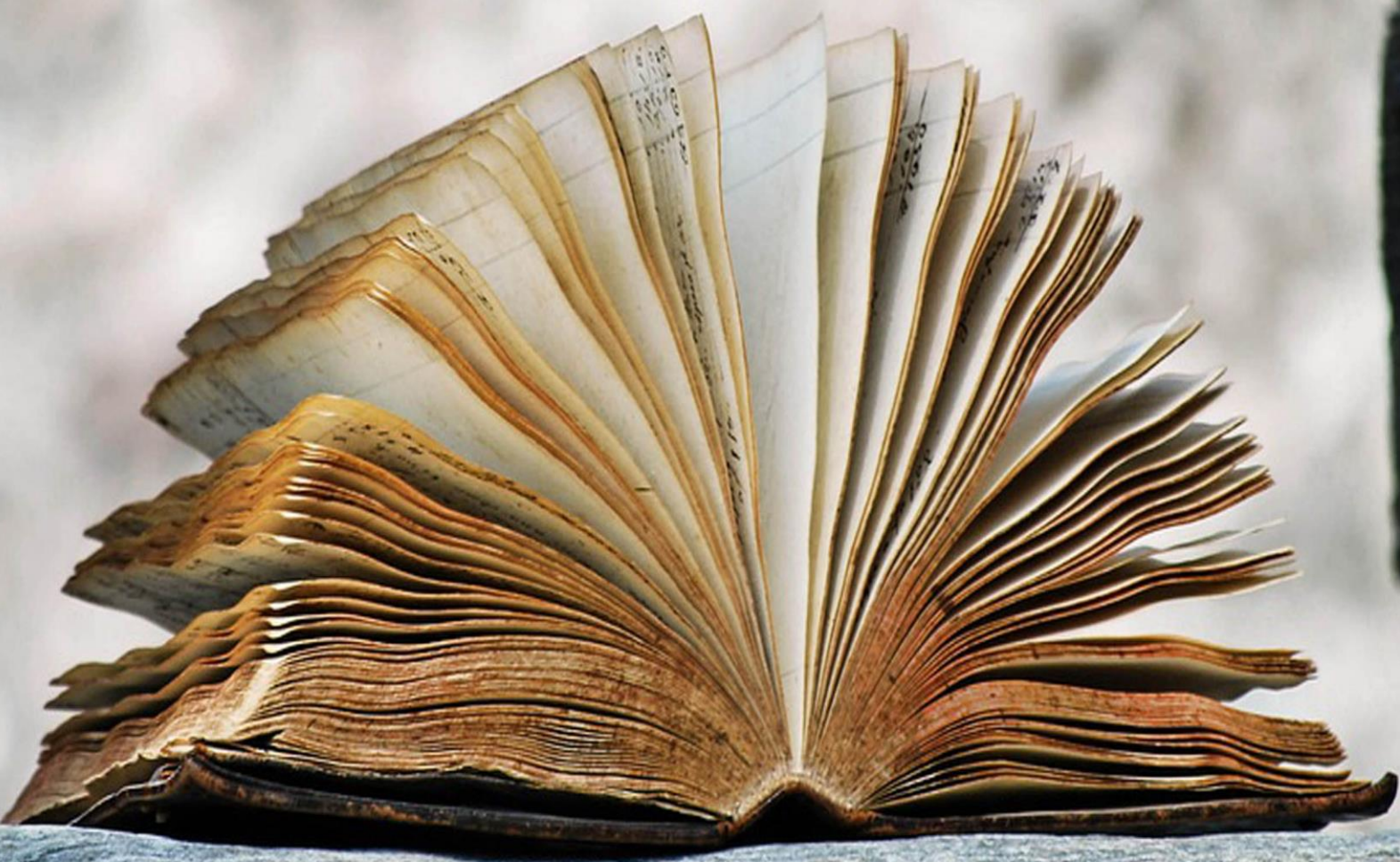
Where it's headed

Though the technology is still in its infancy and people are only able to access tRNS by entering controlled trials, Dr van der Groen said its practicality and apparent safety meant there was a lot of potential for a range of applications. "The concept is relatively simple," he said. "It's like a battery: the current runs from plus to minus, but it goes through your head as well. "We're working on a study where we send the equipment to people, and they apply everything themselves remotely. "So in that regards, it's quite easy to use." Scientists worldwide are also investigating tRNS' effects on perception, working memory, sensory processing and other aspects of behaviour, with the technology showing promise as a treatment for a range of clinical conditions. "We're still trying to find out how best we can use it," Dr van der Groen said. 'Using noise for the better :The effects of transcranial random noise stimulation on the brain and behaviour' was published in *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*.



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Firefly Fan Fiction

By The Frisky Firelily

Jayne narrowed his eyes. The bar was near silent, and she was stretched across his lap, trying to look bold when everything in her body was obviously screaming to start a war. Her breathing was ragged, shaky, and despite the calm look on her face, he could feel her heart racing, tattooing a beat across his palm.

He licked his lips.

This was all Mal's fault.

And somehow, he couldn't quite bring himself to be pissed.

Yesterday

Mal grinned as he explained the plan to his dumbstruck crew. "Now I know it's a lil bit on the crazy side, but then again so're we, so I figure it just might work."

Simon finally found his voice, standing at the galley table and pointing an accusatory finger at the Captain. "You want her to be a *whore!*"

Mal rolled his eyes, shaking his head. "Come on Doc, ya know that ain't what I'm sayin'."

He rubbed his temples impatiently, speaking slowly, as if to a very young child. "What I'm sayin' is that they ain't never seen Jayne or yer sister, but they know me an' Zo'. Now Jayne can't cover the whole bar on his own, an' they got people on the lookout fer us, so yer sister is a good bet for backup. If they go in together things're gonna look mighty fishy ta our mark, so we need 'em both inside separately."

Simon's face was a little red at being patronised. "I'm not a moron, Captain." Mal and Jayne shared a smirk that only seemed to irritate the doctor more.

"I understand full well that he'll need backup; what I don't understand is why my 19 year old sister working as a whore in a bar full of criminals is necessary to the fulfilment of your pla-"

"Doc," Mal's voice was sharp. "This ain't the kinda bar that's used ta women goin' in fer a drink. If your sister goes in she'll be noticed in a heartbeat; nice little Core girls don't just stroll into the most dangerous bars on Likure every day, *dong ma?* This'd be fer her protection too."

Simon groaned. "Well why can't Inara do it?"

Inara wasn't particularly insulted by the request; she understood Simon's concern, but she also knew exactly what the captain's answer would be.

Although she didn't think the scoff was necessary.

"Doc, I could feed ya all the usual lines; I'm the Cap'n, my word is law, Inara ain't exactly gonna be believable as a common whore an' yer sister has already shown Badger that she can act well iffen she's so inclined."

His eyes grew firm. "But I ain't gonna say any o' that because you know the biggest reason; yer sister is a damn good lil weapon, an' Jayne's gonna need decent backup in this place. Zo' an' I'll be around an' ready should we be required, but the bottom line is there ain't nobody better to take Jayne's back than yer kid sister."

Simon was silent and Jayne scowled. Being told he needed backup in the form of a 90lb teenager rankled, but he'd seen her shoot before, and given who they were dealing with he knew the Captain was right.

Didn't mean he had to like it.

The girl in question raised a brow, and he was suddenly a little too focused on that purple dress and the way that it clung to her lean frame to remember what he was being pissed about.

At Simon's silence Mal nodded. "Good, glad we sorted that out." He turned to River. "Now, lil 'tross, I reckon yer gonna have ta ask Inara here iffen she won't mind deckin' you out all appropriate. Seems I don't have the wardrobe ta be so accommodatin'."

Inara rolled her eyes but smiled as she stood, gesturing for River to follow her. The youngest member of Serenity was currently wearing that purple dress that always seemed to make Jayne's eyes follow her (though the ex-Companion admitted that since the girl had slashed his chest wearing that same dress maybe the merc's concern was valid).

Jayne stood without ceremony, striding out towards his bunk to do weapons check before the Captain insisted on briefing him all over again. He hated running jobs himself; being the big scary guy who didn't have to interact until violence was required tended to be his *raison d'etre*. Still, Maxwell Ire knew the Cap'n and Zoe, and they needed someone who looked like a criminal to meet with their mark.

Which ruled out Simon.

Still, the idea of going into the den of criminals with the Reader as backup was...disconcerting. Especially since she tended to distract him when she was wearing baggy dresses and stolen shirts, so he wasn't particularly comfortable with the idea of her dolled up like one of the women he was so damn fond of.

He didn't mind having the girl as a second gun hand; truthfully, his back had never been better covered. They worked well together, didn't need much talking with a Reader around, and while she didn't have Zoe's warrior woman presence, she sure gave the element of surprise.

Which didn't excuse the way she traipsed into his thoughts as if she owned the place.

He sighed, wishing for a minute that Book was still around since the Shepherd had an easy way of talking to him that didn't rile him up. He also wished Wash was around if only to get rid of the sadness in Zoe's eyes.

Zoe looked at Mal across the galley table, the two of them alone as the rest of the crew went about their preparations (or, in Simon's case, cleaning the infirmary six times to help deal with his nerves).

The first mate shook her head. "You sure this is a good idea, sir?"

Mal smirked. "Course I am Zo', shouldn't be much trouble at all."

She stood, shaking her head.

Mal hadn't seen the way Jayne was looking at the Reader, and this plan had all the indications of something about to go very, very far south.

Inara smiled as Kaylee trotted into her shuttle behind River, eager to help. "You even got somethin' that'll look right on her 'Nara?"

The ex-Companion nodded. "Yes. Some clients prefer a certain...flavour to their sessions. Whilst it was never my personal preference, it became necessary to develop somewhat of an...extra wardrobe."

Kaylee tilted her head, eyes sparkling with interest. "Ya mean...costumes?"

Inara sighed but laughed. "Yes, I suppose that's the best way to put it."

At the hopeful look in Kaylee's eye River glared. "Please do not consider copulation with sibling in costume while she is here."

Kaylee had the grace to blush as Inara pulled a chest from under the sumptuous bed, the rich mahogany a reminder of days gone by. No tug at her chest when she thought about her old life; she wouldn't trade all the elegant parties in the world for her crew.

River was standing silently in the center of the room, and Inara took a moment to study her before opening the chest. Slender and pale, though her previously tangled hair was now brushed into chocolate curls. Still no make-up, but she honestly didn't require it; her newfound grip on sanity meant that the medications that had ravaged her system with dark circles and a sickly pallor were no more.

Inara's clinical eye swept over the slim figure, small but supple breasts, narrow waist and lean hips. She evaluated, much like a house madam, and quickly picked up on the best traits to enhance.

She smiled as she opened the chest, reaching inside to pull out the outfit she had in mind. Kaylee's eyes went wide and River swallowed nervously.

Inara nodded. "Yes, this will be perfect."

The bar was crowded, dark, thick with smoke and loud voices. Painted women trawled through the crowds, deftly avoiding the hands of those desperate for a feel without monetary exchange, smiling falsely through hardened masks. The patrons were rowdy, well into their drunken states, games of pool soon to transform into arguments and then brawls.

Just his kind of place.

He adjusted his earwig, knowing Mal and Zoe would be instructing him quietly if need be, relieved that they didn't feel the need to chatter constantly. The lights were low, but his eyes could pick out every face in the crowd, and he thanked his Pa for being tall. He couldn't see Crazy anywhere, but Mal had assured him that she was in position. Inara had pulled some strings, flirting the bar owner into taking on her 'niece' for the evening, and Jayne had grinned at hearing yet another example of Inara's easy manipulation. The ex-Companion was a damn valuable addition to the team.

He spotted the mark and strode towards the table. The heat meant he was only wearing a black t-shirt and green cargos over his boots, but he preferred being unencumbered.

People tended to assume it meant he was unarmed.

He hid a grin. He liked it when people assumed things.

The meeting started easily enough. Maxwell Ire had the lean, hungry look of a whippet, and Jayne recognized another mercenary when he saw one. Only difference between them was that Jayne's job title was clear; Ire was pretending to be a respectable businessman, looking for a cargo transport.

And given the kind of cargo he hoped to transport, he wanted his passage to be just as dodgy as he was.

As the conversation struck up Jayne suppressed a niggling irritation. Firstly, he still hadn't spotted the girl, and secondly, he was starting to suspect that Mal had thought he would blend in for other reasons. Enjoying the company of a whore was one thing, pretending to be a people trafficker was something else, and he made a mental note to have words with the Captain. `Even though they were planning

to dupe this guy, take his cash and set his slaves free, Jayne couldn't help a feeling of discomfort that his Captain thought he'd fit in so damn well.

Itre grinned. "Well, looks like we got a deal Cobb. Reckon we should celebrate."

Jayne fought the urge to sneer, knowing what kind of celebration a man like this would have in mind. As Itre clicked his fingers towards the barkeep Jayne slammed back his whisky, hating this part of the job. He was more than comfortable being a filthy perv on his own time; sharing women wasn't something he found a particularly pleasant hobby.

Itre's eyes lit up at whatever tasty was being called to the table, and he shot Jayne a gap-toothed grin. "Which you prefer Cobb; blonde an' curvy or brunette?"

Jayne turned as the girl's approached the table. The buxom blonde was wearing a skin-tight blue dress that seemed to be made of some kind of leather, artful ringlets falling over her shoulders and overly made-up face. The feather in her hair had wilted slightly from the heady atmosphere of the bar, and Jayne couldn't help but think that on a normal day she'd be exactly what he went for.

The other...

Ma de.

Tousled chocolate curls tumbled around pale shoulders, smoky eyes regarded him carefully, and Jayne felt his mouth go dry. The bodice and skirt were the darkest red he'd ever seen, clinging tightly to the slim frame, pushing up the small breasts until they looked ready to spill over. Lean legs were encased in heeled black boots, the stockings leading up under the skirt, and his fingers itched to find out just how high they went.

Itre grabbed River's arm, drawing her closer, his leer making Jayne's blood boil. "Now there, how old are you sweetheart?"

She blinked prettily, reaching forward to take the already poured shot of whisky from in front of Jayne. "Nineteen." She slammed it back, her face showing no sign of the burning in her throat, and Jayne felt a moment of respect for the Reader.

Short words, little opportunity to tangle her sentences.

Itre grinned. "Well you don't look a damn day over 16, an' yer 'bout as pretty as a peach."

She dipped one finger into the now empty glass, drawing up the last droplets of whisky and sucking her finger into her mouth.

Slowly.

He felt his blood begin to warm, saw the way her eyes flicked to him for the briefest second, and wondered just how much of that little display was meant for his eyes only.

Something flared in Jayne's stomach and he made a snap decision, yanking her arm and pulling her down into his lap. He smirked at Itre. "Ya don't mind, do ya? I got a thing fer skinny brunettes lookin' like jailbait."

Any other man would have recoiled in disgust; Itre gave him an approving nod. "Be my guest Cobb." He gestured to the curvy blonde, who looked slightly put out at having missed an opportunity with the big man.

Jayne struggled to concentrate as he wrapped hands around River's cool skin. He tried to send out an apology, but had no idea if she'd read him. For her part she was doing her best, curling one arm around his back and nuzzling into his neck. Her voice was soft and her breath cool.

"Tread carefully; he has mischief in his heart."

Jayne wasn't likely to ignore a warning like that, although the scent of her was making it difficult to breathe. As Itre's cronies joined the table he kept an arm slung around River's narrow waist, carefully laying a claim in an attempt to spare her embarrassment.

Although he had to admit, his attraction wasn't exactly forced.

The group drank, harassing the serving girls and trying to ply favours from the whores as they delved deeper into drunkenness. If River was put off by the way their hands would occasionally grab for her leg, she didn't show it. Jayne, on the other hand, was finding himself growing more and more tense, not only due to fending off such advances, but from the offensively smooth body currently sitting in his lap. He let them carry on, rowdy and loud, and was getting ready to find them an exit when one of the cronies turned beady eyes to River.

"Ere then Cobb, how's about ya share a lil bit? Ain't like you've taken her for a turn yet."

Jayne glared darkly, a look that tended to make smart men back off quickly.

Unfortunately, his opponent wasn't smart.

Itre noticed the possessive tightening around River's waist and his eyebrow twitched. "You seen the girl before Cobb?"

Jayne growled. "Nope, first time on Likure."

Itre's eyes narrowed, and Jayne saw him smelling a rat. "Seems like yer bein' a might particular bout her. Everythin' I heard says you'd've taken her upstairs for a spin by now. Yer seemin' a mite shy."

He leaned forward, uncaring as the blonde in his lap was jostled. "You wouldn't be tryin' ta play me, would ya?"

Jayne flashed him a cocky grin, silently apologizing to River as he ran a lecherous hand up her slim thigh. "Naw, jus' like playin' with my food afore I eat it." He kept the leer on his face as his heart stopped around where the silky stockings turned to silkier skin.

Itre wasn't convinced, and his right-hand man whispered in his ear. Itre grinned knowingly. "Well then, how's about we get the festivities started?"

Jayne felt his blood run cold. He'd seen this before; animalistic displays designed to put off potential sneaks. Anyone in the slave trade had little issue treating a body like a toy, and the merc knew he was in for some trouble as they leered.

Itre gestured to the barkeep, a serving girl bringing over the tray of shot glasses filled with tequila, wedges of lemon, and salt. Of course. The bar had thinned, and Jayne was acutely aware that they were largely in the company of very dangerous people, all of whom were eyeing him, ready to pounce.

Jayne narrowed his eyes. The bar was near silent, and she was stretched across his lap, trying to look bold when everything in her body was obviously screaming to start a war. Her breathing was ragged, shaky, and despite the calm look on her face he could feel her heart racing, tattooing a beat across his palm.

This was all Mal's fault.

And somehow he couldn't quite bring himself to be pissed.

There was a reason Mal had chosen him for this role, and his Captain was about to see exactly what happened when you sent a lion in with a lamb.

He scratched at his ear, the tiny earwig falling out unnoticeably, and he knew what he had to do. He breathed carefully for a moment, tapping into that dangerous, dark part that had lead Mal to hire him. Tapping into the mercenary, the leering rogue, the man who enjoyed whores regularly. He fought the urge to apologize again, knowing this was the quickest, easiest way to get them both out of here.

He grinned, wrapping a large hand around her slender throat.

"Bout time you boys showed some balls."

Take my love. Take my land.

Take me where I cannot stand.

I don't care, I'm still free. You can't take the sky from me.

Take me out to the black. Tell 'em I ain't comin' back.

Burn the land and boil the sea. You can't take the sky from me.

Have no place I can be since I found

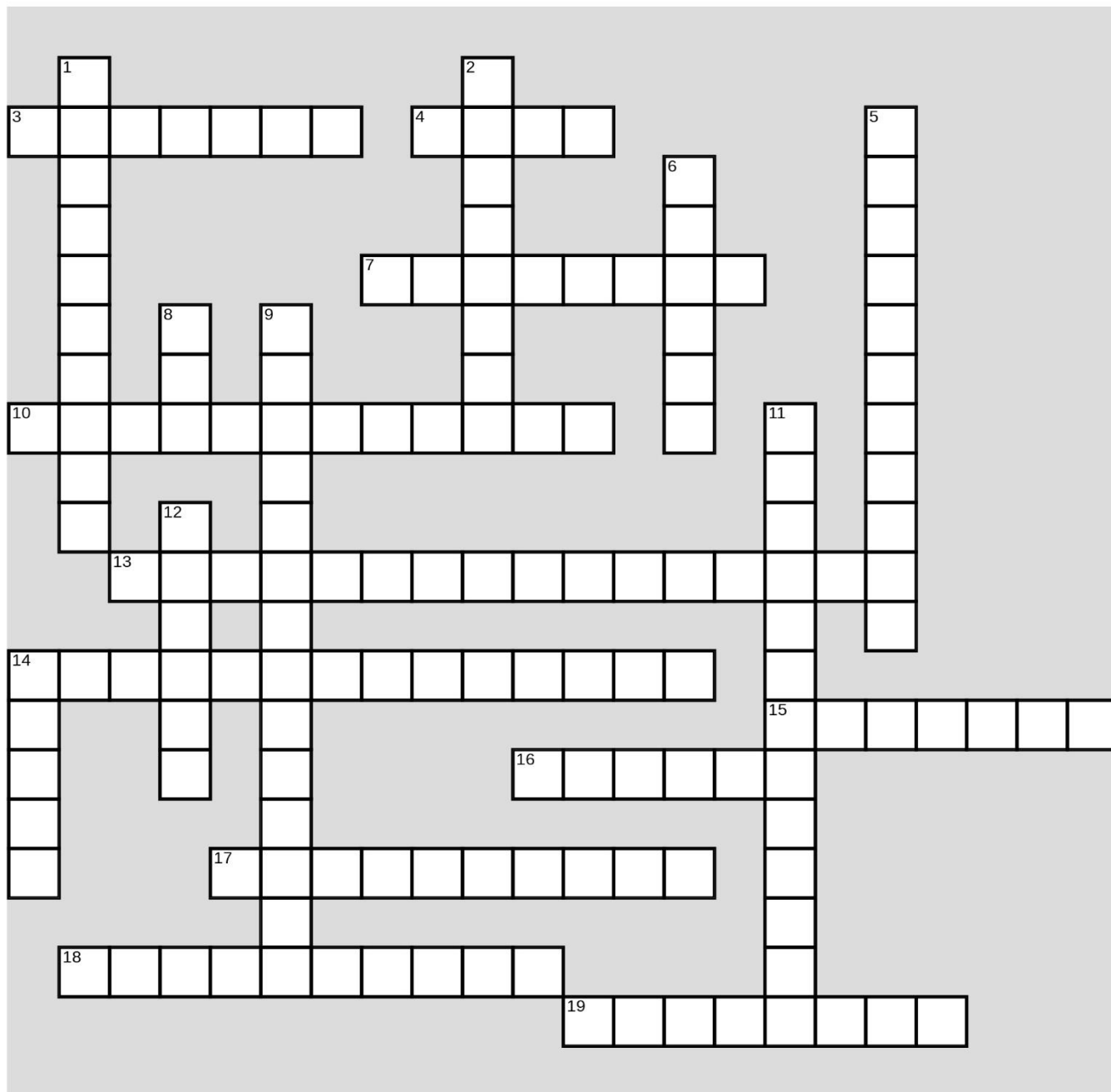
宁静
SERENITY

You can't take the sky from me.

WORD

games

90s Pop Culture Fun



Across

- 3 Name of main character in 90s movie, ____ Gump
- 4 Game that involved using a slammer to knock over game pieces, plural
- 7 90210 hangout spot (2 wds)
- 10 2 wds, name of Homer's blue haired mother
- 13 Popular MTV show, TLR stands for that? 3 wds
- 14 Name of late show host (2 wds)
- 15 Band attributed to making grunge music mainstream
- 16 Rapper prodigy of Dr. Dre
- 17 2 wds, what did the Little Ceasars guy say in the commercials?
- 18 2 wds, original British girl group that promoted girl power
- 19 Name of TMNT master

Down

- 1 2 wds, Nickelodeon game show where participants were punished with slime
- 2 Plural, type of bands that became incredibly popular in late 90's, mostly for pre-teen females
- 5 Company that famously reminded the public "be kind, rewind"
- 6 2 wds, sitcom that featured two FBI agents investigating all things strange
- 8 Term for wearing jeans low
- 9 Show that Claire Danes and Jared Leto get their start on (4 wds)
- 11 (2 wds) Grunge rocker who's music was partially blamed for the violence of Columbine
- 12 First name of notorious Bill Clinton mistress
- 14 Moody, monotone female cartoon character

HBO
max SM

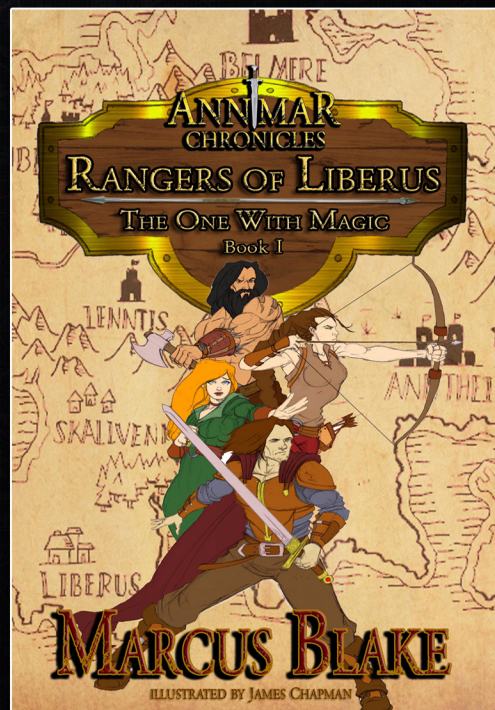
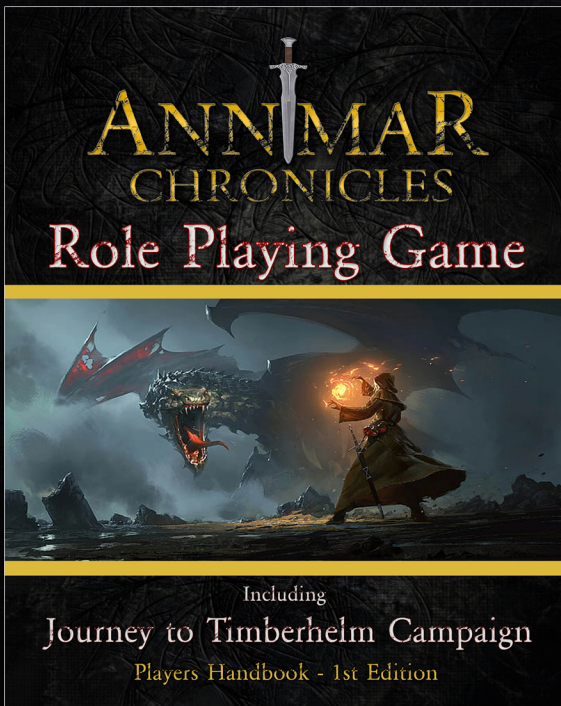


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