

# That Nerd Show



## WEEKLY NEWS



December 19 / December 26, 2021

Vol. 11

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



### HALO INFINITE REVIEW



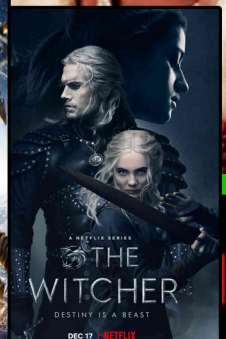
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# HOLIDAY MOVIES THAT SHOULD BE WATCHED EVERY YEAR!



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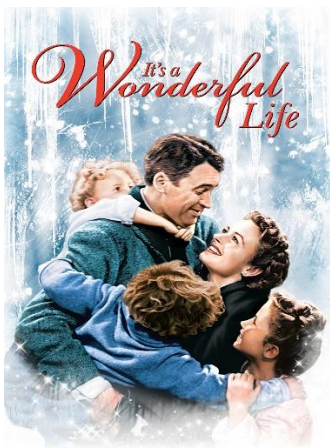


# Holiday Movies That Should Be Watched Every Year!

*There* are certain holiday movies that should be watched every year. Call it tradition, but it's more than that. These are movies that have the perfect theme for how we should all be during the holidays, hopeful, full of joy, and compassionate. Some holiday movies are funny, some are dramatic and inspiring, but fundamentally they are all "feel good" movies that show us the best of humanity. And the holidays are the best time for "feel good" movies. There are many holiday movies that one could watch every year, but here are some of our choices for movies that should be watched every year. Some are traditional and some are definitely not, but are just as enjoyable. Here are some picks from the staff of That Nerd Show and some honorable mentions too. What do you think...should these movies be watched every year!

## It's a Wonderful Life

by Marcus Blake



*To* me there is no greater Christmas movie than *It's a Wonderful Life*. It has the ultimate Christmas theme of "hope" and that everything is going to work out no matter how bad things are in your life. It shows us the true definition of family, which includes friends who will always have your back in your darkest moments. It is the best feel-good movie of Christmas. I know it's cliché to say that this is the best Christmas movie ever, but I don't care. To me it is the one Christmas movie that should be watched every

year and apparently TV networks agree because it plays on at least one or two of them every year before Christmas. The movie is about a man named George Bailey who wanted to see the world and then realized the greatest part of the world was right where he grew up. He wanted to be a rich man and finds out that he is the richest man in the world because of the friends and family who love him. It's the typical Frank Capra movie for the true riches in life are loved ones and at the greatest treasure we can find is joy and passion in all that we do. It may seem farfetched, but sometimes we need that kind of reality to remind us of what is good in life and there's no greater time to discover those things than around Christmas which is a season of Hope. If the movie were made today, then it would probably be a Hallmark movie and that's okay because the themes within *It's a Wonderful Life* still exist today and we still need to believe that everything will work out, that there is hope in the world, and that we are loved by friends and family.



Essentially, the movie is a bit hokey, but that's okay, so are a lot of Christmas movies. But like with every Frank Capra movie we need to feel the things are better than what they really are so that we can be inspired and find hope and what really amounts to a "shit" world. It almost feels like a dream because in reality, things that we see in a Frank Capra movie don't really exist, but they can if human beings would only get out of their own way. But what I do love about Christmas is all our troubles seem to fade away and that's what this movie reminds me of no matter how hokey it really is. Also, it helps that you have Jimmy Stewart who was pretty much Tom Hanks before Tom Hanks ever existed. He's the actor that everybody always liked, a man who was full of virtue and good humor. And I don't think he ever made a bad movie. Now you may

think with a movie like this which became a Christmas tradition that it was a massive hit when it first came out. Unfortunately, it was a box office failure. Of the movies that Frank Capra made, it was his favorite. Jimmy Stewart even once said an interview that it was the favorite of all the movies he made. Frank Capra had always had a hit up until that movie, but nobody thought much of it because it was made right after World War II and the big movie of 1946 that seem to inspire and give hope was *The Best Years of Our Lives*. It's a good movie for sure, but hardly anybody remembers it. *It's a Wonderful Life* didn't really become popular until it started playing on TV every year around Christmas in 1956. Then in 1974, the studio who made the film forgot to renew the copyright and it became public domain thus continuing the tradition of this movie being played on TV every year around Christmas.

Christmas movies are always a little hokey or over the top when it comes to comedy. They're supposed to be that way because they're an escape and help remind us of how life can be good around the holidays. I love all sorts of Christmas movies even the accidental Christmas action movies like *Die Hard* or *Lethal Weapon*, but when it comes to a movie making you feel all warm and fuzzy inside, there is no better movie than *It's a Wonderful Life* and two generations later we still watch it every year. I remember the first time I watched this movie when it was being played on TV with my grandparents and my mother or watching it with my other grandparents and my father. It was the one Christmas tradition we can all get behind. The movie is heartwarming, it's funny, and like I said before, it has the greatest Christmas theme, hope. I admit, I have a bit of a Shangri-La moment each time I watch this movie every year that the next year is going to be better. Sometimes it is and sometimes it's not. But when I watched it in 2020 during the pandemic, it really did make me believe that 2021 was going to be better and for the most part it has been. We find inspiration in many things and for me around Christmas, it's this fantastic film. And now that I've watched it again this year, I'm already looking forward to next year and I think it will be a better year than the previous two. Yes, it's like a Hallmark movie, but a much better than a movie where we get some ridiculous romantic scenario and somehow love always works out. *It's a Wonderful Life* is more meaningful because there's a lot more truth in knowing that the greatest treasure we can have is

the love of friends and family who will always be at our side and our darkest days, and that will always be better than millions of dollars. That's a great Christmas theme and that's why we need to be reminded every year when It's a Wonderful Life is on TV every Christmas.

## A Muppet Christmas Carol by Aclairc Ambrosio



**There** are plenty of timeless classics out there when it comes to Christmas movies. Many of these holiday films are more celebrated than others. My favorite happens to be a film that is cherished as one of the most accurate versions of a classic tale, if you're going line-of-line and are... well, okay with people being replaced by strange mice, pigs, frogs, and whatchamacallits... Yes, I'm talking about *Jim Henson's The Muppet Christmas Carol*, starring Kermit the Frog, Gonzo the Great, Rizzo the Rat... oh, and some unimportant human guy named Michael Caine. Noted for being one of the most faithful adaptations to date, Gonzo the Great plays as Charles Dickens, the author, and recites much of the novel line for line. There are some obvious differences (such as there being two 'Marleys' in the form of the muppet critics Statler and Waldorf), but all-in-all, it is a faithful and fun version of *The Christmas Carol*. Why should this become part of your holiday movie checklist? Simple enough: it's *The Muppets!*

But maybe puppets seem too childish or the humor isn't for you. It is still a charming version of a beloved Christmas classic. There are tons of Christmas Carols out there, from movies to holiday episodes of favorite shows. However, not many have faithful retellings, fun songs in between, and have star-studded casts (even if some of them are made of fabric). There is plenty of humor in seeing Kermit playing Bob Cratchet and Miss Piggy being his violent, overbearing wife. The muppets crafted for the spirits that visit Scrooge are unique to the film and not part of the usual Muppet-verse, and fit the descriptions that novel gives very well. In fact, *The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come* is given a rather terrifying rendition—even for a Muppet. Give it a watch this holiday season if you haven't already.

The Muppet Christmas Carol is currently streaming on Disney Plus!



## Christmas Vacation by Alex Moore



**Right** around the same time I was considering "Creepshow" as a personal favorite in the Horror genre of film, I also became aware of a movie that might have already been considered a classic in its own right, but for the sub-genre of Holiday films: 1989's "Christmas Vacation." Throughout the 1980s, John Hughes had become something of an icon for many moviegoers. He was not just a memorable Director, but, also, a notable Filmmaker, in a much broader scope. Hughes had the same involvement in all three of the "Vacation" films, enlisting himself as the Screenwriter and Producer, but stepping aside to allow someone else to direct them. Of course, the original of the '80s trilogy is a classic in so many ways, albeit a shining example of a movie that has aged somewhat poorly due to all of its outdated humor. I have never been a big fan of the direct sequel, "European Vacation," but there are some who have an appreciation for it. However, the third installment, which is really no vacation at all, is the one I keep revisiting, almost every holiday season, but why? Is it possible that my early teenage years just happen to be the most

enduring, when it comes to nostalgia? Sure, that's a possibility, but in hindsight, I have some other ideas... Think about the first two "Vacation" films. From the outset, if someone were to ask you what those movies are about, you could sum it up with a simple sentence about travels to exciting destinations, here and far away. In other words, they are movies which are driven (no pun intended) by their story arcs.

"Christmas Vacation," on the other hand, is less about the story and more about the characters WITHIN the story. Therefore, it is unique to the rest of the trilogy in that regard. Are their plot points throughout? Yes, there certainly are, but when you think back to what you really remember most fondly about this film, it is never about what is happening in the story and ALWAYS about what is happening to the characters and what they are saying and so forth. By the time I first watched "Christmas Vacation," I had already seen the majority of the Holiday classics from up to that point. Do I still watch "A Christmas Story?" You bet I do. Still, there is something different about that example versus this one. What is it? Well, as much as I enjoy dark humor, for a Holiday movie, that can be difficult to swallow for some audiences, which is probably why it was not a big hit when it first arrived to the theaters. So, in that way, the advantage, to me, goes to "Christmas Vacation." Is it any coincidence that the opening title cards of "Christmas Vacation" bare a similarity to "Creepshow?" What I mean is that they both utilize animation, though not exactly in the same way. Say, they even share an actor in common! Throw in a cheesy, but catchy title song AND a star-studded cast ranging from the elderly on down to the youthful and you have the recipe for an all-time great!... for what it is, anyway.

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## The Holiday by Beth Currier



the Holiday

If you love romantic comedies with heart, this is the Christmas movie for you. The Holiday has a great cast with Kate Winslet, Jack Black, Cameron Diaz, and Jude Law with a plethora of phenomenal supporting characters. In this film, the two lead characters Amanda (Diaz) and Iris (Winslet) are both down in the dumps from love. They connect through a vacation service and decide to swap houses for Christmas, with Iris heading to Los Angeles and Amanda heading to Surrey. While in their new environments, Iris and Amanda discover the last thing they expected: romance. The Holiday is chock full of great comedic moments, but that is what usually happens when you have Jack Black. He plays the character Miles who meets Iris in L.A., and they form a friendship that blossoms into much more throughout the story. Their romance is given a push in the right direction by Arthur Abbott (Eli Wallach) who is a legendary Old Hollywood screen writer. Arthur is Amanda's neighbor, he and Iris hit it off instantly and form a beautiful friendship. Six thousand miles east, Amanda meets Iris's brother Graham (Law), and they quickly form a romantic friendship, both letting someone in for the first time in many years. The Holiday has humor, and it has heart. You cannot help but smile as you watch it with a soft, warm feeling. This is an all-around feel-good film, with romance and comedy at Christmas. A must watch!

## DIE HARD

BY K. SCOTT COOPER



Die Hard is Christmas! All jokes, pokes, and upset religious folk aside Die Hard is a Holiday film that does have a solid Christmas message for all to enjoy. Now if you aren't familiar with the storylines of Die Hard or Die Hard 2 most of the points I am about to make will probably zip right past you and they should because you are a puppet person that needs to go watch these films behind the back of your holiday overlords. But both films have Bruce Willis playing hard ass cop John McClane that takes the names of some serious bad guys, while saving lots of good ones.

Now both films do take place on Christmas eve and gives any victory declared by John to be a flat out Christmas miracle, barefoot and half-dressed John McClane takes one hell of a beating during the first film Die Hard as he frantically fights terrorists trying to steal some serious cash at his estranged wife's work Christmas party, John only wanted to fix his marriage for Christmas and his kids, but has to rip glass out of his feet and nearly get blown up three times to save the day and his marriage. It has all the hallmarks of your classic struggle of good and evil, truth healing old wounds, terrorists falling from extreme heights, and friendship saving the day. While all the bad guys die horrible deaths, along with questionable FBI agents, and a greed little weasel named Ellis who gets a coke and some lead for his shift ways. So, there is very much a message her folks, its just not for the kids. Die hard 2 is every airline traveler's nightmare thrown into a crazy holiday spin, set again on Christmas eve, John has to save his wife Holly from Terrorist again and some corrupt U.S. Special Force types, while also preventing airplanes dropping out of the sky and prevent another big nasty Terrorist from being set free. Again, McClane gets his ass kicked within an inch of his life, but the Christmas miracle comes in for the win. Well after he had to throw a guy through a jet engine, but what it comes down to is that both films share this similar tone and similar messages. So, while the kids may enjoy some happy holiday cartoon and all the softies watch Hallmark, Die Hard is for us that has ice water running in our veins and deep down we still wanted to be touched by the holiday spirit.



## White Christmas

by Allison Costa



A couple of years ago I decided to share "White Christmas" with my 7 children. Most of them were young at the time and I worried that they might hate it. Its my favorite Christmas movie and I just wasn't sure they were ready!! It's a movie from a bygone era and it doesn't have all of the flash and glitz of modern day Christmas films. It's not based on Santa or Elves and it's definitely not a cartoon! It's a musical with some of the all time greats—Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, Rosemary Clooney and Vera-Ellen. The message is one of love, service, selflessness and duty to both country, friends and family. These are not ideals held by many these days and they often bring controversy.



It's a story of devotion, hard work, and love. Old fashioned morals and values and tons of comedy and wit. All attributes that I cherish and want to instill in my children. I grew up watching musicals with my father. I have special memories attached to many musicals because of these times with my dad, but "White Christmas" is still a powerful reminder of all that is good and true. My children sat mesmerized the entire time!! They laughed at all of the clever jokes and dialogue and were intrigued by the many nuances and musical numbers. Recent years have seen

comedy take on a flagrant approach to humor focusing on body humor and sexual innuendos. White Christmas is clever and witty and has humor that is appropriate for all levels.

But most importantly I love the story it tells of helping those in need who were once there for you. We all fall on hard times and seeing the selfless gift that they give to their Major is so beautiful that it renews the Christmas Spirit for everyone. It's a timeless classic that even younger children can feel and adore! It will always hold a special place in my heart and I hope to be able to share it with my grandkids and great grandchildren!

## Gremlins by Violet Ravotti



*Gremlins* is a playful, fun-loving, nostalgic Christmas movie for me to watch every year. It's a cute, Steven Spielberg-produced horror-comedy from the 1980s. The Mogwai, Gizmo never fails to cheer me up with its adorable, inquisitive curiosity. The dark plot, snowy aesthetic, and chaotic adventure make for an enjoyable, wonderfully festive movie. The Gremlins conjure an image of the eastern European folklore - Krampus, in that they are similarly devious and terrorizing quite like this fellow horned counterpart. It's debatable whether Gremlins is a Halloween or a Christmas film. It's always felt like an offbeat Christmas film to me though since Gizmo was purchased as a Christmas present to Billy from his dad, and the whole plot of the movie is based around Christmas. When we first dive into the intro of this film, we are greeted with a flurry of Christmas cheer, décor, and festive music.

There is a strong feeling of the connection and support of family, which resonates throughout the film. There are also notes of bravery, greed, debauchery, and kindness. It was impressive how unswayed Billy's mother was. She was a real trooper, jumping into action and preventing the gremlins from taking over her

kitchen and using all her nifty kitchen gadgets at her disposal. The dark, mischievous glee of Mogwai leader, Stripe and the procession of gremlins, truly unrelenting troublemakers, is both a startling and horrifying sight. I was in awe of how very dire and quickly the Mogwai propagation situation escalated throughout the film, until peace was ultimately regained. The ridiculous bar scene where their quantities have multiplied to an extreme proportion is especially memorable. The situation has become out of control, and the gremlins are behaving belligerently in the bar, with paramount debauchery. Because with great power comes great responsibility, sometimes you must be careful and throw caution to the winds. Especially when guidelines are given – in this case, it was just three simple rules: don't get them wet, no food after midnight, and no sunlight exposure. I guess I see why they turn into gremlins when they eat after midnight – it's not healthy to be eating so close before bedtime. The gremlins caused chaos over the town on Christmas, as they wreaked havoc and caused endless terror and destruction everywhere they went, representing the sea of chaos that can result when you don't take great responsibility seriously. Overall, a lively Christmas horror tale treat and a true delight to watch. But there are rules for a reason. For you must be careful with the gifts of nature.

## 8-BIT CHRISTMAS IS THE GAMERS "A CHRISTMAS STORY"

"THE NEXT GREAT CHRISTMAS CLASSIC"

BY MARCUS BLAKE



There's a lot of holiday classics that we watch every year and one in particular that deals with getting that perfect Christmas present. If you are a child of the 80's, you grew up with *A Christmas*

*story*. You also grew up with such films as *Christmas Vacation* or *Home Alone*. And yes, *Elf* is the perfect Christmas movie, but we've never had a gamer's Christmas Story. We've never had a movie that dealt with the struggle of gamers getting a brand-new console and what they had to go through to find one when every store seems to be sold out. Well, now we have that movie in *8-Bit Christmas* and the setting couldn't be more perfect. Set during the 1980s when kids were struggling to get a brand-new Nintendo Entertainment System, that's right the original Nintendo. Even though it had come out in America about 1985, it still wasn't a popular gaming system until about 1988 and that was the year when more systems were produced and more kids wanted it, which led to huge shortages in store during the holidays. I know this because I lived through it, and I was one of the lucky ones to get an original Nintendo that year thanks to a loving and scrappy mother who I'm still convinced had to fight other mothers at a Walmart to get me the perfect Christmas gift. So, I can honestly say that for a gamer, the new Christmas classic will be *8-Bit Christmas* because it is about the struggle of 10 and 11 year olds, trying to get a Nintendo and living in a town where it seemed like only one kid had one. But there were shortages and of course there were evil parents who thought video games rotted children's brains and would stop at nothing to deprive kids of a Nintendo Entertainment System. Yes, there were those kinds of parents who convinced the other parents that video games were bad. We don't talk about that nowadays, but it was a real fear in the 80s, the equivalent of crazy Christians thinking that Dungeons & Dragons and fantasy role-play was of the devil. Yeah, it sounds like something like that would never happen, but you had to be there. Just like they say in the movie, "It was the 80's, things got real!"

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But yes, *8-bit Christmas* Even if it's not as good as other Christmas movies will be a Christmas Classic, I'm convinced of that because it's a movie especially for gamers. The best way I can describe the movie is it's a mixture of *The Goonies*, *The Wizard*, and *A Christmas Story*. I'm not even going to say it is as good as other Christmas movies, but it doesn't have to be. It's



just a fun movie and if you've ever played video games or got a new console for Christmas, you will appreciate it especially if you've played video games since the Atari era. I've been there since the beginning and remember how cool it was to have an 8-bit gaming system. I think the movie is fantastic, I cannot wait to watch it again and it is brought to you by the same studio that made *Elf* so you know it's a heartwarming tale and you will laugh. Of course, there's the all-important Christmas message that family is more important than getting a new gaming console. Yes, that's true, but also just as important is the adventures we had as kids when trying to get that new console or some other toy. We would plan a special ops type mission to get what our parents wouldn't let us have by pooling our allowance together just so we could afford to buy something we would all have to share and then hiding it from our parents if we needed to. You know, something that the *Goonies* would do. I think as we get older, we forget that some of the best times we had in our lives is when we were kids and the adventures we had with our friends. To me that was the best part about this movie because, I feel like I would have done what they did if my mother hadn't gotten me a Nintendo for Christmas. And the Steve Zahn character very

much reminded me of my father who was very frugal to the point of being cheap and would not buy a new gaming system. That's something I would have to earn money for.

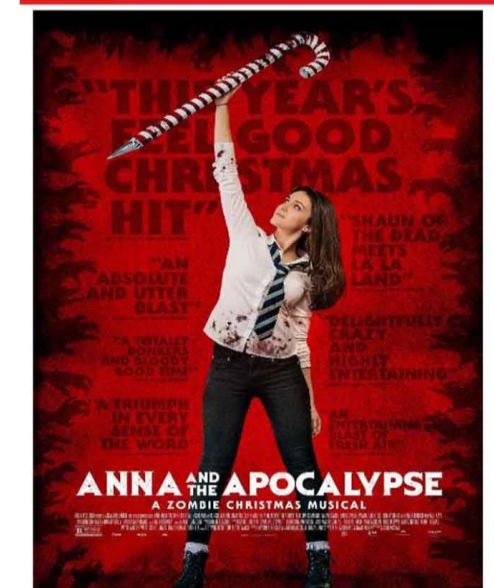
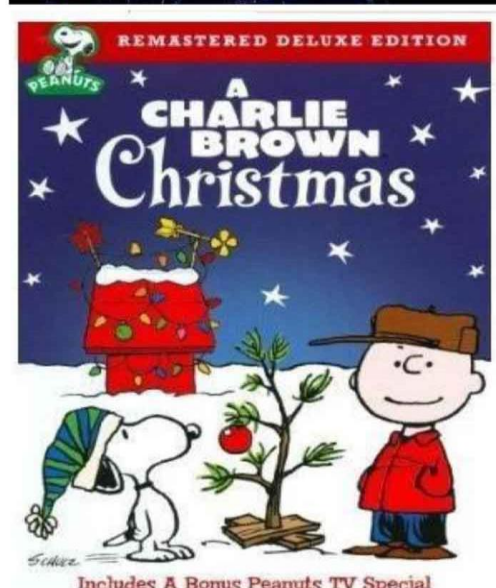
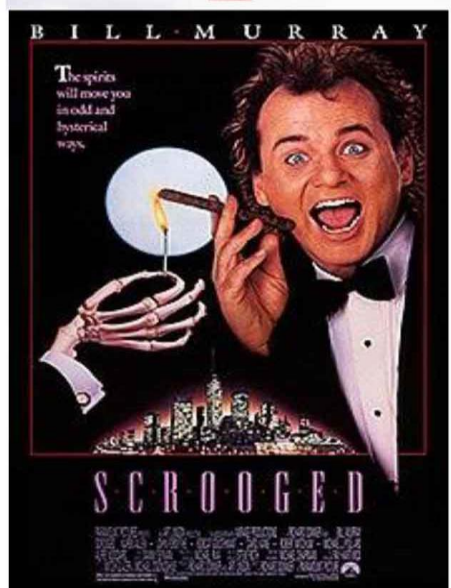
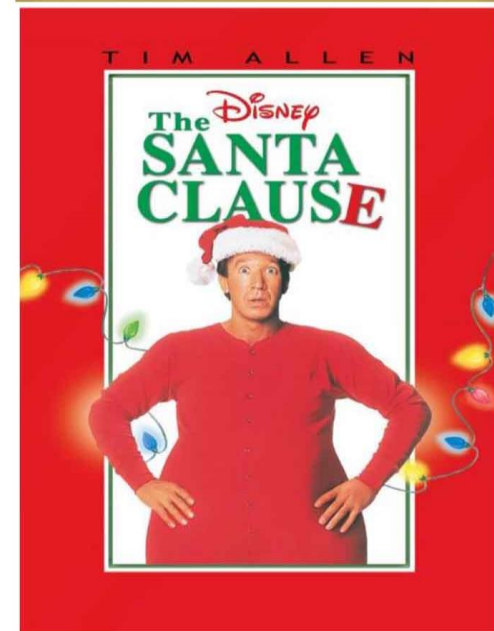
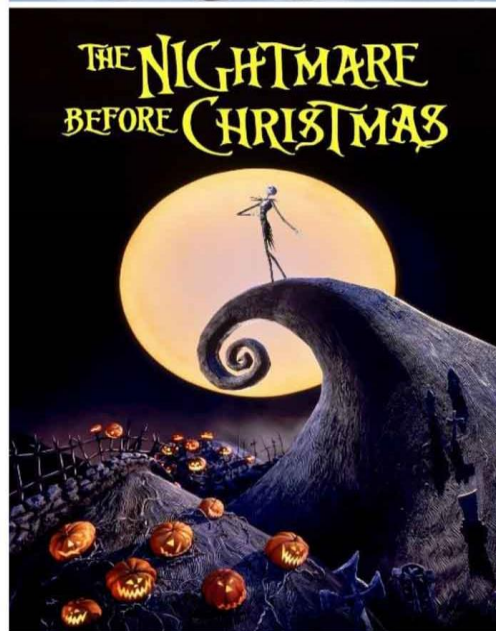
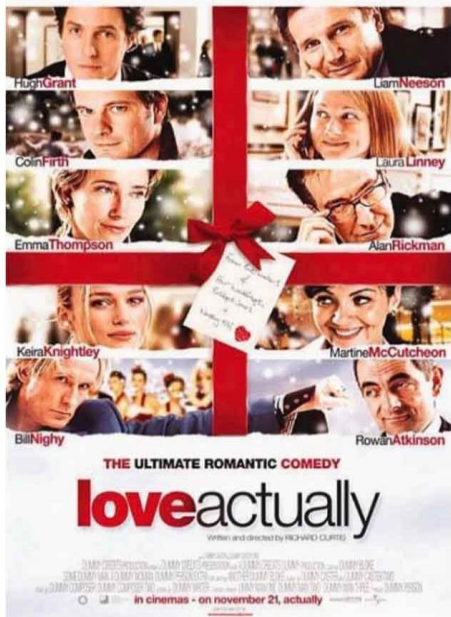
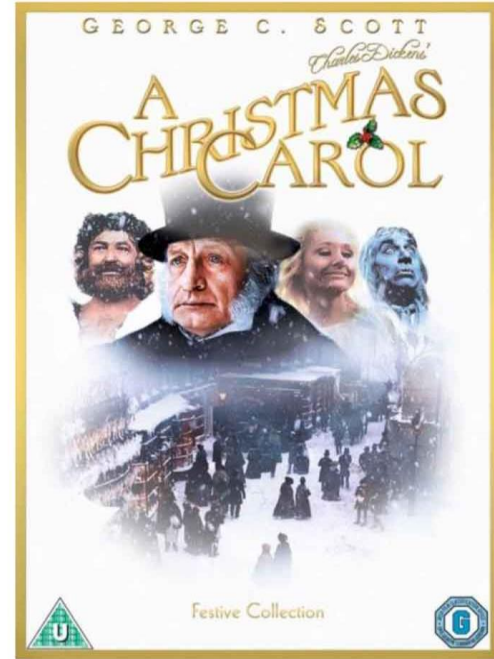
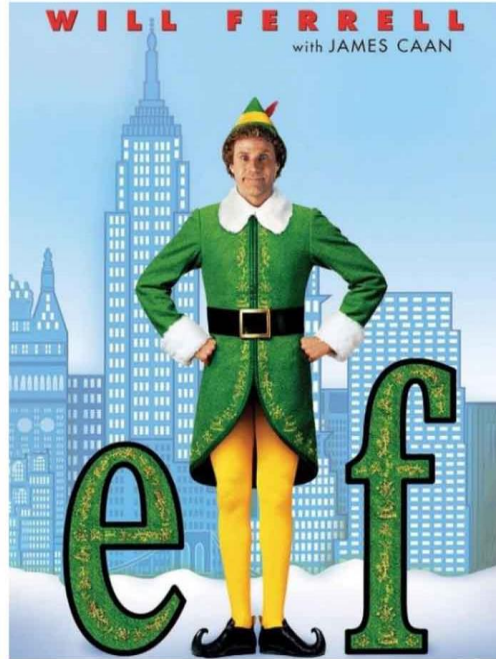
But I do firmly believe this is the next great Christmas classic and maybe that's just the nerd in me because I'm a gamer. 8-bit Christmas is funny and down-to-earth and captures all of those perfect moments of our childhood like playing video games with your friends. It also perfectly captures all the tropes of the 80s with crazy Christian parents who wanted to end the video game industry because they thought it was bad to the shortages stores had on toys like Cabbage Patch Kids and gaming consoles. And my favorite little metaphor was just how awful the Power Glove turned out to be, but it looked cool. When I finished watching the movie, I remembered the year I got a Nintendo, it was 1988 and me and my cousins spent the majority of Christmas that year in the extra bedroom at my grandparent's house trying to beat *Super Mario (NES)* and of course this was before we knew any of the cheat codes and how you could warp to other levels.

Also, my mother was also smart enough to get a couple of extra games like *Tecmo Bowl* and *Ice Hockey*. My cousin and I who have been playing

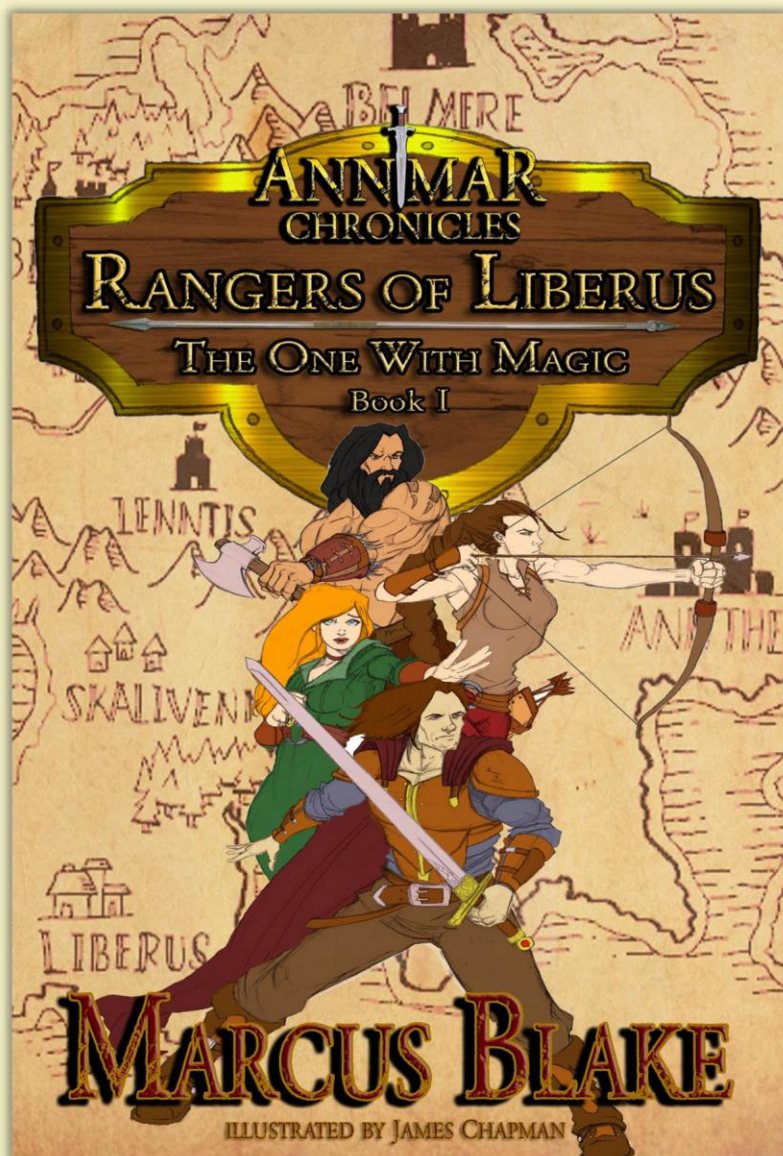
*Madden* since we were kids, first started "duking" it out on *Tecmo Bowl*. There's a lot of movies that are more nostalgic than really being good. If I was a harsh critic of this movie, I probably only give it a 7, but the Nostalgia factor and reminding me of my childhood makes it an instinct Christmas classic for me. If you're a nerd and you're a gamer, I guarantee you're going to watch this movie just like *Elf* or *Christmas Vacation* or *A Christmas Story* for the 50th time. 8-bit Christmas is a gamer's Christmas Story just like *Fanboys* is for every hardcore Star Wars fan who had the idea that they should break into Skywalker Ranch in steel an early print of the Star Wars movie. 8-bit Christmas is the Christmas movie made for every child who grew up in the 80s and played video games. And this movie couldn't have been more well-timed since gamers are dealing with shortages this holiday season on the new PlayStation 5 or the Xbox Series X a year later after they came out. So for the gamers who grew up in the 80's, this is the Christmas movie you watch first before you watch any other Christmas movie.... like I said, it's a gamer's Christmas Story and we definitely need one among all the other Christmas movies we watch every year!

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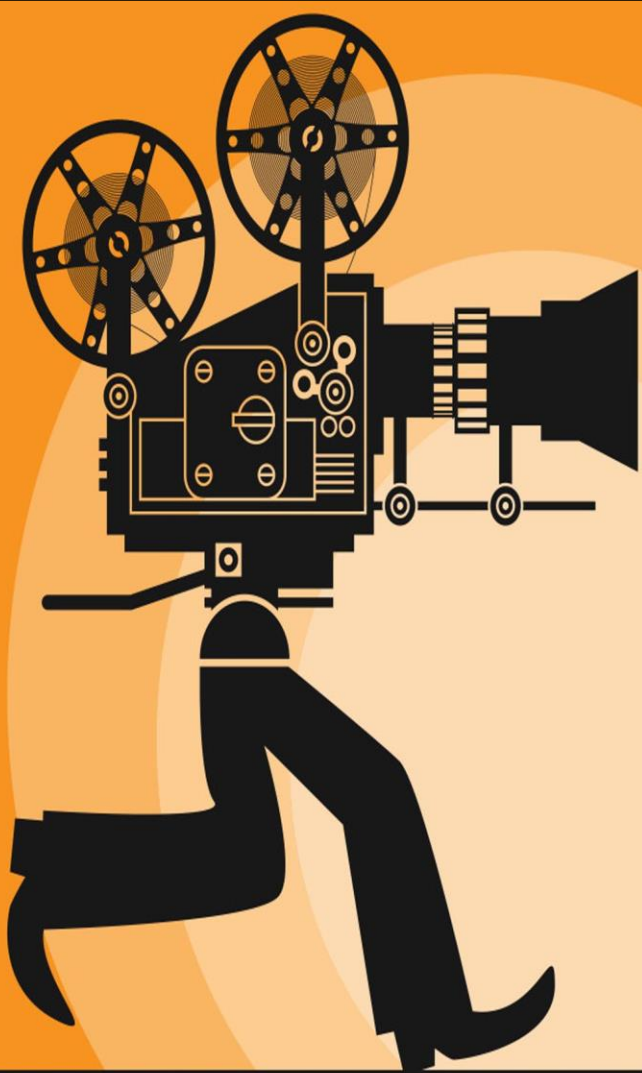
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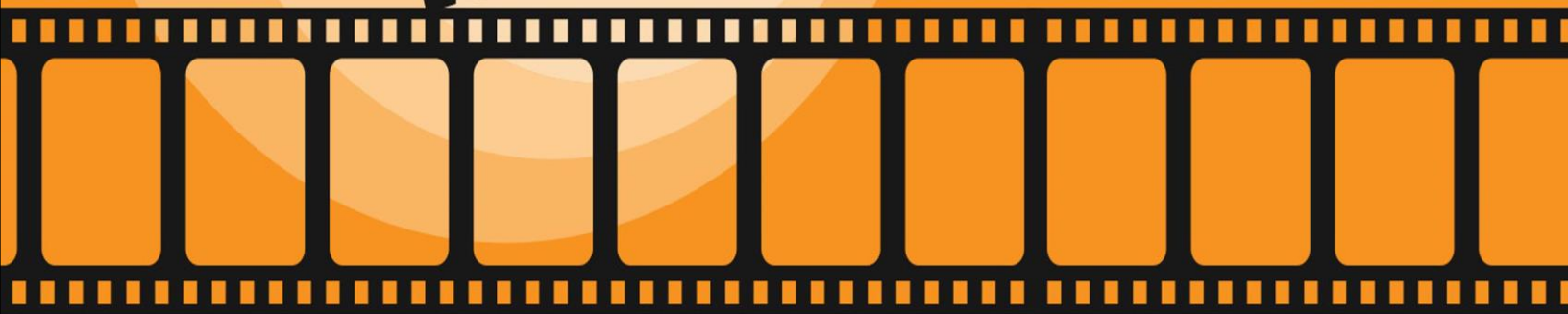
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## Nicolas Cage To Play Dracula In Universal's 'Renfield' Starring Nicholas Hoult



**Nicolas Cage** has been tapped to play Dracula in Universal Pictures' *Renfield*, a monster movie centered on Dracula's familiar henchman starring Nicholas Hoult in the titular role. *The Tomorrow War* director Chris McKay is on board to helm the pic, which is based on an original story outline from Robert Kirkman. Ryan Ridley wrote the script. McKay's producing partner Samantha Nisenboim will be joining the project as executive producer.



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The film will be produced by Skybound Entertainment's film team including Kirkman, David Alpert, Bryan Furst and Sean Furst. In the original *Dracula* novel, R.M. Renfield was an inmate at a lunatic asylum who was thought to be suffering from delusions but actually is a servant of Dracula. Plot details of the movie weren't announced, but it's believed to take place during the present day and is not a period piece. Cage is coming off some of his strongest reviews in some time with the thriller *Pig* and can be seen next playing

himself in the highly-anticipated Lionsgate pic *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*. He is currently filming the western *Butcher's Crossing*.

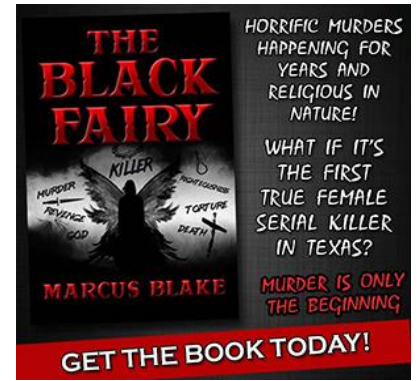
Reported by *Deadline.com*

## Gal Gadot's 'Cleopatra' Pic At Paramount Sets 'Falcon and the Winter Soldier's Kari Skogland To Direct As Patty Jenkins Moves Into Producing Role



**Following** the massive success of directing Marvel series *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, Kari Skogland looks to have found her next film project and will be teaming up with another superhero star in the process. Sources tell *Deadline* that Skogland is set to direct Paramount's *Cleopatra*, starring Gal Gadot. Skogland steps in for Patty Jenkins, who was attached to direct and is pivoting to a producing role. Jenkins fell off as director so she could focus on her next two projects: *Wonder Woman 3* and *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*. Paramount won the rights to the hot package last fall to the biographical drama scripted by Laeta Kalogridis. The film will be produced by Atlas Entertainment's Charles Roven, Jenkins, Gadot and her *Pilot Wave* Motion Pictures partner Jaron Varsano. Kalogridis will be the exec producer. *Cleopatra* is the daughter of Ptolemy,

ancestor of the leader of Alexander the Great's army.



When Rome's ruler Julius Caesar's mentor-turned-rival Pompey fled to Egypt after a brutal war for control of the empire, Egypt became a fixation of Roman rulers. Two siblings battled for the throne of Egypt. After winning that internal struggle by appealing personally to Caesar, Cleopatra had a complicated relationship with Rome, becoming the lover of Caesar and later Marc Antony. The latter alliance would become the undoing of both Antony and Cleopatra. Skogland had been eyeing several properties after directing every episode of *Marvel's The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*. The scope of the series, which played like a *Marvel* tentpole, appealed to execs for what they are aiming for with this film. Her first big break came as one of the key directors on the early seasons of *Hulu's The Handmaid's Tale*.

Reported by *Deadline.com*

## Dave Bautista To Star In M. Night Shyamalan's Next Film 'Knock At The Cabin'



**After** working with big-name directors like Denis Villeneuve and Rian Johnson, Dave Bautista has found his next A-list director to work as the Dune actor is in negotiations to star in M. Night Shyamalan's new top secret pic Knock at the Cabin. Shyamalan will write and direct. Shyamalan will also produce with Ashwin Rajan under the filmmaker's Blinding Edge Pictures banner alongside Marc Bienstock and Steven Schneider. Universal recently dated the film to bow on Feb. 3, 2023.

While his most recent film, Old, involved a large ensemble, Shyamalan has always like to have one or two big movie stars anchoring his films like Bruce Willis, Mark Wahlberg and James McAvoy and given his track record of great scripts stars are always lining up and Bautista was quick to jump at the opportunity to work with the Oscar-nominated director.



Old grossed over \$90M at the global box office, and repped Shyamalan's sixth movie to open at No. 1. Bautista has not slowed over the past year as he continues to star in some of the biggest tentpoles in town that included Dune and Netflix's Army of the Dead. He recently wrapped production on Knives Out 2 and is currently shooting Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3. Besides Knock at the Cabin, he is also expected to shoot Dune 2. Bautista is attached to also star in and produce a Lethal Weapon type action film with Jason Momoa for MGM which won a very aggressive bidding war for the project.

*Reported by Deadline.com*

## MARVEL NEWS: Destin Daniel Cretton Inks Overall Deal With Marvel Studios & Hulu's Onyx Collective; Set For Disney+ MCU Series & 'Shang-Chi' Sequel



**Shang-Chi** and the Legend of the Ten Rings filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton has entered into an exclusive multi-year overall deal with Disney companies Marvel Studios and Hulu's Onyx Collective. The filmmaker is already in development with Marvel Studios on a new MCU series for Disney+. At the same time, Disney has made it official that Cretton is returning to write and direct the previously rumored sequel to Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings. Under the big new overall deal, Cretton will develop TV projects for both Marvel Studios for Disney+ and Onyx Collective across all platforms, including Hulu. Maui-born Cretton will produce through a new production company he is launching with partner Asher Goldstein, named Family Owned. Together they will focus on building a slate of projects in film and TV that highlight the experiences of communities that have traditionally been overlooked by pop culture. "Destin is a powerhouse storyteller with impeccable taste in material.



As we continue to expand our roster, Destin's unique voice will help usher in an exciting slate of content for our global audience," said Tara Duncan, President, Freeform & Onyx Collective. Shang Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, starring Simu Liu, Michelle Yeoh, Awkwafina, and Tony Leung, represents the first Marvel Cinematic Universe movie that is led by an Asian actor, and mostly Asian cast. The film, which opened over Labor Day weekend, is the highest grossing domestic release to date this year with \$224.5M. The movie's Labor Day opening box office record of \$94.6M repped a rebound for the pandemic box office, and encouraged rival studios to keep their event releases scheduled throughout the remainder of the year in cinemas during the pandemic as moviegoers made a point to return.

Worldwide, Shang-Chi has grossed close to \$432M. "Destin is an amazing collaborator who brought a unique perspective and skill to Shang-Chi and The Legend of the Ten Rings. We had a fantastic time working together on the film and he has so many intriguing ideas for stories to bring to life on Disney+, so we're thrilled to expand our relationship with him and can't wait to get started," said Kevin Feige, President, Marvel Studios and Chief Creative Officer, Marvel. There are no details about the Marvel series Cretton is working on for Disney+. At the Disney streamer, Cretton also has American Born Chinese, an action-comedy based on the 2006 graphic novel by Gene Luen Yang, which recently received a straight-to-series order and comes from Disney Branded Television/20th Television. "Working on Shang-Chi with Kevin and the Marvel Studios team was one of the highlights of my life, and I couldn't be more excited about Tara's vision for Onyx Collective. I

can't wait to explore new stories and build new worlds with this community," said Cretton. Cretton's feature film debut, *I Am Not a Hipster*, premiered at Sundance in 2012, and was followed by *Short Term 12*, which won the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at the SXSW Film Festival in 2013, featuring early performances by Brie Larson, Lakeith Stanfield, Rami Malek, Kaitlyn Dever, and John Gallagher Jr. His third movie, an adaptation of the New York

Times best-selling memoir, *The Glass Castle*, starred Larson, Woody Harrelson, and Naomi Watts and was released in 2016 by Lionsgate. Following this, Cretton directed *Just Mercy* for Warner Bros, the adaptation of the New York Times best-selling memoir by civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson. The film starred Michael B. Jordan, Larson and Jamie Foxx with the latter receiving a SAG nomination for Best Supporting Male Actor. Onyx Collective

focuses on curating premium content by artists of color and underrepresented voices. Cretton joins the brand's already-announced roster of prolific creators, including writer and comedian Natasha Rothwell (*Insecure*, *SNL*), Prentice Penny (*Insecure*), and all non-Marvel titles produced by Ryan Coogler's *Proximity* (*Judas and the Black Messiah*, *Black Panther*).  
reported by [deadline.com](https://deadline.com)



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# MOVIE REVIEWS

## SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME Review by Chloe James



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

Twenty years, two reboots, two actors, four MCU phases, and a few giant corporate acquisitions later, we've come to this point. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* might seem like just the third entry of the MCU Spiderverse, but anyone keeping up with what happened in the last one knows that this isn't going to be any ordinary, villain of the week fair. After Mysterio exposes Peter Parker's (Tom Holland) identity as Spiderman to the world while simultaneously

framing him for his death, things get...messy. As you could imagine, mass media attention combined with unforgiving cancel culture has made life a living hell for not only Peter, but his girlfriend MJ (Zendaya), aunt May (Marisa Tomei), and ever loyal best friend Ned (Jacob Batalon). Seeing no other way to fix his life, Peter turns to his local wizard acquaintance, Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) to magic his way out of his troubles. Unfortunately, the spell Strange conjures to try to make everyone forget that Peter is Spider-Man goes a bit wrong (totally Peter's fault) and now some familiar faces from other Spider-Man universes begin to appear.

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

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First off, I'm actually surprised on how well balanced everything feels. We have a great deal of focus on Peter and his friends, yet somehow a surprisingly great amount of focus and development from everyone else who showed up on the way. (Again, not going into specifics.) I just felt an incredible amount of closure was achieved in a short amount of time—closure in many cases, I've been wanting for years. As is the case when multiverses collide, we're also treated with some very interesting dynamics between cross dimensional characters that we've

never seen interact (but have always wanted to!) I'm sure many super fans will have a differing opinion, but I felt very little opportunity was wasted when it came to how these interactions went down. From his first appearance, Tom Holland has been my favorite Spider-man. He's just everything I look for in a Peter Parker. And while I think Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield had wonderful qualities in their own rights for the roll, Holland strikes a perfect balance between the two. Holland has always shown great performances within the MCU films, this one really tested his abilities, and I think he's really achieved something amazing this time around. As for Zendaya, I guess it only took her being in almost everything lately for me to finally admit, I do enjoy her, especially as the ever sardonic MJ. Ok, he's in the trailer, so I'm aloud to talk about this: Alfred Molina is back as Doc Ock and I'm literally screaming with joy about it. He was one of my favorite villains from any of the Spider-man franchises, and I'm happy to say, my opinion hasn't changed. Visually, well it certainly better be as stunning as it was, having one of the largest film budgets to date. Of course everything was beautiful. Can you expect anything less from an MCU film, especially one guaranteed to be popular? As to be expected, anything heavily involving Dr. Strange will not only be stunning but very trippy to view as well. I continue to really love the way magic looks in this universe, and this is coming from a fantasy nerd.

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

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

# Matrix Resurrections

Review by Marcus Blake



It's time to go back into the Matrix, but should we? That's the one question I kept asking myself after seeing Matrix Resurrections and did this movie need to be made! Probably not, but as we did learn in the Matrix trilogy, The Matrix had been rebuilt before and to answer an even bigger question, what really happened to Neo after Matrix Revolutions. Well, we have our answer with the latest movie and while this might be a bit of a spoiler, I'm sure you have already figured out because we have a new Matrix movie that yes, there is a new version of The Matrix and therefore a new version of "the one." Now, I'm not saying this movie is bad. If you're a fan of the Matrix movies, then you will like at least some aspects of this film. It's nostalgic and fun, but don't think in any way it compares to the original Matrix movie that borderlines on perfection as a Sci-Fi movie. There's lots of familiar faces in this film and there's a lot of throwbacks to The Matrix trilogy, enough to keep you entertained and perhaps even enjoy going back into the Matrix, but we could have easily done without the film. Honestly, we only needed the first three movies to tell the story of the Matrix. However, sometimes nostalgia gets the better of filmmakers and they want to revisit their greatest achievements...that's what Lana Wachowski did.



In this film we find a new version of The Matrix set many, many years after the events of Revolutions. Trinity and Neo are pretty much Legends and we find the characters again back in a new Matrix questioning reality... new matrix, same old story. Now, the new Matrix is a bit different and how they make the current reality is actually a pretty cool concept involving video games, which leads us to asking the question of whether Neo and Trinity were ever really free to begin with or did their reality just change from system to system. It's a great way to introduce these characters again, the same way that DC comics can constantly reboot their characters because there's Infinite Earths with different versions of the same characters. I admit that it was great to jump right back in with Neo and Trinity. It's like Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Ann Moss didn't really lose a step. But I don't know if they really gave us anything new that we hadn't seen before except by giving us a different version of what we had seen before. You know, it feels new, but really, it's the same. The new Matrix is simply praying on our nostalgia for the first three movies, you know kind of like Disney did with Star Wars, but does it really deliver. To an extent, yes, this movie delivers by giving us a new Matrix story that makes sense for the most part because it's a new version of the Matrix, but on the other hand, the best action scenes were in the first three movies and this one, feels kind of a letdown in that regard. I'm not saying it's a bad film, it just feels familiar and doesn't give us anything new to a matrix story than what's been explored before especially knowing that there will be a new version of The Matrix and a new version of "the one." The best part of this film are the performances of Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Ann Moss and with newcomers like Neil Patrick Harris who plays the creator or the architect of the new Matrix. Jonathan Groff plays a new version of Agent Smith and as good as his performance is, he's not as compelling as Hugo Weaving. The performances make this movie work, everybody is pretty good and will keep you entertained especially if you're a Matrix fan.



The bad news for this latest incarnation of the Matrix series is it tries to recapture the same magic from the other films. Sometimes it does, but mostly it falls flat especially with the action scenes. The action always seemed smooth no

matter how over the top it might have been in the first three movies. The pacing was good which also made the story smoother as well. I can't really the same thing about this Matrix film. The action was good and felt familiar, but it was also kind of choppy and as if the filmmakers were trying to cram too much into the story and make it feel familiar. Nostalgia is a powerful thing, but it can't always tell a good story. It takes a little while to get to the heart of this Matrix story when Neo is free again. At least in the first film it didn't take us long before we were off to the "races" and it kept us on the edge of our seat. Part of the problem with Matrix Resurrections is it takes too long to catch the audience up about what happened before and to introduce us to the new version of Neo trapped in this latest version of The Matrix. The pacing isn't quite there in this film and things don't really ramp up until about the second act. But I suppose this movie is made for those who may not have seen the first three films and need a crash course on the Matrix's origins. However, this film shouldn't be made for a new audience who has never seen the Matrix movies, it should be a film for those who have been a fan since the beginning. The biggest problem of this film is it just doesn't live up to the trilogy especially the first Matrix film when it comes to the action and the mystique of the original story. There just isn't anything new that would make us come back again. And although it was great to see Jada Pinkett Smith reprise her role as Niobi from The Matrix movies as the older patriarch of the resistance, all her character did was connect us to the previous films. However, we already have that connection through Neo and Trinity.

At the end of the day, it's a film that probably shouldn't have been made. It relies too much on nostalgia and doesn't have the same philosophical depth is the original films. It's nice to see Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Ann Moss back again, but that's not enough to make a great Matrix film, that's on par with the trilogy. It's the equivalent of visiting an old family friend and reminiscing about old times without giving you anything new. It was nice for this film to answer the question about what happened to Neo after Revolutions. It was nice to see a new version of The Matrix with new technology. The concept of the new Matrix is good even if the delivery is not what it could have been. If you are a fan of the Matrix movies, this new movie is entertaining and fun. It's a good movie to see on the big screen, but it won't give you anything new that you hadn't seen before. Essentially, it's a 2-hour movie that seeks to answer some lingering questions from the trilogy, but we didn't need a 2-hour movie to answer those questions. I am by no means disappointed with the movie, but it's not great or something that I would run out and go see. You can easily stay home and watch it on HBO Max, and still get the same enjoyment from the movie. Matrix Resurrections is fun and nostalgic, but doesn't want to keep me coming back for more. Maybe

this film just serves as a long-awaited epilogue to The Matrix trilogy and that's fine, but that shouldn't justify making a new Matrix movie. That's what nostalgia is for and that's why we have a new Matrix movie. That's good enough to make it an entertaining movie, but not necessarily a great movie as in the case of the first Matrix film. That's the one that will stand the test of time and Matrix Resurrections will just be that fun movie you watch every once in a while. It's okay, but nothing more!

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

## The Unforgivable

Review by Danielle Butler



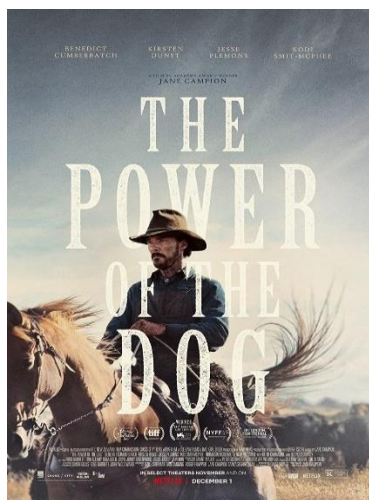
The Unforgivable is intense, gripping, and painfully human film. The 2021 drama is directed by Nora Fingscheidt and written by Peter Craig, Hillary Seitz, and Courtenay Miles, based on the 2009 British miniseries Unforgiven written by Sally Wainwright. The movie begins with the release of Ruth Slater (Sandra Bullock) a woman who has finished 20 years in prison for murder. The story starts with Ruth's new beginning but unfolds the past. Bringing to light the vastly different family dynamics of those still reeling for that day as we uncover what happened twenty years ago. This film showed a little about reformatory justice and how challenging it is for certain criminals to reenter society. Showing how housing, employment, and reputation has present problems and barriers. The heart of this movie is about family, the love we have for those we love most, and the choices we make to protect them. As we follow Ruth Slater through her new life after prison, the movie reveals the many characters, families, who are also affected. The family of the police officer who was killed (Tom Guiry and Will Pullen), the family who adopted Ruth's sister Katie (played by Richard Thomas, Linda Emond, and Emma Nelson), and the family currently living in the home Ruth and Katie had lived in together (Vincent D'Onofrio and Viola Davis). Another notable actors W. Earl Brown,

the officer who was killed, Rob Morgan who plays Vincent Cross Ruth's kind parole officer, and Jon Bernthal who played Blake, Ruth's coworker, and companion. "You bought me a jacket? Why?" Asked Ruth. "Well just so you'd be warm." Said Blake. Sandra's performance is outstanding. The flashbacks reveal a younger Ruth and honestly, she still looks fantastic. You could've fooled into thinking I was watching a Sandy throwback like *Practical Magic*, *Hope Floats*, or *While You Were Sleeping*. Although we typically think of Sandra Bullock in iconic comedic films like *Miss Congeniality*, *The Proposal*, *Ocean's Eight*, and *The Heat* she has also shown her talent as a chameleon in dramas such as *The Blind Side*, *Bird Box*, and *Gravity*. This leading lady dissolves into her character and her performance as Ruth in *The Unforgivable* does not disappoint. She humanizes a woman who is known to society as a cop killer. My favorite scenes are the heated conversations between Ruth and Katherine (Katie's) parents (Richard Thomas, Linda Emond) as well as her argument with the bold and beautiful Viola Davis (the current homeowner of the farmhouse where chaos took place 20 years before.) The characters in this film are painful and intricately woven into the fabric of each other's lives. The movie revisits the moment these character's lives changed forever and acknowledges there is no escaping the past. Only the option to face it. The plot thickens as the movie picks up momentum and intensity, but you won't find any spoiler alerts here. I will say I would have liked to see how certain truths were revealed or played out however, it a brilliantly cruel way the writers leave a lot to our imagination's. I would rate this movie a 7 as it was fairly predictable, but nevertheless a riveting tale of a woman trying to make good.

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

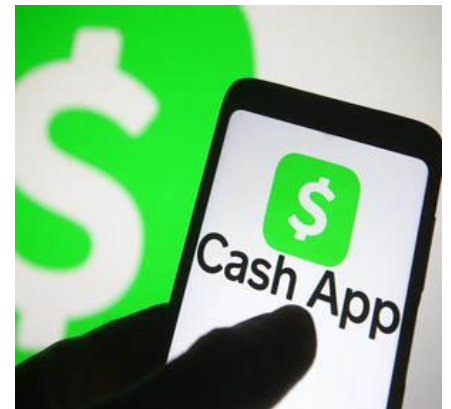
## The Power of the Dog

Review by Alex Moore



Last year, I watched a movie on Netflix, named "The Devil All the Time." It took place in rural America during the World War years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, it was a well-acted, well-made film that mostly kept my attention, throughout. My expectations for Netflix movies has steadily begun to rise and that film was a part of that ascension, for me. I would be lying if I said, though, that 2020 was a stellar year for movies. Thankfully, 2021 has been an improvement. As you might be aware of, this is that time of the year when nearly all of the big studios are attempting to push out the Oscar-baited titles and award-worthy material for the upcoming trophy season. Netflix is, now, in the running, and likely will be for years to come.

I brought up the film as I did for one reason: I was reminded of it just moments into watching "The Power of the Dog," the latest Netflix original, directed and written by Jane Campion ("Bright Star"), who, also, helped to produce this project. I would like to add that this is the first time she has done all three of those things for a feature-length presentation. Keep in mind, this movie was based on the material of a 1967 novel, going by the same name, which was authored by Thomas Savage ("A Strange God," 1974).



Western motifs are certainly not something new for American audiences and many fans have developed in all corners of the world, as well. You can see that just by looking at whom was involved with this particular story, alone: a New Zealand filmmaker, an English actor for the top billing in the cast and a mix of Australian and Canadian producers, just to list a few examples. However, the United States has maintained the top spot in creating stories and products for Western lovers and why not? It originated here. So, what originality can still be brought to the table? I aim to find out!...

Right away, "The Power of the Dog" reminded me of 2007's "There Will Be Blood." I think that this is really a more fair comparison, compared to my previous mentionable. You see, the story takes place in the early 1900s and the setting is that of Montana, with a heavy air of something foreboding. Overall, the music is stress-inducing and depressing in nature. So, why

do I get such a different experience here, compared to “There Will be Blood?”

I thought about all this and concluded that it had something to do with the acting, coupled by the direction. I happen to know that Benedict Cumberbatch (“1917”), who played Phil Burbank, is capable of showcasing great charisma on the big screen, but he showed a lot of restraint, here, and I think it might have hurt the underlying atmosphere of the tale being presented. Alongside Cumberbatch was a familiar and solid cast, consisting of: Kirsten Dunst (“Woodshock”) as Rose Gordon, Jesse Plemons (“Jungle Cruise”) as George Burbank and Kodi Smit-McPhee (“2067”) as Peter Gordon, among a handful of other, familiar faces. Rose is a widowed woman who runs a café and quickly develops a drinking problem, while her son, Peter, malnourished in stature and awkward around strangers, openly studies medicine and nature. George and Phil enter both of their lives when they come around to do some ranching in the area and one of them marries the widow, while the other continues to keep to himself, until one day, he is exposed by a secret, which seemingly involves the affection for a dead man, named Bronco Henry.

Imagine, if you will, a way of life that has existed since the early days of Biblical chronology, but has only, recently, become much more acceptable to most people around modern society. Whether you agree with that lifestyle or not, you have to at least admit that it could not have been an easy thing to live with in 1925 America, be it in the public or the private spheres. However, there have always been coping mechanisms for all sorts of conditions... “A man is made by patience and the odds against him.” It is just like a small rabbit being trapped under a bed of sticks, while two hunters await his next move from up above, but let us move on...

It took me some time to really get into the story I was watching. What I appreciated was the positive interactions of at least one, primary relationship, which did not go in the direction that so many stories have, in recent years. However, the most-important relationship of all took a long time to develop and, in my view, lacked any real, emotional expressiveness, or depth, and was partially marred by the atmosphere of the movie, which I mentioned a bit earlier. It is important to understand that the music of a film, whether it be original or sourced, is its own character and it can drown out or upstage the other performances just as much as anyone else being depicted on screen. I felt that a disservice was done in that aspect.

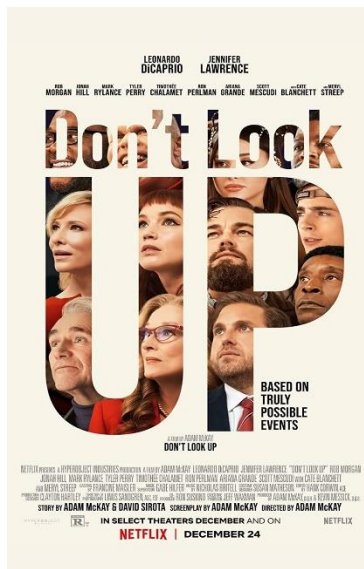
“The Power of the Dog” is not too clear about what its title is trying to convey, but if you watch closely or have any familiarity with the book that it was based on, you probably will not have too much trouble putting the puzzle together. I liked the story, but longed for a more joyful display, even in the midst of melancholy details. In my opinion, a movie such as “There

Will be Blood” did that successfully, so I know it is possible. I would predict that this might not have been the intention at all for those involved with the making of this plot, but if that is the case, then I firmly disagree with the approach. Going by the book does not always translate to a better movie. Just look at the modern remake of “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” as a prime example, compared to its classic predecessor. Still, strong acting and cinematography go a long way and Netflix has certainly adapted well, in that regard. See you soon, little doggies!

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

## Don't Look Up

Review by Marcus Blake



Maybe 20, even 10 years ago I would have said that a satirical movie about an asteroid destroying Earth would probably be in poor taste, but Adam McKay's new film, *Don't Look Up* is a home run. It's the kind of movie we need to remind us of how absurd human beings, especially those in government can really be. It's an extremely funny movie and audiences are sure to laugh, but then probably get dismayed knowing how it really is when it comes to the incompetence of government officials, who don't believe in science while trying to solve a crisis. If you liked the Big Short, which had a satirical and disturbing look about the 2008 financial crisis, then you will certainly like this film and hope that the situation never occurs so that we have to rely on non-scientific people to save humanity. *Don't Look Up* is one of my favorite films of 2021. It's hilarious! It's so absurd that it speaks more truth more than the best documentaries. And the release of this film is perfectly timed to serve as a reminder of how stupid humans can really be. It will end up being one of the best movies, Netflix has ever made.

Personally, I'm a big fan of Adam McKay when it comes to his dark humor. Of course, I've loved every film he did with Will Ferrell that was just borderline stupid like Talladega Nights or Anchorman, these films will keep you laughing, but the dark humor tends to speak more truth and he has a habit of touching upon subjects that not only make us laugh but serve as a warning to humanity to how they can be better. I would even say that *Don't Look Up* is a hopeful movie in the sense that it shows us what not to do and to be better than we really are.



The movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence is about two scientists who find a comet that is going to hit Earth. It's a planet killer and there's no way to avoid it even when government officials want to deny the science and act like it's one big conspiracy. That seems to mimic real life, doesn't it! And although maybe part of humanity could be saved and start over, it's always the stupid government officials that deny science and always have the misfortune of being in charge thus becoming humanity's worst enemy. This movie is almost perfect and gives us a great cast that not only can be serious at the right moments, but can also make us laugh when the situation is so absurd. And I have to admit, this is one of Leonardo DiCaprio's best movies because he's not so over the top that his character is annoying. Everything he does seems to be perfectly timed for the situation, that he makes his character sympathetic. He lets the fame of being one of the scientists who discovers the comet go to his head to where he does things he never thought he would do like having an affair. But even when he's over the top in this film, it's perfectly timed, but you believe in this character without being annoyed. I never thought I would actually like Meryl Streep playing a President who's utterly stupid and unlikable, but then again, it's Meryl Streep and has she ever really done a bad role. She was great in this movie. And Jonah Hill deserves credit for playing the nitwit douchebag son of the president. Not only is the movie good, but the cast makes it better. I found myself constantly laughing at these little subtle jokes that just made me laugh at the absurdity of humanity. And as I mentioned before, this field really is kind of a mirror too what we had to deal with during the Trump administration and why it's important that we

actually have people in charge who believe in science. Just like Adam McKay's, *The Big Short*... Everything seems to work in this film and will keep you laughing until the end, even when dealing with the tragedy of the situation. At the same time, like a perfect sarcastic joke, *Don't look Up* dispenses more truth than we see in storytelling.

Now the film isn't perfect and very rarely is any film perfect. But I have minor complaints. This is a movie that I would definitely watch again. In fact, I think it's a movie that needs to be watched more than once by people. But if there is anything to really complain about then I would say that it's the misuse of its cast. There's no denying that Adam McKay found great actors for every role, but as a director, you have to let your great cast be the great actors they're supposed to be. I'll start with Tyler Perry. Wonderful actor, wonderful writer, and even his worst movie is still entertaining. He brings a lot of charisma to the big screen, but I felt like his role could have been done by anyone as he plays a self-indulgent TV host that doesn't care about anything else except his own fame. It's really a minor role for somebody like Tyler Perry, and while I'm glad to have him in this movie because I like him and everything he does in film, I feel like the role is too minor for somebody like Tyler Perry. The same goes with Melanie Lynskey, who plays Leonardo DiCaprio's wife in the movie. She's a fabulous actress. Not only is she extremely funny, but as someone who's had some great dramatic roles over the last 25 years. To reduce somebody like her to a simple housewife that doesn't really have any strong moments until she confronts her husband about his affair, that's a role that anybody could do, and you should allow somebody like her to do more on the big screen. Or maybe you should just watch her in *Yellowjackets* on Showtime where she's allowed her full potential as an actress. I understand how some actors want a small cameo in a film, but if they're supposed to be a major character that helps steer the story, then give that character more to do and don't waste the talents of your cast. Honestly, I wish that I had seen more from these characters because of the talented actors you have playing them. It's just a waste of their talent in this movie, although when they are on screen, they make the scenes better.



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Overall, this is an incredibly funny film by Adam McKay. It is the perfect definition of satire and definitely makes you think, unlike his previous comedies. With a great ensemble cast, Adam McKay delivers another poignant satire and commentary on our society, especially about the people we choose to represent us. We should demand better from our elected officials, especially when it comes to intelligence. I don't know if anybody will win an Oscar for this film, but *Don't Look Up* is poignant and keeps laughing right until the end. It's a great movie to go see in the theater, but it's a perfect movie to watch over and over again on Netflix. I feel that you will probably have to watch it more than once to catch all the jokes. Some movies try to be too satirical and absurd that they're largely forgettable. But this movie won't be because it is the perfect critique of humanity and no matter what tragic circumstances they fall upon us, I think this film just reminds us that we have to laugh at the absurdity that is life itself when humanity is in control. Somebody once said that the greatest tragedies are comedies... *Don't Look Up* fits that definition to a "T" and that's why it's a movie that everyone should watch.

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

## ENCOUNTER

Review by Julie Jones



*Encounter*, the next great movie for Amazon! And Riz Ahmed shines just like he did in his last movie on Amazon, *Sound of Metal*. While there are plenty of movies that try to recreate what films have done in the past, they tend to miss. However, sometimes someone stumbles upon it and makes it a different take on something we loved that feels like something we can love again. And this just might be it.

*Encounter* is a movie about a Marine who tries to save his sons from an alien invasion

where anyone could be an alien. That's probably the scariest scenario of all, kind of like a terminator who looks like a human. While they are on the run, they try to figure out more about the invaders and end up finding out more about themselves as a family in the process because as with all good storytelling, the real journey for characters is the journey into themselves. The film does a good with this and it makes the characters more compelling.

The aesthetics of the film aren't anything new, but there is some good mood manipulation in the color palette and audio. While the frames aren't artistic, there is definitely good framing and direction. It isn't anything noteworthy, but it definitely doesn't suck. It works great for a Sci-Fi film without being too stylish or suffering with too many lens flairs as if JJ Abrams was directing the film. The acting is ok, for the movie they were making. Don't get me wrong, the performances are good and the film has a great cast. I doubt they intended it to be Oscar-worthy, but Riz Ahmed is always worth watching and gives it his all. As I said, he shines in this movie. There were a few moments where I couldn't help but roll my eyes at some of the absurdities in the film, but only a few and that's saying a lot these days. I feel like we all do that in any film we see these days.



The storyline is ok. It isn't anything new, but the film is worth watching on Amazon. You won't see any new ideas or twists, but *Encounter* is good. Overall, the movie is ok. It is somewhere between *Independence Day* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which I guess can be considered a compliment because both of those movies are fun to watch so you can say they're good. If you get bored and need something to watch while you cruise your phone, it's a good option. But, I wouldn't get your hopes up or invest a lot of time in it like the film is going to change Sci-Fi for the better. It's not that kind of movie and only so many Sci-Fi films can be almost perfect. I would give it a seven and a half, but we don't do that here. So, eight it is. Yes, *Encounter* is a good movie and certainly made better by the performance of Riz Ahmed.

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

# Being the Ricardos

Review by Marcus Blake



Anytime Aaron Sorkin writes or directs a movie, I know it's at least going to be okay, if not good. I know the dialogue is going to be fantastic because there's nobody better at writing dialogue and that's certainly what we got with *Being the Ricardos*. Aaron Sorkin's latest project is taking on a biopic about Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz during a very chaotic week of the *I Love Lucy* Show. It's no small task to take on a project about Lucille Ball and what a comedic genius she was. It is certainly no small task to play the character as Nicole Kidman brilliantly did.

Admittedly, I was not a fan of her casting, but by the end of the movie, her performance grows on you and you realize that she does a fantastic job, especially with the physical comedy. I can't say that it's a perfect movie and any great director would have their work cut out for them with a project about Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, but Aaron Sorkin delivers a signature writing and directing performance that do the characters justice, especially with all the behind the scenes stories that we have only heard about and sometimes chalked up to rumors. I knew this film would be at least entertaining because Aaron Sorkin wrote it, but I honestly didn't expect much from the film and I must say, my expectations were exceeded by the brilliant performances of the cast, the fantastic writing, and all the little nuances that went into recreating an *I Love Lucy* episode... I honestly felt like I was there!

The film isn't so much a biography of the *I Love Lucy* show or even Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz's marriage. This particular story centers on one very chaotic week during the *I Love Lucy* run where Lucille Ball was accused of being a communist. In the early 1950s, being labeled a communist ruined your career, today's equivalent of the MeToo movement. They didn't even know if that week's episode would be allowed to air at the end of the week. But you do get flashbacks within the film of how Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz met and fell in love. You do get flashbacks

to where their careers started and how a radio show would be the genesis of *I Love Lucy*.



But the real story is how Lucille Ball faced the acquisition that could have ruined her career while also dealing with the first proof of her husband's infidelity. It has always been widely known that Desi had many affairs and even justified some of those infidelities with "they were just hookers" and didn't mean the same thing. There are many points in the life of Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, and the fantastic show they created which Aaron Sorkin could have centered on, but it's interesting to pick this one week where the show and their careers hung in the balance. I think for Aaron Sorkin who's no stranger to tackling politics in his writing looked at this as the pentacle of their careers because the accusation could have very well destroyed both of them in Hollywood and that's really saying something considering the *I Love Lucy* show was pulling in 60 million viewers every week. So this makes for a very compelling story and that's one of the many reasons you should check this film out. I will say that the heart of this film is really the brilliant performances. Javier Bardem really does nail it as Desi Arnaz right down to his charisma as a bandleader along with singing and dancing and playing the conga drums. But I also praise the performances of Nina Aranda, who played Vivian Vance and JK Simmons, who absolutely nails it as William Frawley, they portrayed the actors who portrayed Fred and Ethyl on the *I Love Lucy* Show. However, the most surprising performance is that of Nicole Kidman as Lucille Ball. She is not the ideal choice to portray such a comedic icon, especially someone who can do all the great physical comedy that Lucille Ball was known for. Nicole Kidman is a fine actress and there are lots of things that she does well. I'm not so sure that she was the right choice, but I found myself loving her more by the end of the film and especially how she captured all of the facial expressions and quirks of Lucille Ball. By the time you see them actually filming that particular episode *I Love Lucy* Show, you can definitely see the greatness in her performance, it takes a little while to get there, but even though it may not be an Oscar winning performance, Nicole Kidman should be

praised for her performance. Like most of Aaron Sorkin's projects, it is the performances and the delivery of his snappy dialogue that really drives this film. It's not perfect by any means, but it is entertaining and will keep you wanting to know more about these characters.

What does it work for this film is I think it's hard to understand what kind of film it's really meant to be. What is its true narrative? It almost feels as if Aaron Sorkin was cramming some large story arc from *The West Wing* into a 2-hour movie. Is this movie mostly about how Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz got together to create *I Love Lucy* or is it meant to be more of a political statement about how these iconic characters from the 50s took on a communist accusation? As much as I like the film, I found myself feeling like they were trying to do too much. I wonder if Aaron Sorkin is better at writing a series than a 2-hour movie, but then again *Molly Bloom* and *The Social Network* are good enough films because it gives you snippets of the characters' journeys and how it all fell apart for them. We kind of see that happening with this movie. The narrative is not nearly as focused as it should be. Honestly, it feels just like a really good 45-minute episode of *The West Wing* or *The Newsroom* and the entire backstory is just extra stuff to give us a full movie. Maybe it really just comes down to the right editing or maybe this is something that should have been a limited series, but the film in a lot of ways is trying to tell too many stories in a short amount of time and that often happens with great writers who take on big stories and try to fit them in less than 2 hours. Sometimes it doesn't work that way and you need a limited series with four to six episodes to tell a great story. I've talked about this before in other reviews. There are a lot of questions that remain unanswered even when they resolve what happens to Lucille Ball and the accusation. A proper explanation isn't telling us what's eventually going to happen with these characters by giving us a few snippets of text at the end of the film. Like I said, they're trying to tell too many stories in a 2-Hour Film. That's really my biggest complaint. I want to know more, and I feel like it should have been four or five episodes as a limited series to tell everything that they were trying to tell with this particular part of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz's life.

However, I'm not giving this movie a bad grade. As I said the performances make this film worth watching on Amazon. Nicole Kidman will completely surprise you by the end of the film even if you still don't think she is the ideal actress to play Lucille Ball. Maybe there is someone who could have done it better, but that doesn't take away from how good Nicole Kidman really isn't this film or the rest of the cast. Aaron Sorkin's flair for snappy and comedic dialogue is prevalent in this movie, he definitely wrote a masterpiece when it comes to such a great comedic icon like Lucille Ball. He certainly gave the cast a lot to work with to make their

performances outstanding. If you are an Aaron Sorkin fan, you'll definitely watch this film. But even if you're not and are looking for a good drama about Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, and it doesn't get any better than this film even with all the stories being told within it. But one of the brilliant things that Aaron Sorkin can touch upon was Lucille Ball's work ethic about getting the timing and the dialogue right when it comes to great comedy while showcasing everything that went into making the *I Love Lucy* Show because its a show that has stood the test of time. This film is not the best of Aaron Sorkin, but it's not bad. It is highly entertaining and gives the audience a very important history lesson about the entertainment industry. And even though I didn't see it until the end, they chose an almost perfect cast, especially Nicole Kidman, who really does get a lot right when it came to Lucille Ball and her performance as Lucy. Maybe it won't win any Oscars, but it's a film worth watching on Amazon and I'm quite sure you will have to watch it more than once to catch all of the fabulous lines that were written for *Being the Ricardos*.

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



## American Sicario

Review by Chloe James



Mobster movies; they come in a variety of flavors. From classic Italian mafia, to Yakuza, to the Hong Kong heroic-blood shed genre, the inspiration for these films is seemingly as limitless as the actual presence of real life organized crime. In sitting down to write this review, I had to stop and ask myself: "What makes a mobster film, an mobster film?" Is the criteria merely one of the protagonists having to be involved in organized crime? Are they the same as heist films? Are they really that different from noir? If anything, *American Sicario* may have finally given me the answers I needed.

*American Sicario*, (absolutely no connection to the 2015 *Sicario*) directed by first timer RJ Collins, is pretty much literally sums up what it's about in the title: A white, American man Erik Vasquez (Phillip A. Haddad) who also happens to be a Sicario (a Spanish term for "hired killer"). Erik Vasquez is doing pretty good for himself as a cartel in Mexico, despite his "foreign" origins. He's making tons of money, has a beautiful passionate wife (who is pregnant with his child), a loyal crew, and the fear of his enemies. But, it seems even this won't be enough to quench his thirst for more money, power, and reputation as the baddest gangster. When an ambitious drug deal goes south, he soon discovers the risks of ambition.

Yup, quite typical gangster film plot. But hey, even the most overdone plots can be brilliant if executed well and with an original flare, right? Well, I hate to say it, but American Gangster doesn't exactly have that going on for it either. Unfortunately, there was no point in the film that I felt like I saw anything new. Confession of someone with a weirdo mind: the first half of this movie, I had to keep myself entertained by imagining this as a sitcom, as Erik the main character really looks like a stereotypical sitcom dad. It oddly worked, as I imagined laugh tracks between him bantering with his sassy wife, trying to please her former gagster dad (played by the legendary Danny Trejo), dealing with the wacky hijinks of his lovable underlings, and hoping to impress his superiors. I would legit watch and greatly enjoy the "American Sicario" sitcom I created in my head as I sat through this!

Sadly, the second half didn't leave me much room to imagine it as a sitcom anymore, as it divulged in the normal Macbeth tragic downfall. I would in fact describe this as "Macbeth marketed to the *Fast and Furious* crowd." And that may be why this movie didn't exactly work for me. The writing, while not absolutely egregious, spells out everything a little too much. While I appreciate call backs to previous lines and plot points, this movie lacks any subtly in the way it went about it. Every other line seemed to exist to remind me that "Family is the most important thing!" or "Over ambition will be your downfall!"

Really, not much about this movie was really bad, per se. It just lacked anything that made it

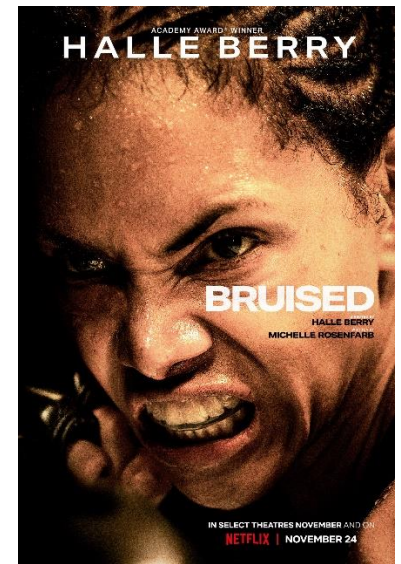
good. But at least it gave me one "eureka" moment. The one thing that connects all mobster films together they are the pure embodiment of mania. Mobster films create a mood of brief joy, heightened energy, and inflated self-esteem. Ok, I realize these are the side effects of all the coke they always show them doing, but it still thematically stays the same. Coke or not, all main protagonists in these movies seem to be in the same manic state, only being stopped by their inevitable tragic downfall. (Could it be said that all noir films are categorized by depression? I'll have to explore that more another time.)

Sad to say, I didn't love *American Sicario*. It was just a little too hallow, basic, and lacking in subtly to leave much of an impression. And if I have to pretend that something is a different genre to get more entertainment for myself the first time I watch it, it's not a good sign. But hey, at least it still made me sit down and think about what I like about mobster films, and that's worth something, right?

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

## BRUISED

Review by Marcus Blake



Halle Berry makes her directorial debut this month with the feature film, *Bruised*, which premiered on Netflix and yes, it's one that you should check out. The film is not bad for a first-time director and someone who cast themselves as the lead so I want to start this review by giving "props" to Halle Berry for making a good film her first time in the director's chair even if it's not perfect. The story centers on a former MMA fighter who, after going undefeated has a panic attack and loses a big fight that brings her world crushing down as she was one of the top female UFC fighters. Her life is in shambles. She's cleaning houses for a living and deals with a terrible manager and boyfriend who essentially is

ruining her career, while at the same time having to be a parent to a 6-year-old boy that she gave up. Halle Berry shines as a UFC fighter. You can definitely tell, she put in a lot of work trying hard to look the part. The action scenes were incredible and made you feel like you were in the cage with Halle Berry. I don't think it's the best movie ever made about UFC fighters, but certainly, a gripping story that makes you watch all the way to the end so you see what happens with his character, especially her shot at redemption in the cage.



There have been UFC movies before, movies about Fighters looking for another chance that can't help but inspire the audience. When I think of those kinds of movies, I always go back to *Warrior* with Joel Edgerton and Tom Hardy, a great movie that will bring tears to your eyes by the end. *Bruised* is not that movie, if you like *Warrior* then you will like this movie, but you'll also realize that where is the better UFC story. That's okay because *Bruised* doesn't have to be as good to not be as gritty and emotional. I definitely enjoyed this movie and love what Halle Berry did with it. Not only did she shine through her physicality as a UFC fighter, but she does make you feel for her character who seems to have been wronged in life at every turn and uses MMA as a way to escape her circumstances. The cast is wonderful and she has a Rocky-esque quality to it, but at the same time, it does have a feel of a perfect movie for Netflix, something you probably wouldn't go to the theater to see unless you just wanted to see the action on the big screen. Half the movie is about the main character trying to reconnect to her son especially if she tries to get him into school and doesn't know how to do that and then the relationship with her trainer if she is given a title shot where everybody thinks she's going to lose. It feels like a familiar story and like we have seen this before in sports movies, I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but it feels familiar, almost as if it's a recycled storyline, I don't know if it has the same emotional weight as watching *Rocky* or *Warrior*.

Here's what I didn't like about the movie. Sometimes it feels uneven floating between scenes of her trying to reconnect as a mother to scenes of her training. Sometimes it's hard to figure out which relationship is more important,

the relationship with her trainer or the relationship with her son. There are times, it feels unbalanced until it gets to the end of the movie with the big fight, but despite all that, there is a big payoff in the end. The fight is incredible and ends the way it should end. I feel in a lot of ways that ends perfectly and has that awe-inspiring, emotional moment that you're looking for so that you don't think it's just a movie about women fighters. However, it's a movie where you need to cram in a love scene because this movie isn't about the main character finding love again and only to be abandoned again. This movie is about her relationship with her son and getting her shot at Redemption. Love stories are fine in movies, but sometimes they get crammed in just to have a love story when it's unnecessary. I understand what the filmmakers were going for, but sometimes the best stories are the ones that you keep simple and for the main character, the best story is her relationship with her son and getting back into the cage while proving that she's not a loser. But a more important story than a love story is having to deal with a pill-popping mother who clearly didn't care for her daughter when she was young. The movie is a little over 2 hours and if you take out some of the necessary stuff it would have been a much more balanced movie. You could have cut out about 20 minutes, which would have made the movie better.

However, despite all of my critiques, it's still a good movie and Halle Berry does a great job in her directorial debut. She definitely shows that she can direct a good and gritty movie that will keep you entertained and on the edge of your seat, as well as playing a fighter when she's in her 50s. I think that's great because it proves that women are still gorgeous and sexy as hell in their 50s. It also proves for all the misogynistic assholes in Hollywood that women aren't done after their 20s. Older women should still get leading roles. It's a good movie to watch on Netflix, the action and the fight scenes are top-notch. We may have seen this kind of movie before, but it doesn't matter, it's not hard to connect to the characters and enjoy the action. Everything that we like about fighting movies is in this film, so you won't be disappointed. And who knows, maybe we'll get a sequel that's reminiscent of *Rocky 2* where the character has to deal with becoming a champion and raising a family. I definitely enjoyed Halle Berry in this movie, and you will too as well as the rest of the cast including Valentina Shevchenko, who plays a version of herself as the rival UFC fighter. *Bruised* is worth a watch on Netflix!

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

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## Sylvester Stallone Set to Star In Taylor Sheridan & Terence Winter Drama Series 'Kansas City' For Paramount+ From 101 Studios & MTV Ent. Studios



Sylvester Stallone is moving into scripted television. Deadline understands that the actor, whose Rocky won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1977, is in negotiations to star in and executive produce *Kansas City*, a drama series from Taylor Sheridan and Terence Winter for Paramount+. It marks Stallone's first major lead television series, having guested on a number of classic shows such as *Police Story* and *Kojak* back in the '70s and more recently in series such as *This Is Us*. *Kansas City* brings together Sheridan, who is fast becoming one of the most significant television creators in the business with series such as *Yellowstone*, *Mayor of Kingstown* and *1883*, and Winter, *The Sopranos* writer and *Boardwalk Empire* creator. *Kansas City* follows a New York City Italian mobster, played by Stallone, forced to relocate to the most unlikely of places—*Kansas City, Missouri*. Set in present day, legendary mobster Sal (Stallone) is faced with the startling task of reestablishing his Italian mafia family to the modernized, straight-shooting town of *Kansas City*. There, Sal encounters surprising and unsuspecting characters who follow him along his unconventional path to power.

Winter, Sheridan, Stallone and his Balboa Productions partner Braden Aftergood will serve as executive producers along with David C. Glasser, Ron Burkle and Bob Yari of 101 Studios. Winter will also serve as showrunner, and a writer's room is up and running. Stallone remains one of the biggest Hollywood stars, having written and starred in *Rocky* and its sequels as well as the *Rambo* and *Expendables* franchises. *The Expendables 4*, which is due out next year, will be Stallone's last in the franchise

and in addition to *The Suicide Squad*, in which he played Nanaue/King Shark, he stars in superhero film *Samaritan* and *Guardians of the Galaxy 3*, which is set for a 2023 release. Glasser, CEO of 101 Studios, said, "Taylor is a prolific creator because of the multi-dimensional characters he creates and the complex worlds he builds. To be able to have the legendary, transcendent Sylvester playing one of these characters is truly a privilege. And on top of that, we have Terence producing the project with us, who is responsible for some of the most captivating, deeply respected television shows in history. We are thrilled that ViacomCBS has partnered with us to help tell this story."

*Reported by Deadline*

## Colin Farrell Will Continue to Play His 'Batman' Penguin in New HBO Max Series



Colin Farrell's Penguin will continue to stay afloat, moving from Matt Reeves' upcoming feature film on March 4, 2022 into a new Gotham-set HBO Max series. Farrell is starring in and executive producing the new HBO Max series, which centers on Penguin's rise to power in the Gotham criminal underworld. Lauren LeFranc is attached to write the script. Reeves and *The Batman* producer Dylan Clark would executive produce the Penguin series under their 6th & Idaho and Dylan Clark Productions banners respectively. Warner Bros Television is producing. HBO Max provided no comment when reached. The Penguin would be the second HBO Max spinoff of Reeves' upcoming *The Batman*. The first, set at the Gotham Police Department, has Joe Barton as showrunner.

*Reported by Deadline.com*

## 'Fear The Walking Dead' Renewed for Season 8, Kim Dickens Returns As Series Regular



AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead* has been picked up for an eighth season, the network announced Sunday night on *Talking Dead* following the Season 7 fall finale of *The Walking Dead* spinoff. Popular former cast member Kim Dickens, who played Madison Clark in Seasons 1 through 4 of *Fear the Walking Dead*, is set to return. She will make her first appearance in the second half of Season 7, which debuts April 17, and will continue as a series regular in Season 8. "If there were a Mt. Deadmore, Kim Dickens' face would be on it. Madison Clark is a foundational character to TWDU — heroic, complex, an everyperson who becomes a warrior and then a force of benevolence," said Scott M. Gimple, Chief Content Officer of *The Walking Dead* Universe. "Kim Dickens' raw talent, strength, and brilliance will electrify TWDU once more and we couldn't be luckier to have her back." *Fear the Walking Dead* will join AMC's biggest lineup of original programming ever in 2022, which also includes the final season of mothership *The Walking Dead*. In the second half of Season 7, months have passed after the nuclear blast and the only one thriving is Victor Strand (Colman Domingo).

Having built a fiefdom, he callously selects who will have a chance at life. The other members of the group have suffered immensely, but out of that, has come a fierce determination to live, even if it means taking Strand's Tower by force and continuing the search for Padre, a mythical place no one is sure really exists. Alicia (Alycia Debnam-Carey) now the reluctant leader to Teddy's former followers, is plagued by a mysterious illness and the repercussions of her past actions. Morgan (Lennie James) trying to maintain hope that he will be reunited with his family, knows Alicia is key to their survival. With Alicia declaring war, Strand's paranoia and personal vendettas grow, and with that, new threats emerge from all sides. *Fear the Walking Dead* is executive produced by Scott M. Gimple,

Showrunners Andrew Chambliss and Ian Goldberg, Robert Kirkman, Gale Anne Hurd, Greg Nicotero and David Alpert and is produced by AMC Studios.

*Reported by deadline.com*

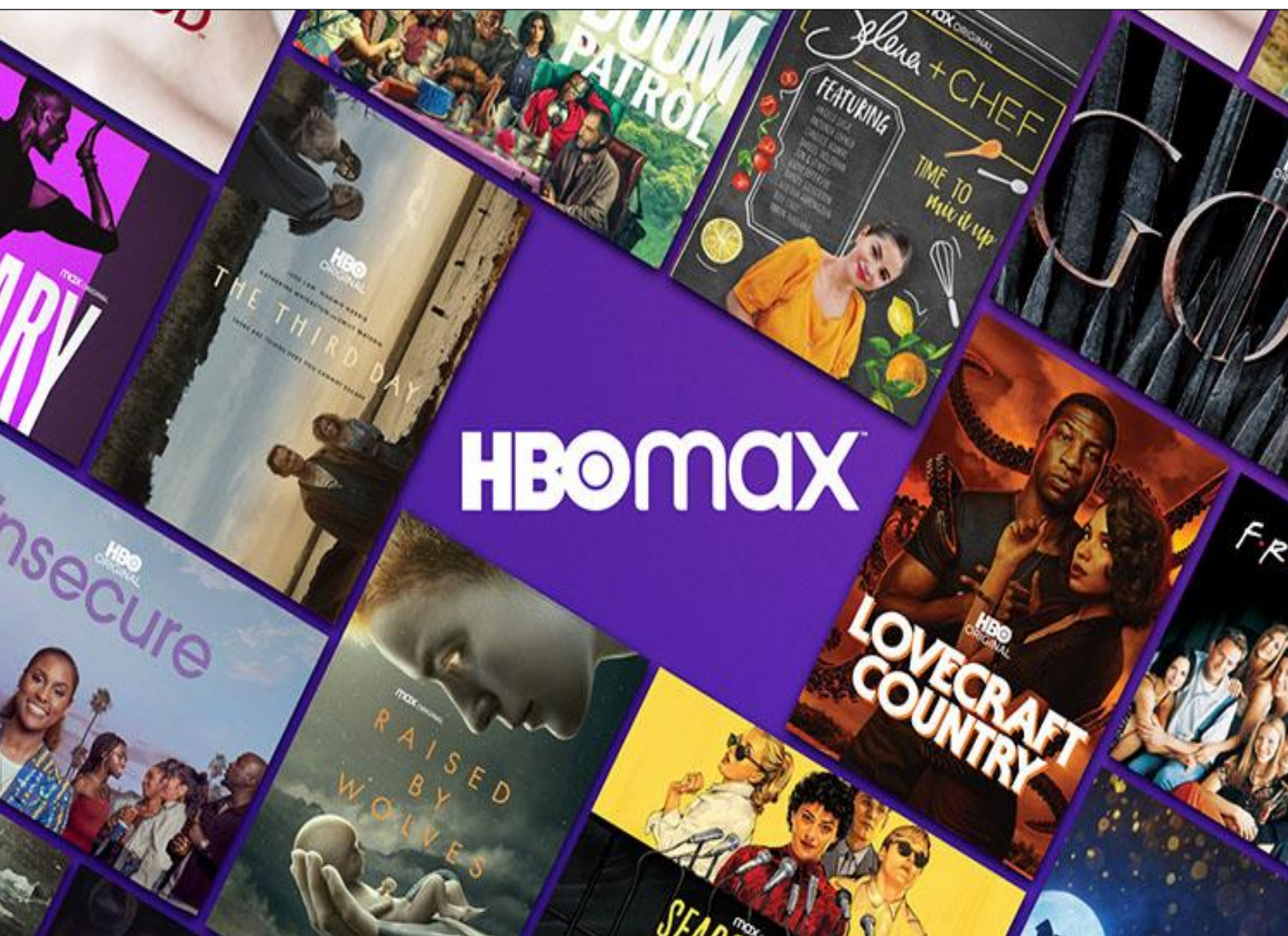
## 'Reacher' TV Series Starring Alan Ritchson Gets Premiere Date



Amazon's Prime Video said Thursday that it has set a Friday, February 4, 2022 premiere date for *Reacher*, the series adaptation of Lee Child's bestselling Jack Reacher novels that stars Alan Ritchson. It also unveiled the first trailer for the series, spotlighting Ritchson as the hulking ex-military police investigator who helps those most in need. All eight episodes of the Amazon Original Series' first season will drop on the same day in more than 240 countries and territories. Based on Child's first Jack Reacher novel *Killing Floor*, the series introduces Reacher after he just recently entered civilian life. He is a drifter, carrying no phone and the barest of essentials as he travels the country and explores the nation he once served. When Reacher arrives in the small town of Margrave, GA, he finds a community grappling with its first homicide in 20 years. The cops immediately arrest him and eyewitnesses claim to place Reacher at the scene of the crime. While he works to prove his innocence, a conspiracy

begins to emerge, one that will require Reacher's keen mind and hard-hitting fists to deal with. Malcolm Goodwin, Willa Fitzgerald, Chris Webster, Hugh Thompson, Maria Sten, Harvey Guillén, Kristin Kreuk, Currie Graham, Marc Bendavid, Willie C. Carpenter, Maxwell Jenkins and Bruce McGill also star. The trailer shows off Ritchson's physical resemblance to Child's original character from the book — a 6-foot-5, 240-pound, fist-first tough guy — a marked contrast to two Paramount movie adaptations that starred Tom Cruise. Ritchson, whose credits include playing Hawk/Hank Hall on DC Universe's *Titans*, certainly fits the bill.

*Reported by Deadline*



# WHAT YOU SHOULD BINGE WATCH!

## The Witcher: Season 2

Review by Marcus Blake



The Witcher is back! Season 2 is here and I'm just going to go ahead and tell you, it's absolutely amazing! If you are a fan of The Witcher books and the video games, then you are in for a real treat because season 2 finally connects all of the characters to one another. As you saw at the end of season 1, Geralt meets Ciri. Season 2 is about him training her and while she is on her way to fulfilling her destiny. I honestly don't really have any complaints about season 2. It's everything I expected with how the character's stories are progressing. The performances are fantastic. Of course, it helps that Henry Cavill who loves the video games is playing The Witcher and knows all the little details to perfectly portray Geralt. Plus, season 2 will lead us into the Wild Hunt storyline which if you played the video games is probably the best storyline of The Witcher series. Season 2 starts off with Geralt taking Ciri to the Witcher's home. That is where he begins to train her and help her harness her power. Unlike the first season where you have a lot of interaction between all of the characters, season 2 is about their separate journeys after the great battle at the end of season 1. Yennefer is without her magic and it seems everybody is looking for Ciri because of her power. I can't really tell you anything more without spoiling season 2. But it's season 2 where we see Ciri starting to fulfill her destiny and if you know the story, you know what direction that they're heading in, which if

you're like me, you can't wait for future seasons of this series.

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

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

Yes, season 2 of The Witcher is fantastic and should be watched immediately. I won't give it a perfect grade, but it's easily a 9 for me and I can't wait to start it over. The producers did a great job of diving more into the overall story that will lead to the Wild Hunt storyline and Ciri's destiny. You start to see her character come into her own and be the warrior that she will become. Season 2 is no short of great action and really does expand upon the story of The Witcher that we have seen from the books and the video games. And as I've said before, Henry Cavill's just perfect for this character. It's a shame that the storyline had to diverge, and you didn't get to see more of Yennefer and Geralt, but that's what season 3 is for. If you loved the first season, then season 2 is even better and will not disappoint. It's almost perfect and they do a great job of telling this part of The Witcher story in eight episodes. But I also have to say that any true Witcher story is not as good unless you have more of Jaskier... Unfortunately, he wasn't in every episode, so we'll see what happens in season 3 for his character. But in the meantime, start watching the new season today, trust me, it's worth watching even if you stay up till 4:00 in the morning to finish it. And now, I must be going because it's time to start watching the season 2 over again.

An advertisement for the 'Annmar Role Playing Book'. The top part features the title 'Annmar Role Playing Book' in a stylized font. Below that is a smaller image of the book cover with the text 'ANNMAR CHRONICLES Role Playing Game'. To the right of the book cover, there is promotional text: 'For fans of DnD, WoW, Pathfinder, and Table Top RPG's It's the Next Great Role Playing Book!'. Below this, it says 'PRE-ORDER NOW Coming 10-18-21'. At the bottom, it says 'Buy It Here and Start Your Next Campaign' and 'www.ANNMARCHRONICLES.com'. There is also a small note that says 'Including Journey to Timberhelm Campaign Players Handbook - 1st Edition'.

I won't say the season 2 is perfect, I do have a few complaints. It does start out kind of slow but that is to be expected when you are telling a story where all of our characters are on their own

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

## Swagger: Season 1

Review by Alex Moore



As a kid, sports started out as a simple activity to get good exercise with. Little did I know that there were some who were already playing for their future, dreaming up something big. I became much more aware of this phenomenon in the year of 1994 when the documentary, “Hoop Dreams,” hit the big screen. Fortunately or unfortunately, I was not born to be one of those kids, but then again, few of us are.

I had not thought about “Hoop Dreams” for quite some time. I had not spent any time watching programs on Apple TV+, either, but I had heard about a new series that was something like “Hoop Dreams,” only it was an original story, rather than a documentary. The title? “Swagger,” created by Reggie Rock Bythewood, who also co-produced the show, along with Kevin Durant, Brian Grazer, Rich Kleiman and Samantha Corbin-Miller. Like many other shows, “Swagger” had multiple writers and directors, swapping out with each new episode. The idea is to maintain continuity, not just in the story, but especially with the characters.

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Episode 1, ‘NBA,’ introduces us to the protagonist and prodigy of the story, Jace Carson,

played by Isaiah Hill. We see him drawing up a puzzle with the help of his Dad, just before he takes off and mysteriously vanishes from the family, which is made up of: Jenna Carson, played by Shinelle Azoroh, and Jackie Carson, played by Jordan Rice. Just ahead of the bulk of the story, a title card flashes and reads “Before Amaud, Breanna, COVID.” This was intended to not only tell people what to expect from the show, in terms of the plot, but also let us know that if there were any details that seemed insensitive, concerning real life, they were not meant to be. The show starts out strong, showcasing Jace as he prepares for his future. Already, his goal is to one day play in the NBA. However, there are. Already challenges awaiting him, such as wrongful behavior by police officers in his community. Some of the words and emotions echoed by his mother and the like seem a bit over-dramatic, but there is no doubt that. Some who watch the series will be able to relate to this and that is a sad truth to realize.

Episode 2 is ‘Haterade.’ Jace is a part of a trend that shows puzzles all around him. Every morning, he touches the paper on his wall that reads “NBA.” Two, additional characters, which we were introduced to before, become more prominent here: Ike Edwards, played by O’Shea Jackson (“Godzilla: King of the Monsters”), and Meg Bailey, played by Tessa Ferrer (“Insidious: The Last Key”). Ike is the head coach of Jace’s team that he has just joined, which eventually takes on the name of “Swagger.” He also works at a Hope Depot type of store and has a pregnant wife at home. Meg is a former basketball player who has traded her on-court talents for a behind-the-scenes role, handling the business side of team Swagger. Jace’s mom continues to develop, as well. She is an attractive, smart and strong individual who also has great difficulty trusting anyone and it is understandable as to why. Additionally, a friend of Jace, who also plays basketball, Crystal Jarrett, played by Quvenzhane Wallis (“Trolls”), appears to be having some trouble with her head coach. The opening episode was good, but this episode was VERY good.

By the time Episode 3, ‘Mano a Mano,’ begins, Jace has established that he is a real player for his age bracket. So far, he has had a great victory, but also a great loss, on the court. This time, he is preparing to face a Puerto Rican prodigy, Nick Mendez, played by Jason Rivera. The discovery is that as different as these two seem, they are like 1 and 11 on the face of a clock: closer to being the same than they are to being different. Nick’s team and Jace’s team are also different in their approach to the game, at least when it comes to practice: one is more traditional and the other is unorthodox. Just watch and you will see which is which. There is a great moment in the game against each other when we see a fight for a loose ball and it parallels the inner fight these two kids have, also fighting for their basketball dreams. Another

development, in a broader sense, is the dark underbelly of business, even at this age level. It is not just because of the inner workings of the biz, itself, but also a connection between a financial backer and the head coach of Swagger. This is another good episode.

Episode 4, ‘We Good?’ is where I saw a slight drop-off for the show, overall. Crystal’s struggles with her seemingly abusive coach are worsening and Nick is going through a family dilemma which sees him trying to leave his team and join Jayce’s. His mother is a bit like Jace’s, too, and this plays a definite factor in his decision-making. Jayce has begun to see the fruits of his successes, in the form of hanging out with celebrities, but also alienating. Himself from his team. The issue I was having here was not in the story, itself, but in how it was presented. It felt just a little bit choppy to me, but it is still a pretty good episode.



In the interest of time, consider the next three episodes as one, singular review. It happens to be the strongest frame of the series, in my view. ‘24-Hour Person’ is mostly about the development of the rest of the team. There is plenty of likability to go around and plenty of hardship and drama, but my personal favorite is Musa Rahim, played by Caleel Harris (“When They See Us”). He is a Muslim and a smooth-talking point guard. Actually, his dad is an assistant coach for Swagger, too. That is Naim Rahim, played by Sean Baker. Crystal’s coach issues have reached a breaking point and her closest friend, Jayce wants to help. Just keep in mind that people do not always do the best thing even if it might somehow be the right thing to do. ‘All on the Line’ picks up where the previous episode leaves off. Is it living in reality? Well, maybe and maybe not. It is becoming more clear that Jayce’s mom is too hard on him, but of course she has good intentions in the process. There is a great moment when Crystal is back with her team and the coach is no longer around. As others’ heads are bowed, she and another look up and lock eyes. She was never alone in her plight. Episode 7, ‘#Radicals,’ takes the series in a whole different direction and it is not without controversy, just in the nature of what it is all

about. Six months have passed and COVID has impacted the court scene for everyone involved. As Swagger makes it way to another important game, a seriously egregious act takes place and it is shocking to witness. My thoughts were, “I don’t know if this sort of thing really goes on, but if it does, it’s an outrage (and it needs to stop!)” This provides perfect context for everything that happens thereafter and it is done in away that is accessible for all of the viewers and it is not overly preachy or judgmental. To me, it was an honest portrayal and it was extremely effective. These three episodes are truly the crux of the show and it was a pleasure to watch.

Unfortunately, “Swagger” does not stay on point from here, in my view. Episode 8 is the weakest of the bunch. Episode 7 did not need a follow-up, as I see it, and this episode took a little bit away from its merits by sounding too repetitive. There is also the unrealistic inclusion of Crystal jointing team Swagger. I realize that these are 14-year old kids, but this is not something that goes on, from everything I can tell about youth league sports. Perhaps the makers of this episode were trying to make an idealistic point, but I do not think it was necessary and it was hastily executed, on top of that. Beyond that, Jayce begins to turn on his coach, thanks in large part to his mom, and it reaches a feverish pitch that I thought seemed silly and forced, as well. Chalk this one up as a rare loss.

The remaining two episodes, ‘Follow-through’ and ‘Florida,’ certainly improve on things from the previous installment, but they do not reach the level of episodes 5-7. I could personally relate to Jayce’s and his sister’s emotions about their dad. I identified with Jayce when his coach told him that he, “doesn’t play well when he’s angry,” haha! Not everyone is the same, right? Meanwhile, Meg is patching things up with her distant father as he is on his last legs. I thought the story here was a bit sloppy, again, but at this point I cared enough about the characters to just focus on what was happening and still enjoy it. Fatherhood really is the final theme as this series closes out. People are paying their respects to those who have passed on and others are dealing with those whom are still alive. I wanted this show to go out with a bang, but it did not quite live up to my expectations. I was not disappointed, per se, but I did want to see more emotional substance in the dramatic conclusion.

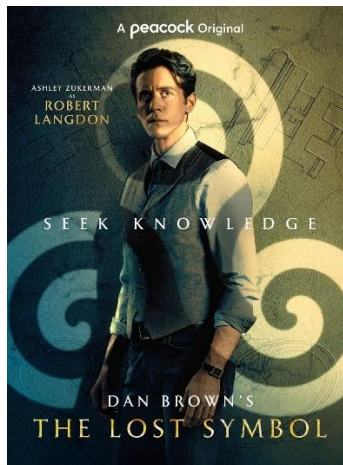
Overall, “Swagger” is a good series that had some moments of being very good (and great), but also a few moments of pretty good, on down to one moment of mediocrity. The quality of the production was consistently solid and most of the acting performances were believable, even though many of these actors are fairly inexperienced. Directing and writing for a show is hard work and a very different job from doing the same thing in the world of movies. I do not know where the show will go from here, but I could imagine it continuing on. Personally, I

would not be hurt or bothered if this was a one-and-done affair, either. I have loved the game of basketball since the early summer of 1992 and I plan on continuing to love it, in some form or fashion. “Swagger” brought more depth to the game and I appreciated that, both as a fan and as a fellow human being. If you loved “Hoop Dreams,” I think you will like “Swagger.”

Final Grade 7 / 10 (Okay)

## The Lost Symbol

Review by Allison Costa



For all of the Dan Brown fans out there, there is finally a series surrounding one of his most popular books! Now while we all miss Tom Hanks, (and his movies were excellent), there is something nice about a streaming series that can delve even deeper into the characters and their relationships. It’s been about 15 years since I read “The Lost Symbol”, so there was much in the series that I didn’t remember and that they simply changed.

The actor who plays Robert Langdon in this series, Ashley Zukerman, is definitely very different from Tom Hanks but also good in his own way. He interprets the character differently but somehow it still works. There is more vulnerability and insecurity in how he portrays Langdon, than in how Hanks played the character. The series also delves deeply into Langdon’s relationship with his mentor and portrays how they have a deep father-son bond. Eddie Izzard plays the role of Peter Solomon and the first few episodes I felt he was awkward and didn’t possess the power and charisma the character required, I felt he was poorly cast. However, as the series continued I began to see what the Director saw in Izzard and felt he did a good job in portraying both an Intellectual Mason as well as a heart-broken father.

The series does have some pretty intense moments and there is a lot of history and legend intertwined but it moves fairly quickly and keeps the interest of the audience. One of the best characters, and one who I do not remember from the book is Nunez, played by Rick Gonzalez who is best known for his character in the CW series Arrow as Mad Dog. Nunez’s character added a lot of humanity and loyalty to the series, and was responsible for a lot of Langdon’s success. I don’t know if they will make a second season or even how they would make one, since the storyline is resolved by the season finale, but the final moments definitely tease that more is coming. If they did decide to move forward they would have begin inventing entirely new quests for Langdon to explore and perhaps write off-script. I guess we will just have to wait and see! But in the meantime, is The Lost Symbol worth watching on the Peacock Channel...yes! Even if its just s one-off, it’s still worth watching.

Final Grade 7 / 10 (Okay)

## “Lost in Space” Series

Review by Marcus Blake



Lost in Space, I always thought it would be a good show to reboot and was excited when Netflix decided to do just that. After all, it’s been over 50 years since the original series premiered on TV. And now, after three seasons the reboot of Lost in Space has come to an end and I’m already sad. I have loved this show since the beginning. Of course, I love the original having

grown up watching it on syndication just like the original Star Trek series. But I consider the Netflix series the one true reboot of Lost in Space. Even though there was a movie that came out in 1998, it just never captured the essence of the original show. The storytelling in Lost in Space was better suited for a TV series or a streaming Series in this case. I'll just go ahead and tell you that it ended perfectly. While I'm sad that it only lasted 3 Seasons and 28 episodes, it was well done and one of the most underrated shows on Netflix. At its heart, Lost in Space is a story about a family coming together to beat the odds when it comes to survival as they're trying to find a new home. I have very few complaints of the way Netflix did this story even having new takes on the robot and my favorite character, Dr. Smith. Of course, they changed that character to a woman starring Parker Posey, but she was brilliant. She was just as brilliant as Jonathan Harris who played the original Dr. Smith. But the whole show has been great as it has shown the Robinsons struggling day in and day out while getting lost from the rest of the party going to Alpha Centauri, therefore, getting lost in space. Molly Parker and Toby Stephens were fantastic as John and Maureen Robinson. Now I can't say that I liked the casting for the Robinson kids, but they definitely grow on you as the series progresses and really come into their own by season 3. In fact, season 3 really focuses on how the kids have grown and taking on more responsibility. Season 3 starts out with all of the kids being separated from their parents and having their own little colony for an entire year while having to rely on each other without their brilliant parents to help them.



The main theme in season 3 is self-reliance because the Robinsons are split apart. But we also delve deeper into the story of why the robots have a connection to Will Robinson and what

drastic actions he's willing to take in order to save the entire Colony that's going to Alpha Centauri. All the questions that we've had as an audience about the true intentions of these robots do get answered and while I'm not going to give away any spoilers, I will say that they're not much different than humanity when it comes to choice and free will. I'll just leave it there. I always thought it was interesting that you had the character of Judy Robinson being adopted and that her origin was different from the original series when they cast a young African American actress by the name of Taylor Russell who audiences have gotten to know with the Escape Room movies. But it is in season 3 that we meet her real father and find out her true backstory. Everything comes full circle not only for her character, but her real father's connection to the entire story. Again, I won't give any spoilers. I think the writers and producers set out to have a very clear story that didn't involve "Jumping the Shark" like too many popular streaming or TV series tend to do by keeping it on too long just because it's popular. You can honestly say that Netflix's Lost in Space is really just a three-act story where it's the parents having to teach their kids how to survive in the first season and then all hell breaks loose for everybody in the second season, while the third season is about the kids taking their own destiny by the reins and becoming the saviors of the entire colony so to speak. However, the heart of the story has always been how the Robinsons can overcome all of these obstacles to accomplish their mission.

I honestly can't find much fault with the reboot. Not only were the visuals and cinematography fantastic, the casting was almost perfect in a lot of ways. I didn't always like the kids in the beginning of the series and one of the complaints I've always had was they dealt with childish squabbles, but that's also common among teenagers and the intensity of those squabbles would certainly increase when their circumstances become more dangerous as they fight for survival. It just became annoying at times. Obviously, the actors playing the kids weren't too strong of actors or as seasoned as the adults. By the time we get to season 3 and we see them coming into their own, their characters grow on you, and I think that's the point. So, my critique is only minor, but it can ruin the pacing of the first two seasons. Season 3 was cut down to 8 episodes as to not drag out the climax of the story and it worked brilliantly. I felt like season 3 flew by and wrapped up all of the loose ends to

give us a very clear ending to the story of Lost in Space. Obviously, there's more story to tell with the Robinsons, but those stories aren't really about being lost in space. Sometimes TV shows have a tendency to drag things out without giving the audience the proper closure. Sometimes a shortened last season is a good thing. As I said before, things really do come full circle in the last season. Now it may seem that they're trying to cram a lot in the last eight episodes. That may be true to an extent, but it made the story better.

Overall, the reboot of Lost in Space is spectacular. While different from the original TV show, the new version of the robot was brilliant for this series, and changing the character of Dr. Smith definitely worked for the new one. Parker Posey will probably not get enough credit and obviously she can't replace the charisma of Jonathan Harris from the original series, but she should be commended for her own take on the character. Even Ignacio Serricchio's portrayal of Major Don West, I think is an improvement over the original character. They made the character more of a Han Solo type which made this character a lot of fun. The character was often overshadowed in the original series and Matt LeBlanc, tried his best in the movie, but he never really captured the potential of what this character could be. This new version of Lost in Space definitely did that. I mean having Don West be a brilliant engineer, pilot, smuggler, and accidental hero just made the character more interesting. And if you have a Han Solo type character in your Sci-Fi series, that makes the series a lot better. In only three seasons, Lost in Space has a very fitting and perfectly constructed conclusion to the overall story. Maybe you only need 28 good episodes to tell a great sci-fi story. At least that's true when it comes to this show. It's not perfect, but I do think it's close without ruining the charm of the original series. Lost in Space is one of the best series that Netflix has ever been produced and it may never get the credit it deserves considering there are more popular series on Netflix. But if you are a fan of the original series then you should definitely check it out and I guarantee you will not be disappointed. Also, if you're like me, you'll geek out a little bit the first time you hear "danger Will Robinson!"

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

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# CHORUS: FAST-PACED SPACE-COMBAT SHOOTER, AVAILABLE NOW!



Enter a dark new universe and explore epic locations in the highly anticipated Chorus, out today on current and next gen formats, from developer FISHLABS and publisher Deep Silver. With Chorus, FISHLABS has taken the nostalgic feel from classic space shooters and expertly blended it together with a contemporary mindset, evolving the spirit of these games. Chorus follows ace pilot Nara and her sentient ship Forsaken on their compelling journey of redemption, expertly balancing the spectacle of space exploration with frenetic, fast-paced action. Explore epic cosmic vistas and tight crystalline corridors as you fight to free the galaxy from a mysterious cult, the Circle. The Circle is ruled by The Great Prophet, but not much is known about this mysterious figure.



Under his command Nara and Forsaken were responsible for many of the cult's major victories and atrocities on their path to dominate the galaxy. Once the Circle's deadliest warrior, Nara is now their most wanted fugitive. This immersive narrative is supported by stunning gameplay; flying Forsaken is exhilarating and players will find it thrilling to use the ship's weapons, powers and aerobatic abilities in zero-g combat.

## KEY FEATURES

- A compelling single-player experience
- Play as dual protagonists Nara and her sentient AI companion and starfighter, Forsaken, on a personal journey of redemption
- Experience fast-paced, frenetic action that evolves the spirit of classic space shooters
- Fight to unite resistance forces against the Circle and their ominous leader, the Great Prophet
- Face down hordes of enemy starfighters, titanic battleships and unknown Void entities
- Reclaim, upgrade and wield devastating weapons and abilities in zero-g dogfights
- Explore a dark new sci-fi universe, teeming with mystery and conflict
- Enjoy gorgeous next gen sci-fi visuals in 4K, from cosmic vistas to sprawling space stations
- Engineered to take advantage of gen 9 hardware, enhancements include:
  - o 4K resolution at 60fps
  - o Advanced enemy ship destruction
  - o Higher quality volumetrics
  - o Richer environmental effects

Chorus is out now on Xbox Series X and Xbox One, the all-in-one games and entertainment systems from Microsoft, the PlayStation® 5 and PlayStation® 4 computer entertainment systems, Google Stadia, PC via Epic Games Store and Steam, and Amazon Luna.

## Sea of Thieves: Break New Ground in Season 5 -Starts Now



**Bury** your own treasure, dig up loot from the Quest Board and light up the sky with fireworks and flares! With the nights drawing in and the chill of winter fast approaching, *Sea of Thieves* offers a warm welcome to pirates old and new with the arrival of Season Five. With new Seasonal rewards, Events and a whole host of quality of life updates to deepen your pirate immersion,

this Season also brings in pirate pyrotechnics and a long-requested game-changing feature: burying treasure! If you're keen to dig into this and everything else *Sea of Thieves* has to offer, Season Five is now available as a free download for all players with Xbox Game Pass and across Xbox Series X|S, Xbox One, Windows 10 and Steam. As with previous Seasons, Season Five and its 100 levels of rewards can be embarked upon free of charge by all *Sea of Thieves* players. To earn rewards, raise your Renown by sailing the seas and tackling regularly rotating Trials and Deeds. The Season Five Plunder Pass can also be purchased separately, enhancing your pool of Seasonal rewards with premium goodies not yet available anywhere else! Find out more about the workings of Seasons and the Plunder Pass in our [Seasons Explained](#) and [Plunder Pass Explained](#) articles.



Make all the right  
money moves.

### Quest for Treasure

Enough of only digging up other pirates' spoils – finally, you can bury your own! Season Five now allows you to fulfil that crucial part of any pirate fantasy, by letting you bury almost any item and create a map leading right back to it. You can do this purely for safekeeping, or post your map on the new Quest Board at the nearest Outpost and challenge other crews to seek it out. If another crew successfully finds the location of your buried treasure, you'll earn a healthy dose of Renown. Just be careful when following other players' maps taken from the Quest Board – you can never be sure if what's been hidden away is prime loot or something not quite so desirable...

### Set Things Off with a Bang

Whether you're kicking off celebrations or just sending up a flare, Season Five brings in some explosive ordinance for pyrotechnically inclined pirates! Fireworks come in a spectrum of different colors and designs, and can be found in barrels around the Sea of Thieves or bought in themed Firework Crates from the Merchant Alliance. If you've found yourself in a spot of trouble, there are also Signal Flares to help you signal to passing crews that you'd appreciate a little help. Fireworks and Signal Flares alike can be fired from cannons, even from the prow of the Cannon Rowboat – a new mini-craft for any pirate who likes the idea of being a one-person demolition team! These new features are accompanied by numerous quality of life updates to improve in-game immersion,

whether it's sitting and sleeping, passing the time on board with new shanties and dice emotes, whispering to crewmates by turning your speaking trumpet around or watching rats scurry around your sinking ship. Plus of course there's a new crop of time-limited Events, kicking off with our annual celebration of charity, the Festival of Giving, and the traditional end-of-year bash, Grogmanay. Throw yourself into the spirit of the season to earn some festive cosmetic

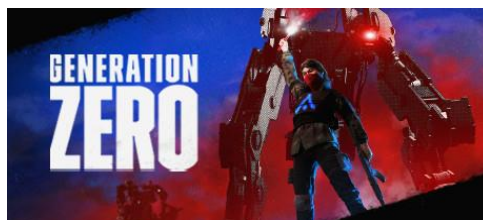


### Pirate Emporium Plunder

As with previous Seasons, pirates can bolster the Seasonal rewards available with never-before-seen goodies from the Season Five Plunder Pass! Wrap up warm, as this latest Plunder Pass arrives on glacial winds – headlined by the complete Boreal Aurora ship set, which channels the dazzling aurora that streaks across the northern skies. Also included is the evolving Creeping Cold Costume, which transforms as you progress through the Season's 100 levels, and the adorable Sand Angel Emote. A special festive haul of 750 Ancient Coins is also included, which – combined with the 250 already earnable through Seasonal progression – lets you recoup the cost of the Plunder Pass if you reach a high enough level! The Pirate Emporium's range of wares inspired by Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* also gets a boost in Season Five: the fearsome Royal Revenge ship and weapon sets, Captain Barbossa Costume and Mutinous Mutt pet all evoke tales of one of the most treacherous captains who ever sailed the seas...



## Generation Zero Is Now Available on Xbox Game Pass for Consoles & PC



**Build** and defend your command center from rampaging machines with the open-world co-op action game's free new "Resistance" update on Xbox One Systemic Reaction has released the open-world stealth-action game *Generation Zero* on Xbox Game Pass for Xbox One and PC. Xbox Game Pass subscribers can download the title today for free and play solo or with up to three friends in a war against sinister machines in an alternate-history Sweden. And it's the perfect time to dive in: the **free "Resistance" content update** (previously launched on PC and PlayStation®4) is now available for all players on Xbox One, delivering new stories and dangers and bringing content parity across all platforms. "Resistance" jumps the game forward from 1989 to 1990, introducing exciting new base-building systems and world revamps, including:

- **Base-Building & Defense:** Secure your own unique outpost, customize it as you see fit, and protect it from waves of invading machines in new home base defense missions.
- **New World Revamps:** Extensive redesign of the forest region, adding more fun surprises and environmental storytelling to explore.
- **New Crafting Items:** Discover and craft new consumable items with each successful defense of your base.
- **Bonus Challenge Tree:** Take on new challenges focused on base building.

*Generation Zero* is currently in its third year of ongoing content development. More than one million players have experienced the game since launch, with numerous updates and two story-driven expansions ("Alpine Unrest" and "FNIX Rising") continuing to drive the adventure. Year 3 takes the game in exciting new directions that put players on the front line of the battle against the machines, with a breadth of new features and content coming in the future.

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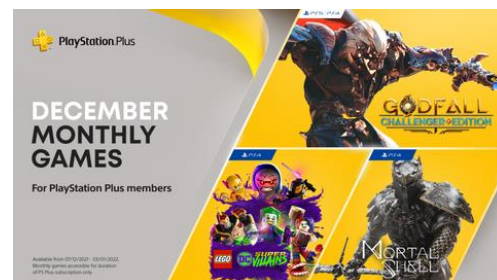
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## PLAYSTATION PLUS games for December: Godfall: Challenger Edition, Lego DC Super-Villains, Mortal Shell



**All** available December 7. December's PlayStation Plus lineup sees you battling through bright fantasy universes and grim worlds shattered by zealous foes. It asks you to play the hero or see yourself become the villain. You haven't long to wait in deciding to lose yourself to the looter-slasher hybrid of *Godfall*, the careful combat of *Mortal Shell*, or play bad in *Lego DC Super Villains*: all games will be available on Tuesday, December 7 until Monday, January 3. PlayStation Plus members will have until Monday, January 3 to add those titles, plus three bonus PS VR games to their game library.



## Godfall: Challenger Edition | PS5 & PS4

Godfall is a looter-slasher set in a bright fantasy universe filled with heroic knights and arcane magic. Embark on adventure in a fantasy action RPG that utilizes high-impact third-person melee combat to engage players as they hunt for loot, don legendary armor sets and defeat vicious enemies. The Challenger Edition focuses on three unique modes: Lightbringer, Dreamstones, and the Ascended Tower of Trials. All three are endgame-level content, but you'll be immediately equipped with a spread of deadly weapons and skill points, letting you team up with up to two other players\* in co-op. Perfect your build and smash your enemies. Challenger Edition's endgame co-op is compatible with all upgraded editions of Godfall & supports cross-gen play. Godfall: Challenger Edition players can upgrade at any time to the Deluxe Edition gaining access to both Godfall and Fire & Darkness campaigns.

you and a crazy group of misfits to uncover the intentions of Earth's new, strange, wannabe superheroes. Joined by renowned DC Super-Villains: The Joker, Harley Quinn, and countless others from the Injustice League, players will set out on an epic adventure.



## Mortal Shell | PS4

Mortal Shell is a ruthless and deep single-player action-RPG that tests your sanity and resilience in a shattered world. As the remains of humanity wither and rot, zealous foes fester in the ruins. They spare no mercy, with survival demanding superior awareness, precision, and instincts. Track down hidden sanctums of devout followers and discover your true purpose.

## PS VR games\*\*

Continuing from last month and as part of PS VR's 5th anniversary, three bonus PS VR titles are still available to add to your game library. Survive the horrors aboard a procedurally generated spaceship in The Persistence, tackle zombies in The Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners and showcase your sword skills in roguelike Until You Fall. These three games are available until Monday, January 3.



## The Persistence | PS VR\*\*

The Persistence challenges you to survive aboard a doomed deep space colony starship in the year 2521. Stranded, malfunctioning and caught in the inexorable pull of a black hole, "The Persistence" is overrun with a crew mutated into horrific & murderous aberrations. It's down to you, a clone of security officer Zimri Eder, to make your way deeper in the decks of The Persistence to repair the systems and prevent the ship from being torn apart. Gather resources, upgrade abilities and fabricate an arsenal of weapons in this brutal sci-fi horror roguelike.



## The Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners – Standard Edition | PS VR\*\*

Face all the horrors that the living and the dead can offer in this new VR adventure in The Walking Dead universe. Travel through the ruins of walker infested New Orleans as you fight, sneak, scavenge, and survive each day unraveling a city wide mystery within the iconic quarters. Encounter desperate factions and lone survivors who could be friend or foe. Whether you help others or take what you want by force, every choice you make has consequences. What kind of survivor will you be for the people of NOLA?



## Until You Fall | PS VR\*\*

Fantasy and synthwave collide in this physically active PS VR sword fighting game. Grow stronger as you battle through an awesome neon environment and strike down magic-infused monstrosities in this hack-and-

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## Lego DC Super-Villains | PS4

It's good to be bad... Embark on an all-new DC Lego adventure by becoming the best villain the universe has seen. Players will create and play as an all-new super-villain throughout the game, unleashing mischievous antics and wreaking havoc in an action-packed story. Set in an open world experience within the DC universe, the Justice League has disappeared, leaving Earth's protection to their counterparts, who have proclaimed themselves as the 'Justice Syndicate'. It's up to

slash roguelite. Move your arms and body to the synthwave soundtrack as you attack, block, cast spells, and dodge your way deeper into the heart of a neon fantasy world filled with magic-infused monsters. Equip yourself with a variety of gameplay-altering weapons as you continue to gain strength and strike down the monstrosities that lurk throughout this mystifying world.

who receive all the fantastic benefits of Gold plus access to over 100 high-quality games with Xbox Game Pass.

- *The Escapists 2* (\$19.99 ERP): Available December 1 to 31
- *Tropico 5 – Penultimate Edition* (\$24.99 ERP): Available December 16 to January 15
- *Orcs Must Die!* (\$14.99 ERP): Available December 1 to 15
- *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet* (\$9.99 ERP): Available December 16 to 31

Century. Build your city's infrastructure, plan your trading routes, and utilize new technologies, in the fifth installment of the fan favorite city-building series.



**XBOX:**



***The Escapists 2***

From the tundra to the desert, join up with three of your friends to form the ultimate crew and engineer the wildest escapes from some of the toughest prisons in the world. Live by the rules, attend roll call, and follow strict routines, all while secretly planning and executing your bid for freedom!



***Tropico 5 – Penultimate Edition***

In this *Penultimate Edition*, including *The Big Cheese* and *Hostile Takeover* add-ons, expand the reign of your dynasty from the early colonial period to beyond the 21st



***Orcs Must Die!***

As a powerful War Mage, defend twenty-four fortresses from a mob of beastly enemies, using all manner of weapons and traps at your disposal. No matter how you get it done, you'll have a blast destroying rampaging monsters in this fantasy, action-strategy game.



***Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet***

Explore unique environments in the 2D action-adventure game, *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet*. Make your way to the center of the mysterious Shadow Planet, all while solving complex puzzles and battling bizarre creatures, as you fight to save your home world

**It's** time to announce the December Games with Gold lineup! On Xbox One and Xbox Series X|S, join your friends and plot ingenious prison breaks in *The Escapists 2*, and run your island nation as you see fit in *Tropico 5 – Penultimate Edition*. And for our classic lineup via Backward Compatibility, take out an orc army in *Orcs Must Die!*, and battle bizarre creatures in the 2D platformer *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet*. Xbox Live Gold members will have exclusive access to these games for a limited time as part of Games with Gold. So will Xbox Game Pass Ultimate members,



# GAME RELEASES FOR JANUARY 2022

<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>RELEASE DATE</b>
<b>Star Exodus</b>	Games Operators	PC	01/01/2022
<b>The Godkiller - Chapter 1</b>	Seespace Labs	Mac, PC	01/01/2022
<b>Class of '09</b>	SBN3	An	06/01/2022
<b>Demon Turf</b>	Nighthawk Interactive	XSX	11/01/2022
<b>Duru</b>	Twisted Ramble Games	Mac, NS, PC	11/01/2022
<b>Risk System</b>	Hidden Trap	NS, PS4	11/01/2022
<b>Monster Hunter Rise</b>	Capcom U.S.A., Inc.	PC	12/01/2022
<b>Astroneer</b>	System Era Softworks	NS	13/01/2022
<b>Battle Brothers</b>	Overhype Studios	PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	13/01/2022
<b>Nova-111</b>	Curve Digital	NS	13/01/2022
<b>Super UFO Fighter</b>	Phoenixx	PC	13/01/2022
<b>Blackwind</b>	Blowfish Studios	Mac, NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	20/01/2022
<b>Empire of Ember</b>	Poleaxe Games	PC	20/01/2022
<b>Expeditions: Rome</b>	THQ Nordic	PC	20/01/2022
<b>Jentrix</b>	Arcadia VR	PC	20/01/2022
<b>RPGolf Legends</b>	Kemco	NS, PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	20/01/2022
<b>Baby Storm</b>	Forever Entertainment	NS	21/01/2022
<b>Elden Ring</b>	Bandai Namco	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	21/01/2022
<b>D&amp;D Rules Expansion Gift Set</b>	Wizards of the Coast	Tbl	25/01/2022

<b>PRODUCT</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>FORMAT</b>	<b>RELEASE DATE</b>
<b>Diplomacy is Not an Option</b>	Door 407	PC	26/01/2022
<b>KINGDOM of the DEAD</b>	DIRIGO Games	PC	26/01/2022
<b>Spaceflight Simulator</b>	Stefo Mai Morojna	NS, PC	26/01/2022 (Early access)
<b>Record of Lodoss War: Deedlit in Wonder Labyrinth</b>	Red Art Games	NS	28/01/2022
<b>A Cure for Jessica</b>	Bernardo Fernandes	PC	Jan 2022
<b>Broken Ranks</b>	Whitemoon Games	PC	Jan 2022
<b>Heat and Run</b>	Damnatio Games	PC	Jan 2022
<b>Hyper-5</b>	Hyper Productions	PC	Jan 2022
<b>Kerpleth</b>	Gamera Game	PC	Jan 2022
<b>Rugby 22</b>	Nacon	PC, PS4, PS5, XO, XSX	Jan 2022
<b>Tannenberg</b>	Blackmill Games	PS4, PS5	Jan 2022
<b>Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Extraction</b>	Ubisoft	PC, PS4, PS5, Stad, XO, XSX	Jan 2022
<b>Veil of Dust: A Homesteading Game</b>	Calamity Bay Games	Lin, PC	Jan 2022
<b>Verdun</b>	M2H	PS4, PS5	Jan 2022
<b>Virtual Driving School</b>	CGA Studios	PC	31/01/2022



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# HALO INFINITE

## REVIEW

By K. Scott Cooper



the overall storyline, save for gathering skill points used in the game.

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We waited or it to arrive after delays and rumors of another, but Halo Infinite is here and its free on Xbox Game Pass, if you ask me that's a good thing because frankly, I would be a little hot under the bonnet if I had. But before I engage in my rant of absolutely "blah" points of the game, lets start with some of the fun stuff that I enjoyed about the game. I know, I'm blowing your mind right now Gang! This game gives you some seriously fun "Halo shootout" moments that really give you that rush of blood to all the fun places as you get thrown into some truly awesome knock out fights on the new Halo ring Zeta, the Grunts are the icing on the cake with their dialogue and banter, and their wasn't a sense that you need to rush straight through every situation to came along. But this is where I have to start becoming a touch more critical of one of my favorite game series and trust me Gang, I have a lot to say about that.

So here are some things that aren't horrid about Halo Infinite, it does feature a semi open world portion of the game where the player can do little side missions, poke around cosmetics that are for Multiplayer, and hunting the source of the awful "beep, beep" that is extra lore datapads. Which is great if you want to spend your time glued to a walk through to find it all, which is rather bothersome because I rather enjoy all the lore and extra bits painstakingly added by the game makers. I sadly spent a good amount of time searching, I was able to find all the cosmetics, finish all the side missions, and only half of the overall lore. But I didn't feel like mapping every square inch of the open world area that I can honestly say is very, very bland and you won't be surprised by the overall feel of the Pacific Northwest inspired countryside. The side missions, sadly, don't affect the outcome of

Now some things that really pissed me off and I'm going to try and stay as spoiler free as possible, the storyline doesn't start out strong and is wicked confusing if you didn't play a smaller Haloverse game that 90% off us probably didn't play. It does clear up in the last final moments, but for the most part it is dull and boring. Its ending gave me the smallest glimmer of hope that something cool might becoming in the future but I not holding my breath. This is mainly due to the other features of the game that pissed me off beyond all belief, why in the sweet blue hell that has become the corrupt greed of bleeding gamers dry, did there even need to be a season pass. What the actual F@#k! The Multiplayer, which they released early, could have been a saving grace and it wasn't. They released it with limited modes of play that made as much sense as a pissed of bag of weasels, by the time this article is published they will have corrected that with an update that adds in basic play modes you would think they would have from day one, such as free for all or slayer. Still in my mind the damage was done and put a soar taste in my mouth for the overall game score and my desire to return to the game in general.

Now this brings me to the final part of scoring and grading Halo Infinite, which I do with a heavy heart because I am a Halo fan and I had so much hope for this game. The Campaign I give the Score of 7, its fun and I enjoyed 90% of the game. But it's nothing new and this by no means anything groundbreaking in anyway, we know the enemies and we know most of the weapons. Halo Infinite does take us back to Halo's roots after we got a completely different type of game in Halo 5 and that's great if that's what you're looking for. However, if you have seen one Forerunner sight you have seen them all and it is no different here, not to mention the various bugs and glitches that didn't break the game, but wasn't doing any favors for me as I played. Such as not having NPCs man turrets or do anything other than get themselves killed quickly, which more than once resulted in my own death. The story is slow and smells like its been in the fridge a touch to long, would honestly enjoy something fresh at this point. Now we get to the multiplayer and just the lazy ass pile of carbon build up it was, not to mention the stupid and boring season pass content. I fail you 343I, I FAIL YOU TO HELL! You get the score of 1 and that is the lowest score I'm allowed to give you. Trust me it would be lower. There is honestly no excuses for the weak content they released and makes me wonder what is actually going on over there or has it become some strange cursed placed that besets all who wonder in, mangling them into husks of their former selves. So, the overall score for Halo Infinite is a 6/10, but at least Halo Infinite is a better game than Fat Cry 6, which I had high hopes for. And Halo Infinite is good enough that I will go back to play the campaign in co-op mode when a few more of my mates get around to playing it. Until then Gang, Stay Safe, Stay Classy, and Stay Crazy.





The

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Opinion

# Your Place To Talk!



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# OF COURSE, "LETHAL WEAPON" IS A CHRISTMAS MOVIE!

By Marcus Blake



Yes, we all agree that *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie. It's one of the best action movies that falls on Christmas Eve and goes right into Christmas Day. Yes, it has all the requirements to be a Christmas movie. But, why isn't *Lethal Weapon* considered a Christmas movie...the first *Lethal Weapon*? Is it because it doesn't exactly happen on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day? However, there's more to it than just happening on a certain day for a movie to be considered a Christmas movie. Personally, I think it's a movie that happens during the Christmas season. After all, movies like *A Christmas Story* or *Christmas Vacation* start out before Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. *Elf* is a Christmas movie

that doesn't start out on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day so if that's the only requirement needed to be a Christmas movie then there's a whole lot of Christmas movies that really shouldn't be Christmas movies, think about it! But I digress, to me *Lethal Weapon* is just as much of a Christmas movie as *Die Hard*. The movie literally starts off with a Christmas song, "Jingle Bell Rock." Christmas decorations fill every house and the police station. When Detective Rigg is making a drug bust at the beginning of the movie, he gets a Christmas Tree. These are just a few of the things that make *Lethal Weapon* a Christmas movie.

I don't know who decided that *Die Hard* should be a Christmas movie. It's not a traditional Christmas movie, but it's a fun '80s action movie that you can certainly watch during Christmas. I mean it's no less of a Christmas movie than *Gremlins*. I don't even know for sure why it really is considered a Christmas movie except for the fact that it takes place on Christmas Eve. Maybe that's the only requirement to really be a Christmas movie. But there should be more requirements, maybe not strict requirements, however, if you really look at every Christmas movie whether it's a comedy or a drama there is a universal theme to them. That universal theme is hope... the hope that everything is going to work out and everyone will find joy. Why can't that be the same for an action movie. In *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon*, the good guys win and the bad guys don't prevail. The good guys get to go celebrate the holidays with their loved ones while the bad guys end up in the morgue. It may not be the same hopeful movie as *It's a Wonderful Life*, but there is hope in these movies. At the end of *Die Hard*, John and Holly McClain get back together and go celebrate the holidays with their kids. At the end of *Lethal Weapon*, Martin Riggs decides he doesn't want to commit suicide anymore and gives the bullet that he was going to use to his new best friend and partner, Roger

Murtaugh. The movie literally ends with Christmas dinner. So yes, these movies are about hope in their own strange way. I think it's the universal theme that comes with Christmas that helps make a movie a Christmas movie. And if *Die Hard* can be considered a Christmas movie and why not *Lethal Weapon*. Fun fact, *Lethal Weapon* has more Christmas music than *Die Hard*. *Lethal Weapon* also has more Christmas decorations than *Die Hard*. Is it possible that it's more of a Christmas movie than *Die Hard*?

Okay, that may be a stretch, but my point is we shouldn't write *Lethal Weapon* off when it comes to being a Christmas Movie. In fact, it was a Christmas movie even before *Die Hard* because I came out the year before. But there's something else that I want to point out. *Die Hard* was never intended to be a Christmas movie as it was released during the summer of 1988. While the same can be said of *Lethal Weapon* because it was released in March of 1987, the writer of the movie, Shane Black has always used the time of Christmas as a storytelling mechanism. What do I mean by that? His best movies are always set during the Christmas season. *Lethal weapon*, *lethal weapon 2*, *A long Kiss Good Night*, *The Last Boy Scout*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, and *Iron Man 3*. Any one of these movies is more of a Christmas movie than *Die Hard*. Each one of these movies has that universal theme of "hope" at the epicenter of their stories. Shane Black did that on purpose. It's almost laughable at this point why we consider *Die Hard* a Christmas movie and never really talk about all these movies that Shane Black wrote where he purposely sent them during Christmas to help drive their narratives. I'm not saying that *Die Hard* shouldn't be considered a Christmas movie, but *Lethal Weapon* is most certainly a Christmas movie and all the ones I mentioned above should be considered a Christmas movie as well. Great action movies can



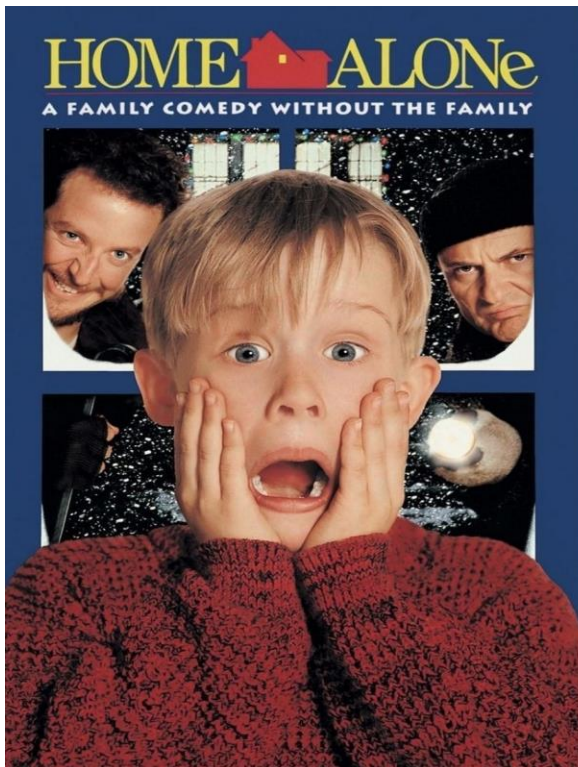
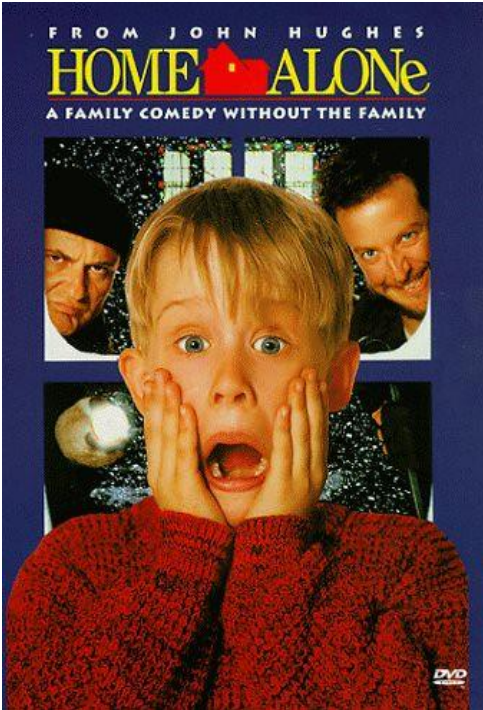
# HOME ALONE VS. HOME ALONE

Comparing the 1990 “Home Alone” movie to the 2021 “Home Sweet Home Alone”

By Aulora Costa

I’m sure you’ve heard by now, of the new 2021 Netflix movie “Home Sweet Home Alone.” While the director Dan Mazer did a wonderful job, in my opinion it doesn’t even compare to the original movies!! First of all, while the character of Kevin McAllister was anything but merciful when setting his traps, he was trying to defend his life and his home from bad guys! However, in the re-make, Max Mercer just about murders the “Thieves” who enter his house—even though he knows who they are. His traps include fire, thumbtack nerf darts, falling icicles, pool balls at the head, and more. He also completely demolishing the inside of his home, without any regard for his mother and the home she has made for him. He seems to care less about destroying the nice things his family owns and does it all for pure fun. Fallen ceilings, broken stairwells, and extremely expensive things smashed to smithereens—while in the original the only things destroyed were collateral damage. And while the character of Kevin was definitely snarky, he was also clever and deep down you could tell he really loved his family and siblings despite their annoyances. He made jokes and clever puns that stick with you forever.

Meanwhile, in this new rendition Max was just straight up selfish and extremely rude, yelling at his mother every time he talks to her, acting like a complete selfish brat and overall, just a very unpleasant protagonist that no one wants to root for. He is a complete jerk. Also, the poor couple who entered Max’s house are just trying to save their home, so that their children can keep living in their new forever home. While Kevin had real robbers inside his home, who were trying to hurt and take him and his family’s belongings. The movie itself even hints that the “remakes are never as good as the originals”—no kidding. There is also a lot more involvement with Kevin’s siblings in the original, and more character development of his crazy, large family overall that makes the wacky crew endearing. But in this 2021 version Max doesn’t even have any siblings, and his mom forgets him because they are worrying about his cousins. He is an entitled, spoiled and nasty kid that no one seems to care for. Overall, both have some good laughs, but if you’re looking for a true family Christmas movie than the original wins hands down. This new remake isn’t even a decent second!



# The Artists

## The Performance That Made Me Want to Be an Actor!

By Rebecca Evens

**When** I was asked to choose a scene that inspired me to become an actor, I slightly underestimated the task. The truth is that there is no one scene or actor that specifically inspired me... there are several. A few do stand out in my mind however, and this is one of them. Gary Oldman's performance as Norman Stansfield in *Leon the Professional* was one that made an impression on me. A corrupt self-loathing, drug-addicted, power-hungry DEA agent could have been played by many actors, but Oldman transforms into Stansfield so well that he arguably stole the film. One memorable scene in the movie is when he was talking about Beethoven to the man whose entire family he just had murdered. No one would have guessed that the short monologue of his is not actually scripted, but completely improvised. This is a mark of a truly brilliant actor. Oldman did his research. You'll never be a great actor without intelligence, and doing the work. He fleshed out the role so well he knew what Stansfield's opinion of the composer would be and delivered that opinion as though it were his own. In a completely terrifying and intimidating way I might add.



One scene I believe stands out in this film is the bathroom scene with a very young Natalie Portman. Had the role of Stansfield been given to someone besides Oldman, it could have been played very differently, and likely been much less effective. It begins with Mathilda already hiding in the bathroom looking to escape. As the door closes behind her we see Stansfield standing casually against the wall behind the door. He proceeds very slowly towards her but stops to wash his face and hands. He does not need to be loud or aggressive, because she (and the audience) already know how dangerous this man is. Part of Oldman's brilliance is understanding the fine line between knowing when to use subtly and stillness, and when to go farther. Mathilda is holding

a brown paper bag that Stansfield and the audience know is filled with guns. As he washes his hands he asks "What's in the bag? Chinese? Thai? I've got it.. Italian food." A point here on Nuance. Little things an actor adds to create a character. Their speech pattern, accent, manner of walking, standing, breathing etc..all add volumes to a role. Something that Oldman is a master of perfecting. Here we see him take his time, wipe his face, cough, and take another pill head turned away from camera, bite, and swallow. Nuances can be so subtle, that we the audience don't even realize they were acting choices. A twitch of the eye or lip, a nod, a hand gesture, even a breath at the right moment are all examples of actions a truly professional actor thinks about and decides when and where they are appropriate.

From the time the door closes, until he's done taking his pill we cover and minute a half. A great actor takes their time. He continues to move closer to Mathilda seemingly calm. But because Stansfield is such a complicated and difficult character, we are all very aware that he could snap at any given moment. That is what makes him so frightening. He is unpredictable. He pulls out his gun and holds it to his side as he approaches Mathilda and says "So this is something personal, is it? What filthy piece of shit did I do now?" His delivery of this line could have been said a thousand different ways. In this moment we see a glimpse of the self-loathing mentioned before that this agent has for himself. He hates who he has become, yet also enjoys it. He may even wish for death but clearly has no desire to change, start a new life and walk away. "You killed my brother," she answers. We see a moment of regret when he says "I'm sorry" but we also see that he only cares just so much. He asks if she would like to join him as he moves down to her level for an extreme close-up. "It's when you start to become really afraid of death, that you begin to appreciate life." It delivers this line as a father trying to teach a child, even caressing her hair. Now what's beautiful in this scene, is the "purpleness." An acting coach once told me, "you have a scene with two actors. One red. One blue. If both actors are giving for the sake of the scene, you get purpleness." Great actors allow room for the other actor's moments and don't attempt to make it all about themselves. When it comes to acting with children this opens up a few more challenges. Oldman does not treat Portman as a child, he treats her as the talented young actress that she was, and allowed her to shine. More selfish actors could easily have tried to steal the scene, but his selflessness here allowed him to do that anyway. Portman here, shows that he is able, and brave enough at such a young age to go head-to-head with a far older, more experienced

actor and be able to hold her own. Most experienced adult actors would be a little nervous to do such a heavy scene with someone like Oldman, but she owned the role and nailed it, establishing herself as an actress of note. Even when he is inches from her touching her face she never breaks concentration or drops a line.



"Do you like life?" He asks. "Because I take no pleasure in taking a life, if it's from a person that doesn't care about it," while stroking her face with his gun. He never raises his voice in this scene. We have seen him lose composure and yell in prior scenes, but Oldman knows that a quiet tone and slow, thought-out movements can be more intimidating and terrifying. He has no need to prove how dangerous he is. Characters like Stansfield have many, many layers. They are fun, but very difficult to play. In this scene we are able to see many of those layers because they were in such a talented actor's hands. We see intimidation and danger of course, but we also see regret, confusion, anger, self-hatred, and even a bit of hesitation. That is a wide range in a short scene to portray, and he captured all of them. On a side note, another film he shows such a wide range of emotions is in the film *Romeo is Bleeding* which every actor should be required to watch. In conclusion, when I watch this scene I feel so many levels of thought and emotion that can best be described not by writing, but by watching. An actor's instrument is their body. They should be an open vessel. Oldman truly is a chameleon and someone whose work is a study all on its own. Actors tell stories. Or rather, if done right, make you FEEL stories. If we achieve that realistically and honestly, we have done our job. We should not think we are watching someone act. A true artist is one that can make something look effortless and easy. But those of us who know better, can truly appreciate the time, work, and energy it takes to to achieve such a task. I hope you will watch this film if you have not seen it and perhaps walk away with a new appreciation and understanding of a truly great performance that I cannot completely convey in words. Never stop studying and learning. The moment you think you've learned it all, is the moment that you will stop being a true artist.



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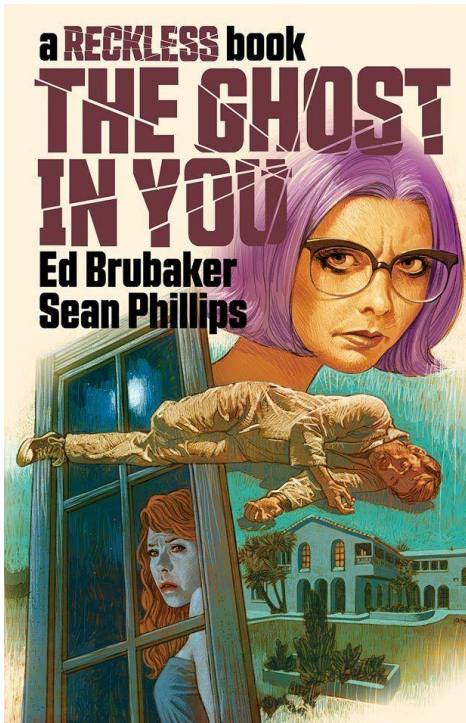
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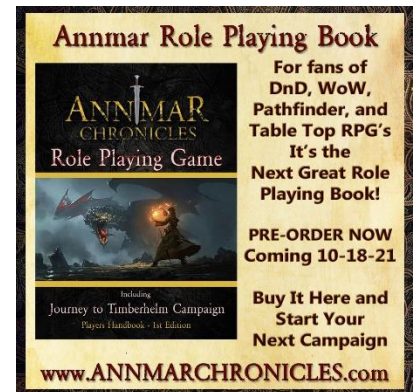
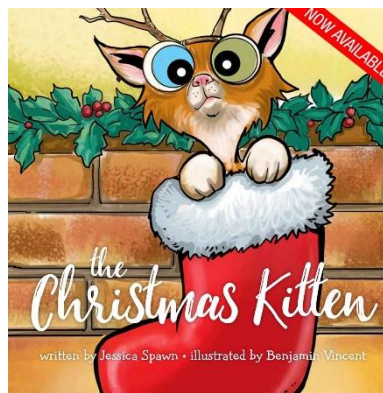
# MULTIPLE EISNER AWARD WINNING DUO ED BRUBAKER & SEAN PHILLIPS HIT FANS WITH NEW RECKLESS BOOK, "THE GHOST IN YOU" THIS APRIL



novels has been amazing, and it's pushed us creatively, too," said Brubaker. "After watching Anna grow over the first three books in the *Reckless* series, I couldn't stop thinking about doing a book with her as the lead, working her own case. And it's a case that lets me dive back into some of my own obsessions, like famous crime scene houses and TV horror hosts of the '60s and '70s. This is one strange mystery that Anna finds herself in the middle of." In *The Ghost in You*, it's the winter of 1989 and Ethan is out of town—so this time, Anna has to tackle the job on her own. When a movie scream queen asks her to prove the mansion she's renovating isn't haunted, Anna will stumble into the decades-long mystery of one of Hollywood's most infamous murder houses...a place with many dark secrets—some of which might just kill her. Phillips added: "It's only taken 40 years, but the *Reckless* books have helped me find my rhythm drawing comics.

One hundred thirty-two pages straight through without having to stop every month on an artificial cliff-hanger to draw a cover means I get to do my best work on an explosive story. Graphic novels are the future, and this is our best one yet!" Another surefire hit from the award winning creators behind *Pulp*, *My Heroes Have Always Been Junkies*, *Criminal*, and *The Fade Out*—and a must-have for all Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips fans. *The Ghost in You: A Reckless Book* original graphic novel hardcover (ISBN: 978-1534322080) will be available on Wednesday, April 13 and in bookstores on Tuesday, April 19. It can be pre-ordered at your local comic book shop or independent bookstore or via [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), and [Indigo](#). *The Ghost in You: A Reckless Book* will also be available for purchase across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

Ed Brubaker and Sean Phillips' bestselling *Reckless* books just won't quit, as the award winning crime noir masters bring us yet another original graphic novel starring troublemaker-for-hire Ethan Reckless in *The Ghost in You*. It will land on shelves this April from Image Comics and join *Reckless*, *Friend of the Devil*, and *Destroy All Monsters* in this original graphic novel series. "The reaction to me and Sean switching to original graphic



# BESTSELLING TEAM BEHIND DESCENDER/ASCENDER, JEFF LEMIRE & DUSTIN NGUYEN, REUNITE FOR “LITTLE MONSTERS” – COMING MARCH 2022



The bestselling, award winning creative behind *Descender* and *Ascender*—Jeff

Lemire and Dustin Nguyen—reteam for an all-new series, *Little Monsters*. This ongoing series is set to launch from Image Comics in March 2022. "After finishing fifty issues of *Descender* and *Ascender*, Dustin and I knew we wanted to keep our collaborations going but also knew we needed to change direction and try something totally different from that sweeping space epic," said Lemire in [an exclusive on the announcement with ComicBook.com](#). In *Little Monsters* readers follow the last children on Earth...who also happen to be vampires. For longer than they can remember, these child vampires have lived a life of eternal wonder amongst the ruins of humanity. But shocking events fracture the group and set them on a path of discovery that will shatter their innocence forever. "This story may be about vampires but it is not a horror book," he [added](#). "It is a book very much grounded in the lives of these children who have, in a way, been trapped in amber. They live an endless life of innocence and games and childhood. It's a character study of what it would mean to

be truly young forever and the things that growing up costs us all. Dustin is doing some of the best work of his career and I've really fallen in love with this world and these characters. We can't wait to share more with readers." *Little Monsters #1* will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, March 2, 2022. *Little Monsters #1* will also be available for purchase across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

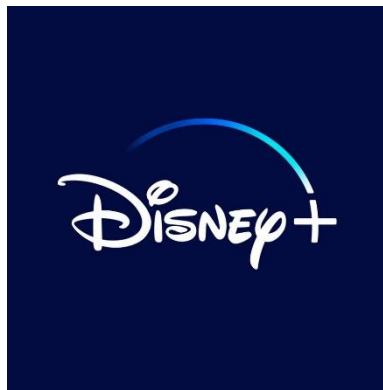


# THE NEW SORCERER SUPREME OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE IS REVEALED



Follow the adventures of *CLEA* as the next Sorcerer Supreme in 'Strange,' a new comic series coming in March from Jed MacKay and Marcelo Ferreira! This March, make way for the new Sorcerer Supreme! With Doctor Strange dead, another sorcerer has taken the title, or should we say Sorceress? Clea, mistress of the Dark Dimension and Stephen Strange's powerful partner, will rise to the challenge of defending earth from mystical and otherworldly danger in writer Jed MacKay's STRANGE #1! Featuring artwork by AMAZING SPIDER-MAN artist Marcelo Ferreira, this all-new ongoing series will spin directly out of the story still unfolding in MacKay's DEATH OF DOCTOR STRANGE. Readers should stay tuned to the hit limited series to see the tragedy and drama that leads into this exciting turn of events!

Haunted by her recently returned memories, Clea longs to bring Stephen Strange back from the dead! But when a mysterious group attacks the magical realm, Clea, now the sole protector of Earth against magical threats must rise to the duties of Sorcerer Supreme. Don't miss the shocking twists, new villains, and unbelievable magical feats as Clea takes Marvel magic to places it's never gone before! Here's what MacKay had to say about continuing this unprecedented Doctor Strange saga: "After the apocalyptic events of THE DEATH OF DOCTOR STRANGE, there's a new Sorcerer Supreme in residence at 177A Bleecker Street, and a new Doctor Strange—Clea Strange. And she's got her work cut out for her—when she's not fighting off the magical gangsters of the Blasphemy Syndicate, or battling undead super-monsters, she's going after what's hers: the late Stephen Strange. Clea is of the Faltine, that race of Warlords and conquerors, and like her relatives Dormammu and Umar, she will not be thwarted in her desires, not even by the mysterious Harvestman standing in her way. "It's been really exciting to open up a new chapter in the world of Doctor (Clea) Strange, to get some new adventures going and some new weirdies on the table, and I can't wait for folks to come along with us!" *Enter a thrilling new age of Marvel mysticism when STRANGE #1 hits stands on March 2!* **STRANGE #1** Written by JED MACKAY, Art by MARCELO FERREIRA, Cover by BJÖRN BARENDS, On Sale 3/2

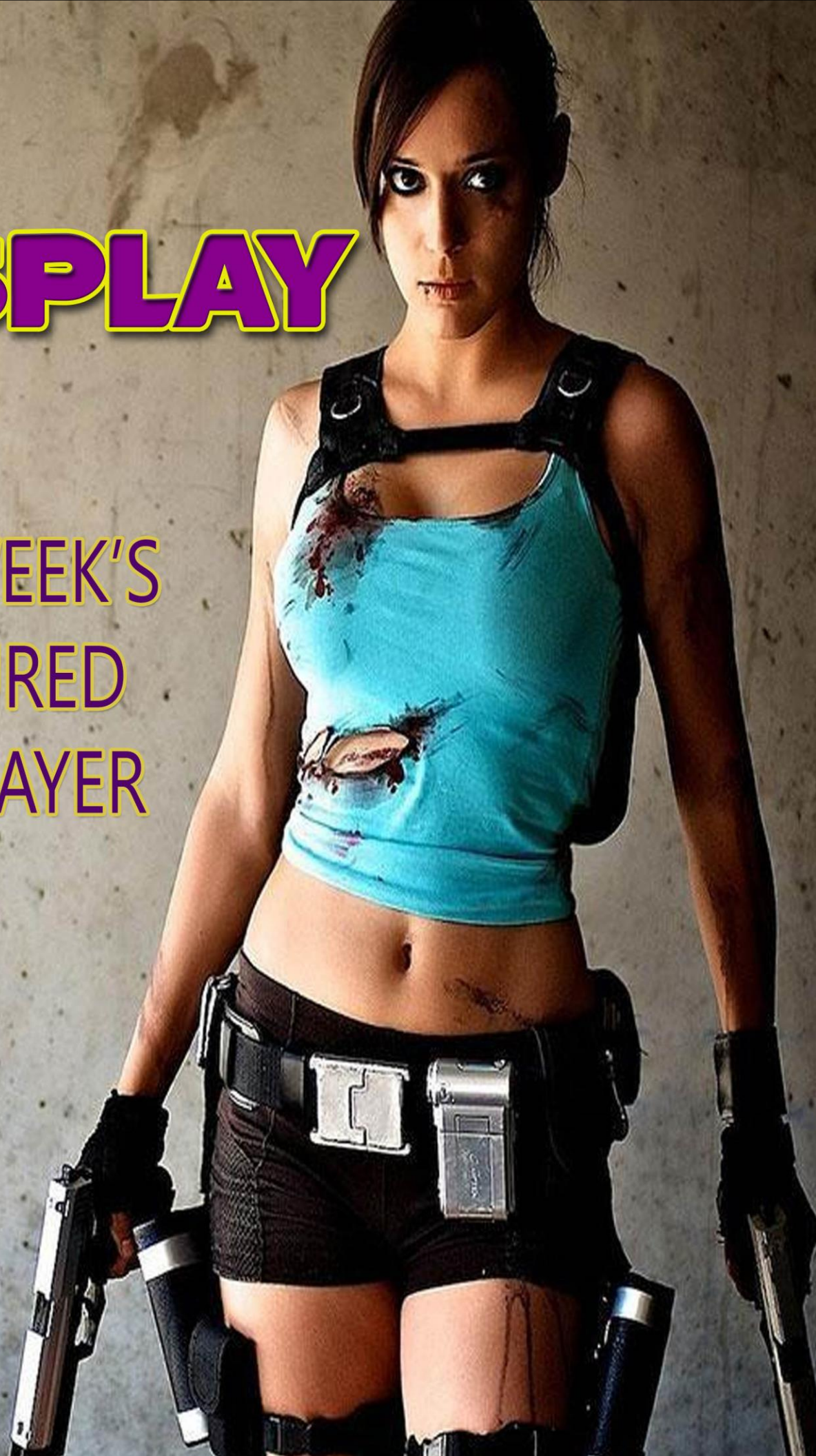


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# COSPLAY

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# THE BRAT PRINCE *Cosplay*



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dfw.hostclub

[www.thebratprince.net](http://www.thebratprince.net)

# ABOUT THE BRAT PRINCE



The Brat Prince is the founder of the media group and YouTube channel Brat Prince Productions that specializes in cosplay, art and game design. They are also the founder of the DFW Host Club which plans events that pay homage to the opulent lifestyle of the Ouran Highschool Host Club. They spend most of their time recording and editing YouTube videos, drawing and helping organize local anime events. They can be spotted at Texas anime conventions and themed pop-up cafes.

[www.thebratprince.net](http://www.thebratprince.net)

## INTERVIEW

### How did you get into cosplay?

Back in the early 2000s, I was really into Boys Love media. Really, the only thing we had was the manga Gravitation by Maki Murakami. My crush in high school at the time was making cosplay in our fashion design class. And I asked what they were doing and they told me they were cosplaying Shuichi from Gravitation. And I'd never made a cosplay or known about conventions until that moment. And so true to being royalty, you know. Go big or go home, so I did a cosplay for my first anime convention. Similarly, that's also how I got into sewing and crafting and all that stuff. Beforehand I was just into art and I watched a lot of anime and drew a lot of anime art, mainly Cardcaptor Sakura, YuGiOh and Dragonball Z. But seeing my friend and finding what anime conventions were made me get into cosplay straight away.

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

I have such a wide range of characters that I have cosplayed over the years that it's hard to narrow it down to just one character. The best I can do for you is three: Prince Noctis Lucis Caelum from Final Fantasy XV. Recently, my father passed away and beforehand I had always considered myself to have a lot of similar points to Noctis. He also loses his father in the game and it just kind of made me relate to that character a bit more, I guess. Also I feel really confident in his cosplay and that's really important to me being a black cosplayer, to feel comfortable in the character's skin because I have gotten pretty hurtful comments on the internet just for being a dark skinned cosplayer. The second character is Kyouya Ootori from Ouran Highschool Host Club. That's an old favorite show of mine and I kind of have some of the same characteristics as Kyouya. I'm very business savvy, money conscious. My wife has the same birthday as Tamaki and I have to deal with that all the time, if you know what I mean. Haha. Plus, I just love the uniform and the crisp clean look of the Ouran Highschool outfit. Apart from that, being a part of the DFW Host Club group, I enjoy cosplaying him with my friends. And last but certainly not least is Sora from Kingdom Hearts 3. The costume is comfortable and I don't cosplay a lot of happy go lucky characters and so when I cosplay him, I kind of feel that energy and it's nice because I'm usually a pretty melancholy person.

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

If you are a beginner, start with altering premade pieces of clothing. For example: if your character has a school uniform jacket and it's black, buy a black suit jacket maybe and make the school crest on it or add the little details yourself with iron on patches, things like that. Start with altering clothes especially if you don't have a sewing machine on hand. Alterations are easier done by hand. If you don't have a sewing machine, you can easily hand-sew on patches and things like that. Silicon spray for wigs is your friend. It'll keep them from getting all tangly, especially long wigs. Youtube is also your friend. There are a ton of tutorials on how to make almost anything in cosplay from really talented cosplayers who have won competitions and things like that. There are so many resources and you can easily make your costume that way. Also, if you're getting things like contacts from overseas, see if your friends want to go on a group order. That way you can split shipping because sometimes shipping is expensive. You can wait for deals on free shipping but they're not always going to be there in time for a convention and usually those places can take 30 days maybe to ship your contacts so try going in on that with friends. And last, don't be

afraid to reach out to cosplayers you admire for help. You never know. We're a generally friendly group and we will help anyone who needs it. And if you can, make cosplay with your friends. Sometimes there will be someone in a group who's like I am great at styling wigs and you're not so hot at it, you can ask them and you can swap off being maybe I'm not as good at styling wigs but I'm awesome at makeup and I can do your makeup for the convention or we can practice makeup techniques together, things like that.

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

A local cosplayer had recreated the little boardgame that they play in Season Zero of YuGiOh and they had the little pieces of Yugi as the wizard, Joey and Tristan were knights. And everyone playing the game was dressed up as YuGiOh characters and the dungeon master of that game was a Bakura cosplayer. We're at the end of the game and we're screwed. It's my turn. Everyone is dead, I have literally two hitpoints. I need a ridiculous number to win so I just grab the d20 and I'm holding it and all "I believe in the heart of the dice", I'm just having a good time and I don't care if I win or lose, we're all just being silly and I rolled a nat 20. I roll exactly what I need. I beat the boss, I win the game. Everyone's screaming and cheering and some random guy with a box of DVDs on him comes over and he just DUMPS his giant box of random anime DVDs for everyone in celebration. In that moment, I was truly the king of games. That's the takeaway here: I'm the King of Games

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

Cosplay who and what you want to cosplay. It doesn't matter if the character is light skinned and you're dark skinned. It doesn't matter if you're overweight and you're skinny. Body type and height don't matter. Like if you're super tall and the character you like is short, it doesn't matter. If you want to be a female version of the character, if you want to make a completely new alternate universe version of that character it doesn't matter because the word cosplay means costume play and it's about having fun. Don't beat yourself up over accuracy or because another cosplayer looks "perfect". Your own take and version of the cosplay will always be perfect, even if it's only perfect for you. If you get into cosplay worrying about what other people think or if you look good, if you look perfect or if you look passable as the character then you will find yourself hating cosplay. You will find that cosplay will bring you stress and anxiety instead of just being fun. In the end, all those people that have hundreds and thousands of followers are the same as you and I: They're just nerds in costume. So cosplay who you want and just remember to always have fun.

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

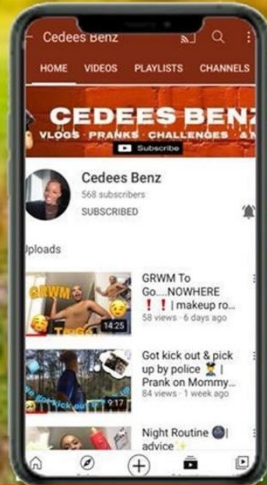
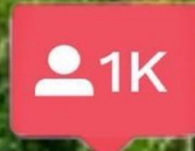
I choose to be super anime rich like SUPER ANIME RICH. Like the Millionaire Detective Unlimited. So at the end of each episode, they calculate how much he had to pay for damages and just everything he did that episode. Clearly, if he's spending that kind of money on the daily, he's not a millionaire. He's a straight up billionaire. I want to be super rich. I don't want powers or a weapon. I just want money. Super Anime Money.



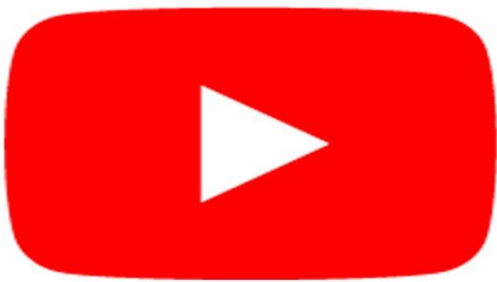




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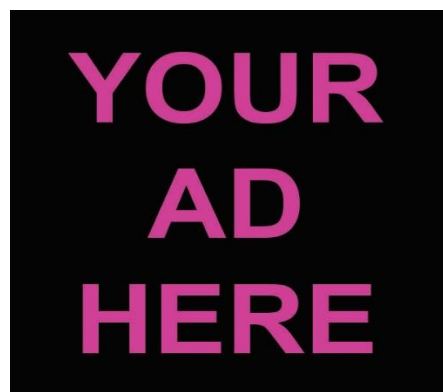


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## Chris Martin Reveals Coldplay Will Stop Making New Music in 2025



**Chris Martin** has announced that Coldplay will make their final album in 2025. During an interview with BBC Radio 2's Jo Whiley, the 44-year-old musician explained that the band will stop releasing new music after the album but continue to tour with their existing catalogue. "Well I know I can tell you: our last proper record will come out in 2025 and after that I think we will only tour," Martin said. "Maybe we'll do some collaborative things but the Coldplay catalogue, as it were, finishes then." The group released their ninth studio album *Music of the Spheres* in October, and Martin told NME at the time that Coldplay plans to make a total of 12 albums. "We're going to make 12 albums. Because it's a lot to pour everything into making them. I love it and it's amazing, but it's very intense too," the Yellow hitmaker said. "I feel like because I know that challenge is finite, making this music doesn't feel difficult, it feels like, 'This is what we're supposed to be doing.'" "I don't think that's what we'll do," he concluded. "I know that's what we'll do in terms of studio albums."



## Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers are Working on a New Musical



**Robbie Williams** and Guy Chambers are working on a new musical together. The 58-year-old songwriter - who has collaborated with Robbie numerous times and has also written for the likes of Kylie Minogue and Anastacia - revealed that he is working on another stage project with the ex-Take That singer which he hopes will premiere in 2023. He told *The Daily Mirror* newspaper: "I'm working on another musical with Rob, as we did 'The Boy in the Dress' which was on in Stratford. It'll take about two years to come out though, as things take a long time, as you need to get the team together. Guy did not go into further detail about the project, but teased that it will be a "departure" from Robbie's usual style. News of the musical comes just weeks after Guy revealed he had once penned a song with Britney Spears, but it was quickly shelved by her record company and is unlikely to come out any time soon. He said: "I wrote a song with Britney that's never come out called 'Sacred'. In the many Britney fan communities it's their holy grail, but they've never heard it, they've only heard about it. She said 'f\*\*\*' in it. This was in about 2006, her imperial phase, when she was huge. She was trying to rebel from the cleaner side of Britney, I suppose, and I should have said no, but I didn't, I let her do what she wanted." "I actually asked her lawyer recently if they could put it out, but they said no. One day it will come out I'm sure, but it won't be tomorrow

## Adele on Course to Secure the Christmas Number 1 Album



**Adele** looks set to secure this year's Christmas Number 1 album, with 30 currently tracking to hold steady at the top of the Official Albums Chart for the fifth consecutive week. Although perhaps less well-known than its singles counterpart, the Christmas Number 1 album has been a UK chart staple since 1956. 30 would be Adele's second Christmas chart-topping LP, having previously earned the accolade in 2015 with her third album 25. With its fifth consecutive week at Number 1, 30 would also tie Olivia Rodrigo's *Sour* as the longest-running Number 1 album of the year. Olivia's breakthrough debut record had five non-consecutive weeks at the top of the Official Albums Chart. Elsewhere this week, Michael Buble's Christmas rises one spot to Number 4, its highest peak of the year so far, and Andre Rieu and his Johann Strauss Orchestra's *Happy Together* is currently eyeing a new peak of Number 5. Rod Stewart's *Tears Of Hercules* is looking to climb three spots to Number 7, while Robert Plant and Alison Krauss' *Raise The Roof* could re-enter the Top 10 on Friday, currently up 11 to Number 8 following the record's vinyl release. Little Mix could also land back in the Top 10 with greatest hits *Between Us* set to rise to Number 10. Outside the Top 10, several Christmas albums are beginning to reap the rewards of the festive season. Gary Barlow's *The Dream of Christmas* is currently up five to Number 12, while Jamie Cullum's *The Pianoman At Christmas* could be this week's highest riser, on course to vault 17 places to Number 36, as Michael Ball and Alfie Boe could re-enter the Top 40 with *Together At Christmas* at Number 40. American musician, comedian and filmmaker Bo Burnham is on track for a re-entry into the Official Albums Chart this week with *Inside (The Songs)*. The album features the songs from his 2021 Netflix special, and following its vinyl release is set to re-enter at Number 16 - the collection peaked at Number 5 earlier this year and spent seven weeks in the Top 10. The highest brand new entry this week could come from American rapper Roddy Ricch, whose second album *Live Life Fast* could debut at Number 26. It will mark his second Top 40 collection in the UK if it holds on. Finally, two former Number 1s continue to climb this week; Sam Fender's *Seventeen Going Under* could vault four to Number 17 following his continued Singles Chart success and triple BRIT nomination at the weekend, while Nirvana's iconic *Nevermind* could crack the Top 20 again, currently up 16 to Number 20.

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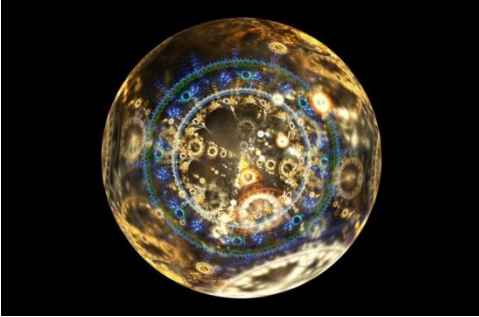
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# Time Crystal in a Quantum Computer



There is a huge global effort to engineer a computer capable of harnessing the power of quantum physics to carry out computations of unprecedented complexity. While formidable technological obstacles still stand in the way of creating such a quantum computer, today's early prototypes are still capable of remarkable feats. For example, the creation of a new phase of matter called a "time crystal." Just as a crystal's structure repeats in space, a time crystal repeats in time and, importantly, does so infinitely and without any further input of energy -- like a clock that runs forever without any batteries. The quest to realize this phase of matter has been a longstanding challenge in theory and experiment -- one that has now finally come to fruition. In research published Nov. 30 in *Nature*, a team of scientists from Stanford University, Google Quantum AI, the Max Planck Institute for Physics of Complex Systems and Oxford University detail their creation of a time crystal using Google's Sycamore quantum computing hardware. "The big picture is that we are taking the devices that are meant to be the quantum computers of the future and thinking of them as complex quantum systems in their own right," said Matteo Ippoliti, a postdoctoral scholar at Stanford and co-lead author of the work. "Instead of computation, we're putting the computer to work as a new experimental platform to realize and detect new phases of matter." For the team, the excitement of their achievement lies not only in creating a new phase of matter but in opening up opportunities to explore new regimes in their field of condensed matter physics, which studies the novel phenomena and properties brought about by the collective interactions of many objects in a system. (Such interactions can be far richer than the properties of the individual objects.) "Time-crystals are a striking example of a new type of non-equilibrium quantum phase of matter," said Vedika Khemani, assistant professor of physics at Stanford and a senior author of the paper. "While much of our understanding of condensed matter physics is based on equilibrium systems, these new quantum devices are providing us a fascinating window into new non-equilibrium regimes in many-body physics."

## What a time crystal is and isn't

The basic ingredients to make this time crystal are as follows: The physics equivalent of a fruit fly and something to give it a kick. The fruit fly of physics

is the Ising model, a longstanding tool for understanding various physical phenomena -- including phase transitions and magnetism -- which consists of a lattice where each site is occupied by a particle that can be in two states, represented as a spin up or down. During her graduate school years, Khemani, her doctoral advisor Shivaji Sondhi, then at Princeton University, and Achilleas Lazarides and Roderich Moessner at the Max Planck Institute for Physics of Complex Systems stumbled upon this recipe for making time crystals unintentionally. They were studying non-equilibrium many-body localized systems -- systems where the particles get "stuck" in the state in which they started and can never relax to an equilibrium state. They were interested in exploring phases that might develop in such systems when they are periodically "kicked" by a laser. Not only did they manage to find stable non-equilibrium phases, they found one where the spins of the particles flipped between patterns that repeat in time forever, at a period twice that of the driving period of the laser, thus making a time crystal. The periodic kick of the laser establishes a specific rhythm to the dynamics. Normally the "dance" of the spins should sync up with this rhythm, but in a time crystal it doesn't. Instead, the spins flip between two states, completing a cycle only after being kicked by the laser *twice*. This means that the system's "time translation symmetry" is broken. Symmetries play a fundamental role in physics, and they are often broken -- explaining the origins of regular crystals, magnets and many other phenomena; however, time translation symmetry stands out because unlike other symmetries, it can't be broken in equilibrium. The periodic kick is a loophole that makes time crystals possible. The doubling of the oscillation period is unusual, but not unprecedented. And long-lived oscillations are also very common in the quantum dynamics of few-particle systems. What makes a time crystal unique is that it's a system of millions of things that are showing this kind of concerted behavior without any energy coming in *or* leaking out. "It's a completely robust phase of matter, where you're not fine-tuning parameters or states but your system is still quantum," said Sondhi, professor of physics at Oxford and co-author of the paper. "There's no feed of energy, there's no drain of energy, and it keeps going forever and it involves many strongly interacting particles." While this may sound suspiciously close to a "perpetual motion machine," a closer look reveals that time crystals don't break any laws of physics. Entropy -- a measure of disorder in the system -- remains stationary over time, marginally satisfying the second law of thermodynamics by not decreasing. Between the development of this plan for a time crystal and the quantum computer experiment that brought it to reality, many experiments by many different teams of researchers achieved various almost-time-crystal milestones. However, providing all the ingredients in the recipe for "many-body localization" (the phenomenon that enables an infinitely stable time crystal) had remained an outstanding challenge. For Khemani and her collaborators, the final step to time crystal success was working with a team at Google Quantum AI. Together, this group used Google's Sycamore quantum computing hardware to program 20 "spins" using the quantum version of a classical

computer's bits of information, known as qubits. Revealing just how intense the interest in time crystals currently is, another time crystal was published in *Science* this month. That crystal was created using qubits within a diamond by researchers at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

## Quantum opportunities



The researchers were able to confirm their claim of a true time crystal thanks to special capabilities of the quantum computer. Although the finite size and coherence time of the (imperfect) quantum device meant that their experiment was limited in size and duration -- so that the time crystal oscillations could only be observed for a few hundred cycles rather than indefinitely -- the researchers devised various protocols for assessing the stability of their creation. These included running the simulation forward and backward in time and scaling its size. "We managed to use the versatility of the quantum computer to help us analyze its own limitations," said Moessner, co-author of the paper and director at the Max Planck Institute for Physics of Complex Systems. "It essentially told us how to correct for its own errors, so that the fingerprint of ideal time-crystalline behavior could be ascertained from finite time observations." A key signature of an ideal time crystal is that it shows indefinite oscillations from *all* states. Verifying this robustness to choice of states was a key experimental challenge, and the researchers devised a protocol to probe over a million states of their time crystal in just a single run of the machine, requiring mere milliseconds of runtime. This is like viewing a physical crystal from many angles to verify its repetitive structure. "A unique feature of our quantum processor is its ability to create highly complex quantum states," said Xiao Mi, a researcher at Google and co-lead author of the paper. "These states allow the phase structures of matter to be effectively verified without needing to investigate the entire computational space -- an otherwise intractable task." Creating a new phase of matter is unquestionably exciting on a fundamental level. In addition, the fact that these researchers were able to do so points to the increasing usefulness of quantum computers for applications other than computing. "I am optimistic that with more and better qubits, our approach can become a main method in studying non-equilibrium dynamics," said Pedram Roushan, researcher at Google and senior author of the paper. "We think that the most exciting use for quantum computers right now is as platforms for fundamental quantum



physics," said Ippoliti. "With the unique capabilities of these systems, there's hope that you might discover some new phenomenon that you hadn't predicted." This work was led by Stanford University, Google Quantum AI, the Max Planck Institute for Physics of Complex Systems and Oxford University. The full author list is available in the *Nature* paper. This research was funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), a Google Research Award, the Sloan Foundation, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

## Strong Winds Power Electric Fields in the Upper Atmosphere



What happens on Earth doesn't stay on Earth? Using observations from NASA's ICON mission, scientists presented the first direct measurements of Earth's long-theorized dynamo on the edge of space: a wind-driven electrical generator that spans the globe 60-plus miles above our heads. The dynamo churns in the ionosphere, the electrically charged boundary between Earth and space. It's powered by tidal winds in the upper atmosphere that are faster than most hurricanes and rise from the lower atmosphere, creating an electrical environment that can affect satellites and technology on Earth. The new work, published today in *Nature Geoscience*, improves our understanding of the ionosphere, which helps scientists better predict space weather and protect our technology from its effects. Launched in 2019, ICON, short for Ionospheric Connection Explorer, is a mission to untangle how Earth's weather interacts with the weather in space. Radio and GPS signals zip through the ionosphere, which is home to auroras and the International Space Station. Empty pockets or dense swells of electrically charged particles can disrupt these signals. Scientists who study the atmosphere and space weather have long included Earth's dynamo in their models because they knew it had important effects. But with little information, they had to make some assumptions about how it works. Data from ICON is the first concrete observation of winds fueling the dynamo, eventually influencing space weather, to feed into those models. "ICON's first year in space has shown predicting these winds is key to improving our ability to predict what happens in the ionosphere," said Thomas Immel, ICON principal investigator at University of California, Berkeley, and lead author of the new study.

### Earth's sky-high generator

The ionosphere is like a sloshing sea of electrically charged particles, created by the Sun and intermixed with the neutral upper atmosphere. Sandwiched between Earth and space, the ionosphere responds to changes from both the Sun above and Earth below. How much influence comes from each side is what researchers are interested in figuring out. Studying a year of ICON data, the researchers found much of the change they observed originated in the lower atmosphere. Generators work by repeatedly moving an electricity-carrying conductor -- like a copper wire -- through a magnetic field. Filled with electrically charged gases called plasma, the ionosphere acts like a wire, or rather, a tangled mess of wires: Electricity flows right through. Like the dynamo in Earth's core, the dynamo in the atmosphere produces electromagnetic fields from motion. Strong winds in the thermosphere, a layer of the upper atmosphere known for its high temperatures, push current-carrying plasma in the ionosphere across invisible magnetic field lines that arc around Earth like an onion. The wind tends to push on chunky, positively charged particles more than small, negatively charged electrons. "You get pluses moving differently than minuses," said co-author Brian Harding, a physicist at University of California, Berkeley. "That's an electric current." In most generators, these components are bound tightly so they stay put and act predictably. But the ionosphere is free to move however it likes. "The current generates its own magnetic field, which fights Earth's magnetic field as it's passing through," Immel said. "So you end up with a wire trying to get away from you. It's a messy generator." Following the whims of the ionosphere is key to predicting space weather's potential impacts. Depending on which way the wind blows, plasma in the ionosphere shoots out into space or plummets toward Earth. This behavior results from the tug-of-war between the ionosphere and Earth's electromagnetic fields. The dynamo, which lies at the lower end of the ionosphere, has remained a mystery for so long because it's difficult to observe. Too high for scientific balloons and too low for satellites, it has eluded many of the tools researchers have to study near-Earth space. ICON is uniquely equipped to investigate this part of the ionosphere from above by taking advantage of the upper atmosphere's natural glow to detect the motion of plasma. ICON simultaneously observes powerful winds and migrating plasma. "This was the first time we could tell how much the wind contributes to the ionosphere's behavior, without any assumptions," said Astrid Maute, another study co-author and ICON scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. Only in the past decade or so, Immel said, have scientists realized just how much those rising winds vary. "The upper atmosphere wasn't expected to change rapidly," he said. "But it does, day to day. We're finding this is all due to changes driven up from the lower atmosphere."

### Wind power

Familiar are the winds that skim the surface of Earth, from gentle breezes to bracing gusts that blow

one way and then the other. High-altitude winds are a different beast. From 60 to 95 miles above the ground, in the lower thermosphere, winds can blast in the same direction at the same speed -- around 250 mph -- for a few hours at a time before suddenly reversing direction. (By comparison, winds in the strongest Category 5 hurricanes tear at 157 mph or more.) These dramatic shifts are the result of waves of air, called tides, born at Earth's surface when the lower atmosphere heats up during the day then cools down at night. They surge through the sky daily, carrying changes from below. The farther the atmosphere stretches away from the surface, the thinner it becomes and the less turbulence there is to disrupt these motions. That means small tides generated near the surface can grow much larger when they reach the upper atmosphere. "Changes in the winds up there are mostly controlled by what happens below," Harding said. ICON's new wind measurements help scientists understand these tidal patterns that span the globe and their effects. Tides ripple up through the sky, building in strength and growing before gusting through the ionosphere. The electric dynamo whirs in response. The scientists analyzed the first year of ICON data, and found high-altitude winds strongly influence the ionosphere. "We traced the pattern of how the ionosphere moves, and there was a clear wave-like structure," Harding said. Changes in the wind, he explained, directly corresponded to the dance of plasma 370 miles above Earth's surface. "Half of the motion of the plasma can be attributed to the winds that we observe right there on that same magnetic field line," Immel said. "That tells you it's an important observation to make if you want to predict what plasma is doing." ICON's first year of observations coincided with solar minimum, the quiet phase of the Sun's 11-year activity cycle. During this time, the Sun's behavior was a low, constant hum. "We know the Sun's not doing much, but we saw a lot of variability from below, and then remarkable changes in the ionosphere," Immel said. That told the researchers they could rule out the Sun as the main influence. As the Sun ramps up to its active phase, scientists will be able to study more complex changes and interactions between space and Earth's atmosphere. Immel said he is excited to have this confirmation of long-held ionosphere theories. "We found half of what causes the ionosphere to behave as it does right there in the data," he said. "This is what we wanted to know." Still, Maute said, "This leaves room to explore what else is contributing to the ionosphere's behavior."



# At the Edge of Our Galaxy, Stellar Cocoon with Organic Molecules



For the first time, astronomers have detected a newborn star and the surrounding cocoon of complex organic molecules at the edge of our Galaxy, which is known as the extreme outer Galaxy. The discovery, which revealed the hidden chemical complexity of our Universe, appears in a paper in *The Astrophysical Journal*. The scientists from Niigata University (Japan), Academia Sinica Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics (Taiwan), and the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, used the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) in Chile to observe a newborn star (protostar) in the WB89-789 region, located in the extreme outer Galaxy. A variety of carbon-, oxygen-, nitrogen-, sulfur-, and silicon-bearing molecules, including complex organic molecules containing up to nine atoms, were detected. Such a protostar, as well as the associated cocoon of chemically-rich molecular gas, were for the first time detected at the edge of our Galaxy. The ALMA observations reveal that various kinds of complex organic molecules, such as methanol ( $\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$ ), ethanol ( $\text{C}_2\text{H}_5\text{OH}$ ), methyl formate ( $\text{HCOOCH}_3$ ), dimethyl ether ( $\text{CH}_3\text{OCH}_3$ ), formamide ( $\text{NH}_2\text{CHO}$ ), propanenitrile ( $\text{C}_2\text{H}_5\text{CN}$ ), etc., are present even in the primordial environment of the extreme outer Galaxy. Such complex organic molecules potentially act as the feedstock for larger prebiotic molecules.

Interestingly, the relative abundances of complex organic molecules in this newly discovered object resemble remarkably well what is found in similar objects in the inner Galaxy. The observations suggest that complex organic molecules are formed with similar efficiency even at the edge of our Galaxy, where the environment is very different from the solar neighborhood. It is believed that the outer part of our Galaxy still harbors a primordial environment that existed in the early epoch of galaxy formation. The environmental characteristics of the extreme outer Galaxy, e.g., low abundance of heavy elements, small or no perturbation from Galactic spiral arms, are very different from those seen in the present-day solar neighborhood. Because of its unique characteristics, the extreme outer Galaxy is an excellent laboratory to study star formation and the interstellar medium in the past

Galactic environment. "With ALMA we were able to see a forming star and the surrounding molecular cocoon at the edge of our Galaxy," says Takashi Shimonishi, an astronomer at Niigata University, Japan, and the paper's lead author. "To our surprise, a variety of abundant complex organic molecules exists in the primordial environment of the extreme outer Galaxy. The interstellar conditions to form the chemical complexity might have persisted since the early history of the Universe," Shimonishi adds. "These observations have revealed that complex organic molecules can be efficiently formed even in low-metallicity environments like the outermost regions of our Galaxy. This finding provides an important piece of the puzzle to understand how complex organic molecules are formed in the Universe," says Kenji Furuya, an astronomer at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, and the paper's co-author. It is not yet clear, however, if such a chemical complexity is common in the outer part of the Galaxy. Complex organic molecules are of special interest, because some of them are connected to prebiotic molecules formed in space. The team is planning to observe a larger number of star-forming regions in the future, and hopes to clarify whether chemically-rich systems, as seen in our Solar System, are ubiquitous through the history of the Universe. \*This work is supported by a Grant-in-Aid from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (19H05067, 21H00037, 21H01145).

## Precise New form of Brain Surgery Requires No Incisions, Scalpels



University of Virginia School of Medicine researchers have developed a noninvasive way to remove faulty brain circuits that could allow doctors to treat debilitating neurological diseases without the need for conventional brain surgery. The UVA team, together with colleagues at Stanford University, indicate that the approach, if successfully translated to the operating room, could revolutionize the treatment of some of the most challenging and complex neurological diseases, including epilepsy, movement disorders and more. The approach uses low-intensity focused ultrasound waves combined with microbubbles to briefly penetrate the brain's natural defenses and allow the targeted delivery of a neurotoxin. This neurotoxin kills the culprit brain cells while sparing other

healthy cells and preserving the surrounding brain architecture. "This novel surgical strategy has the potential to supplant existing neurosurgical procedures used for the treatment of neurological disorders that don't respond to medication," said researcher Kevin S. Lee, PhD, of UVA's Departments of Neuroscience and Neurosurgery and the Center for Brain Immunology and Glia (BIG). "This unique approach eliminates the diseased brain cells, spares adjacent healthy cells and achieves these outcomes without even having to cut into the scalp."

### The Power of PING

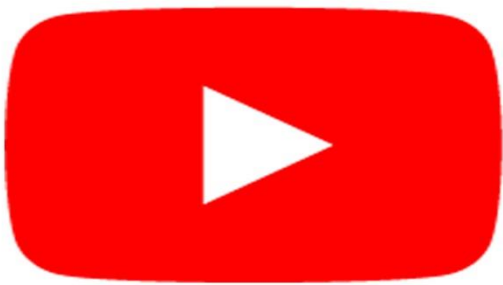
The new approach is called PING, and it has already demonstrated exciting potential in laboratory studies. For instance, one of the promising applications for PING could be for the surgical treatment of epilepsies that do not respond to medication. Approximately a third of patients with epilepsy do not respond to anti-seizure drugs, and surgery can reduce or eliminate seizures for some of them. Lee and his team, along with their collaborators at Stanford, have shown that PING can reduce or eliminate seizures in two research models of epilepsy. The findings raise the possibility of treating epilepsy in a carefully-targeted and noninvasive manner without the need for traditional brain surgery. Another important potential advantage of PING is that it could encourage the surgical treatment of appropriate patients with epilepsy who are reluctant to undergo conventional invasive or ablative surgery. In a new scientific paper in the *Journal of Neurosurgery*, Lee and his collaborators detail the ability of PING to focally eliminate neurons in a brain region, while sparing non-target cells in the same area. In contrast, currently available surgical approaches damage all cells in a treated brain region. A key advantage of the approach is its incredible precision. PING harnesses the power of magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI) to let scientists peer inside the skull so that they can precisely guide sound waves to open the body's natural blood-brain barrier exactly where needed. This barrier is designed to keep harmful cells and molecules out of the brain, but it also prevents the delivery of potentially beneficial treatments. The UVA group's new paper concludes that PING allows the delivery of a highly targeted neurotoxin, cleanly wiping out problematic neurons, a type of brain cell, without causing collateral damage. Another key advantage of the precision of this approach is that it can be used on irregularly shaped targets in areas that would be extremely difficult or impossible to reach through regular brain surgery. "If this strategy translates to the clinic," the researchers write in their new paper, "the noninvasive nature and specificity of the procedure could positively influence both physician referrals for and patient confidence in surgery for medically intractable neurological disorders." "Our hope is that the PING strategy will become a key element in the next generation of very precise, noninvasive, neurosurgical approaches to treat major neurological disorders," said Lee, who is part of the UVA Brain Institute.

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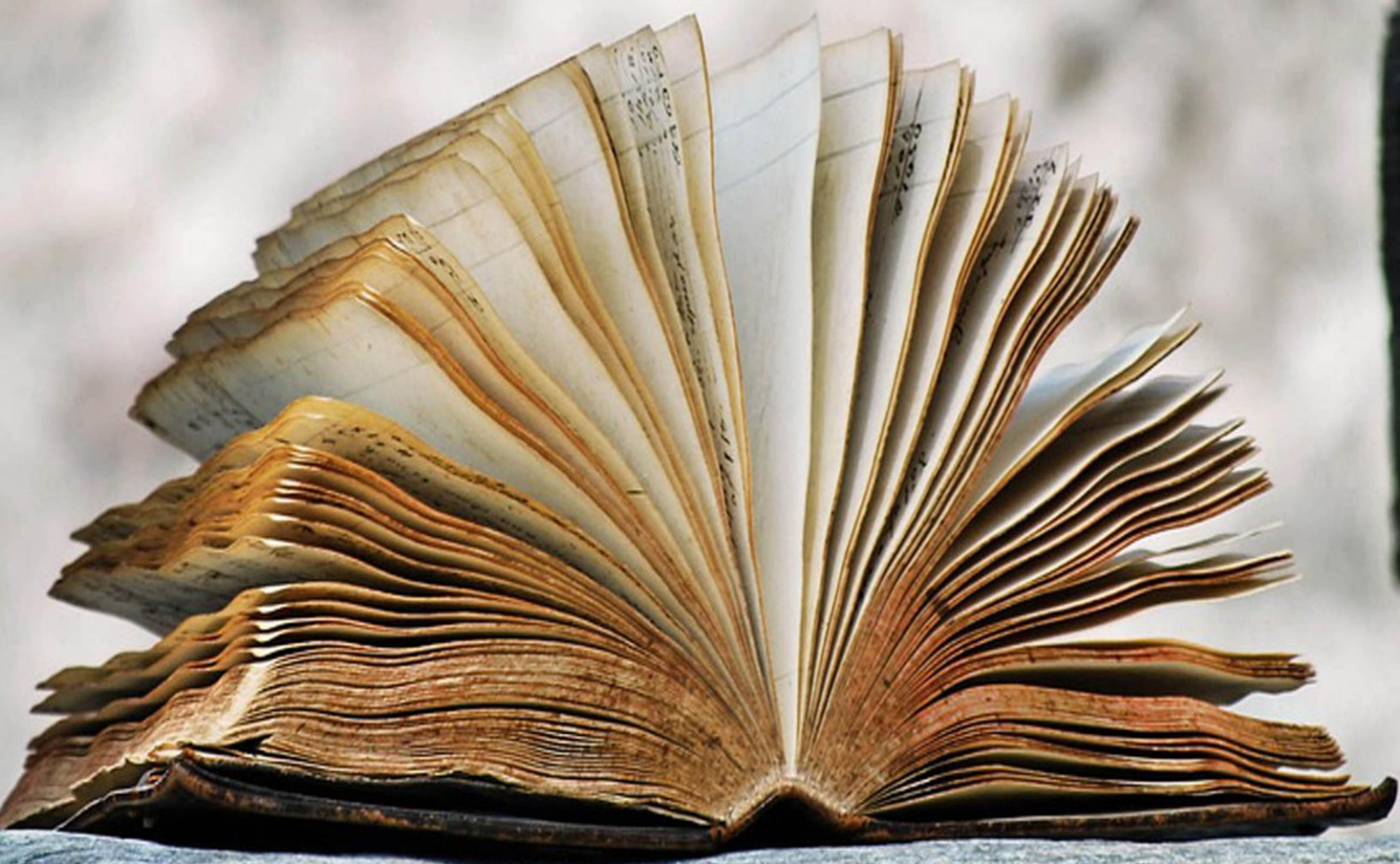


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*Cedees Benz*

# Storytellers





# The Littlest Snowman on Route 66

By J. Franklin Green

## THE MOVE

I was just eight years old when my parents moved from Ash Fork to Flagstaff. My father was a police officer in the Yavapai County Sheriffs' Department and my mother worked as a waitress at The Ranch Cafe in town while finishing her masters and doctorate degrees at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. She had started this work well before

I was born and it took her a long time. Mom eventually got a job in the Chemistry Department at the University and my Dad left the police force to take a job as head of campus security. He didn't mind because it was safer than police work, my mom had finally achieved her goals and of course, he had me to think about too.

That was all fine and good for them but it wasn't fine and good with me. I had a lot of friends in town and loved the small town life. I especially liked all of mom's fellow waitresses and cooks at the Ranch Cafe. Fayrene Hume at the museum who was and is the town historian and "Saint Lucy" as everyone called her who had been just about everything in town in her time from a police posse member to postmaster were also important to me. Lucy was now retired and helped out just about anyone who needed darn near anything in town. My teachers were great as was our school and many of my classmates were fun, especially my best friend Marci. Now all of that was about to change because Flagstaff was a small city, not a small town and it was forty minutes away from Ash Fork on the freeway, Interstate 40. Now all of these details I am telling you now didn't enter the mind of my eight year old self, all I really knew was that Flagstaff was a long way from Ash Fork and I would never see my friends and everything else that was "home" to me.

I was crushed. My parents said we had to move and I would surely make new friends, even more because we were moving to a big suburban neighborhood with lots of houses and the elementary school was only a few blocks away. "Baloney!" I said to myself at the time and cried the whole way there in the car.

Our house was a lot bigger than our old shabby house in Ash Fork but that didn't matter one wit to me. It was my house and I knew every nook and cranny including the weird animal images I saw in the knotty pine paneling and the imaginary secret portal in the back of my closet that led to a big old house with lace curtains, window seats and filled with toys. I could care less about freshly painted perfect walls, dishwashers and built in microwave ovens. The two car garage meant nothing along with the freshly paved neatly landscaped streets. I spent most of the month before school began arranging, rearranging and hating rearranging my room. My toys and books were all of the remaining comforting elements of home. Everything else was strange,

foreign and a constant reminder that I was not home as I thought of home. My parents were busy getting ready to start their new jobs. Dad was already away at the college campus most days setting up personnel changes and new procedures. Mom too was prepping for classes and sitting many faculty and administration meetings. All of this I did not know or care about at my age. I only knew that they were too busy to spend much time with me and on days that both were gone, I was alone except for Mrs Caruthers who was my babysitter. Most of the time she just watched daytime TV game shows

or napped. So I arranged and rearranged some more and waited for school to start, with each passing day that it came nearer filling me with dread. I got a little tour of the school when my parents brought me in to register. It was enormous and brand spanking new, nothing like my old school. I was sure I would get lost and never be heard from again, but my dad tried to assure me that in a couple days I would be right at home there. "Baloney," I said again to myself. It would not and could not be like my school at my real home. I tried to convince myself they were right but I just couldn't. Why didn't they understand?

Finally, the big day arrived. I didn't get lost, well maybe once or twice, and my teacher was very nice and didn't once pull out a knife and fork and try to eat me for lunch or anything, but she wasn't Mrs. Morgan whom I knew well and was to be my new teacher back home in Ash Fork. Eventually I would get used to her and even come to like her but I sure didn't feel that way quickly. Recess was a nightmare. I had been introduced as new to the school to all the kids on the first day but most of them already had their group of friends and apparently didn't have any interest in adding anyone else. From overheard conversations, they weren't interested in the same things I was. Most of it seemed to center around things they had or cool things they were going to do, or cool things they were going to have. As bad as the ones who ignored me were, the ones who didn't were worse. A lot worse!

A "hick." Just a country bumpkin from a tiny little "hick" town who dressed funny and talked funny too. A lot of my clothes had come from the Family Dollar, The Virtual Closet second hand store, or were sewn by my mom or Mrs. Gunther our old next door neighbor. L.L. Bean, JC Penny and Sears were not where I got my clothes. I had a few outfits from a store down in Prescott but not many.

Second of all - I was just plain "the new kid" and they needed to push at me to see how far they could go so they could figure out

how I would fit or hopefully not fit in with them. Most of them were upper middle class city kids and many of their parents, like mine, worked at the University. The fact that mine did also didn't count. I was still the "hick" with the weird name. In short order I became Windy, Wendy Bird, like in Peter Pan, or Goldie or Goldilocks even though my hair was dark brown.

My last name was Goldman, which of course which had led to the latter of the two names, but in addition to that, I was Jewish. The only Jewish kid in the class and as I later learned one of only five in the whole school. We weren't Orthodox, wearing black and yarmulkas and traditional dress or anything like that, and in thinking back on it, antisemitism really had nothing much to do with it. Eight and nine year olds don't really think in those terms except as they might have caught a hint of it at home. The point was that I was different in yet another way. Had I been a hick and a Hindu or Buddhist or believed in the Norse Gods like Odin and Thor it would have been all the same. I was the new kid, from a hick town who had a different religion. Three strikes before I even came to the plate. Had I been more mature, worldly wise or been more self-assured, I could have coped with it. But what eight year old is any of those things?"

So I suffered through fall and because as before, my parents were still absorbed in their new jobs and getting assimilated themselves, I suffered alone. As I think back, my mom might have been going through something similar to me because she too was a "hick" from a small town. My dad not so much. He was a cop after all and had dealt with a lot worse stuff in his life. Suffering may be a bit of a strong word but "alone" is a big word - a powerful and scary word. If you can't cure alone by finding friends you retreat further into "alone" until it almost feels comfortable. You hate it but you become used to it and it sinks in. Really deep!

## WINTER ARRIVES

Winter in Flagstaff was very different. What snow we got in Ash Fork was dry and quickly blown away by high winds. The snow that came that first winter in Flagstaff was deep and wet. "We were at least 2,000 feet higher in elevation," my father told me. The boys called it "good packing" snow, ideal for snowballs and snowmen. Snowballs didn't excite me because I was sure I was going to be considered a moving target by most of the boys. The girls in the neighborhood mostly ignored me but some of the boys were mean. They teased, called me names, and delighted in shooting spitballs and rubber bands at me in school or on the way.

After a particularly big snowfall, as I watched the neighborhood boys building snowmen from our living room window, I decided so go outside and look at them. I have no idea what I was thinking at the time – not thinking was probably the answer, because as I was looking in wonder at the huge snowmen they were building, one boy, who always seemed to delight in tormenting me called out to his fellow, "Hey, look, Windy Wendee came out in the big bad snow." There followed a barrage of taunts, snowballs and laughter, so I retreated to the house and went to my room.

Still in my winter coat, I sat disconsolately and fuming on my bed looking about my room aimlessly, when I saw a Mr. Potato Head toy sitting in pieces on the floor of my closet. Even he seemed to mock me with a raised eyebrow and misplaced features. What I really wanted to do was smack the crap out of the neighborhood boys, but they were too big even for a tomboy hick from little old Ash Fork, but a weird and admittedly warped idea took form in my hurt mind.

Gathering up Mr. Mocking Potato head, I went through our kitchen, stopping at the utility drawer and went into the back yard where nobody would see me except maybe "Miss Kitty," the neighborhood cat, who seemed always to be pouncing on some sparrow or bluebird. Her I could handle, and in the mood I was in, she would not be a happy cat. Finding a nice open snowy spot I started to build a snowman. Just a little sucker, not some big thing like the boys out front were busy making. I wanted one only about a foot high for my purpose. My chest was heaving with anger and frustration as I started to build it, which didn't take overly long. When the snowballs were made and stacked, I used the Mr. Potato head eyes, nose (stupid moustache and all), ears and arms, sticking them in the wet heavy snow in place of the traditional buttons, carrots and sticks.

When that was done, I pulled out a plastic funnel from my pocket, the one purloined from the kitchen, turned it upside down and plopped in on its head. A Tupperware dunce cap it was, and it fit perfectly. That stupid little snowman just incontinently sat there in the middle of our small back yard with no idea of the fate I had in store for it. It had no idea, none, but I sure did. The whole time I was making it, tears were streaming down my face, dripping on my coat, scarf and the snowman. I had never heard of a voodoo doll, but in my mind this inanimate snowman represented all the boys (and girls by proxy) who seemed bent on making me miserable.

Clearing a path in the snow down to the brown sleeping grass as I went, I backed off about five feet and scuffed my boots to clear them of any sticky slippery snow. As I did this I looked up and saw "Miss Kitty" sitting on our fence watching me with that smarty pants cat look on her face and twitching her tail as though mocking me in her own hateful way. Snuffling back the ooze from my runny nose as I bent over, I made a small, compact and very hard snowball. My dad took be to a baseball game one time last summer, but I swear that no pitcher that day threw a ball harder, more accurate and fast that day than I threw at that cat. Of course, that is a bit of an exaggeration, but that snowball smacked that cat right in its face and knocked it clean off the fence.

"That's for the little bluebird you killed last summer you stinker," I yelled. Then I turned toward the little snowman, scuffed my feet again, and got ready to run forward and placekick him into smithereens. I could already see the funnel sailing toward the goal posts that were really a pair of barren saplings, and Mr. Potato Head features flying in all directions like pieces of a piñata at a birthday party.

Leaning over and clenching my fists preparatory to starting my run, I saw the moustache twitch and the Mr. Potato head eyes, pop off and land in the snow in front of the snowman. In their place, two eyes opened, clear, large and bright blue, sparkling in the sun. Stunned and curious, I walked forward slowly, all thought of field goals and kick offs evaporated.

"I like the moustache," it said. "Can I keep it?"

I was speechless.

"I'm not sure about the hat though. Something with a wider brim would keep the hot sun off of my head."

The first thought that came to me was maybe I had fallen asleep in my room and was just dreaming this, but my nearly frozen toes argued against that hypothesis. My mouth went dry and my palms began to sweat. “What... where did you... who are...” I stammered.

“Let’s start with ‘who’ if you don’t mind,” it said. “You can call me ‘Frosty, Snow-Boy, Billy-Bob, Jimmy John’ or whatever you please, but not ‘Bogus.’ That name, is already taken. Maybe you saw the movie with the big goofy Frenchman and Haley Joel Osment?” A smile popped out beneath the Mr. Potato Head nose and moustache. “Personally, I rather fancy ‘Bernard’ – a nice name don’t you think?”

“Bernard?” I said, still rather confused and not a little mystified.

“Bernard W. Allman, if you wish to be formal, but not Bernie please.” He winked as he said this and I sat down hard in the snow.

“Now as to your other queries, where I came from I have no clue really but the why is very simple. Your tears brought me. You are hurt, lonely and need a friend – so... here I am! But if you want me to stick around for a while, you better get me a broader brimmed hat and get me out of the sun. Maybe it would be better under the eaves next to your dad’s shed? The sun never hits that spot.”

My eight year old brain was befuddled, scared and massively confused, so I turned and ran into the house and upstairs to my room. I sat on my bed for a moment shaking. As I did I saw an old doll of mine with a big straw hat on its head, sitting on a shelf. “What are you waiting for,” it seemed to say. There was no wink, no moving lips, and no nod of the head. If there had been I might have gone screaming to my mother and this story never written, but instead, I pulled the hat off and brought it outside. Replacing the funnel on Bernard, the snowman’s head with the hat, I then picked it up, or him rather, and carried him carefully to the shade under the eaves.

“Thank you, he said, “Much better here “

Now what?” I asked.

“First we have to get to know one another. All I know is that you are hurting inside but that’s about it. Please tell me why.”

An hour later, near dusk, I had finally told him everything about myself, from my home and friends in Ash Fork to this horrible life in Flagstaff. Just getting it out in words lifted a great weight. Until then I had kept it all bottled up inside except a few times I tried to talk to my mother and father about it. They had been kind, but told me that “these feeling would pass in time,” and “I would see it differently later, blah, blah, blah...” they didn’t understand how I felt from my point of view which was now, not in some distant, non-existent future. Kids are not very good at the whole “put it in perspective” thing. They only understand and feel how they feel and think that day, or that minute. It’s just like when I had my first crush on Jimmy Sanders and he moved out of town with his folks. I was devastated, but all they could say, that it “wasn’t important now because blah, blah, blah, I would get over it soon, blah, blah and more blah.” I was sad then and it was big to me then.

Bernard said none of those things. He just listened and asked questions from time to time between my sobs. Before I knew it, I heard my dad’s car pull up, my mom was already home, and knew I would be called in for supper soon. I looked toward the back door and started to say...

“Yes, supper time. Just a thought or two for you to chew on while you’re chewing and that pepperoni pizza your dad brought home with him.”

“What other people think about us is none of our business. What we think of ourselves is what counts. Hang on to the good and toss out the rest. Just sitting in your own lonely poop and being angry might seem comfortable because it is, after all, your own poop, but it still stinks. Reach out to find friends. If they don’t respond, try again or move on. Until they do, you have me, and I think you are a bright, pretty, sensitive and thoughtful girl, just like Fayrene, Lucy, your teachers and friends in Ash Fork did. Hold on to that if you need to until you find your own self. Now get on to super before it gets cold. I like cold pizza, but I bet you don’t!”

As we ate supper, my daddy was watching the news. When it was over the weather forecast came on – cold and cloudy for the next week with the possibility of more snow. Mom and dad weren’t happy about that – but I was!

## A NEW BEGINNING

Everyday after school I spent my afternoons with Bernard. On Wednesday, I told him I looked at the fourth grade class list to find out if there were any other Jewish kids on it. There were two. Irene Reiff and Maya Rodich. I found both of them on the playground at recess and invited them to Friday night Shabbat at my house. I had asked my mom’s permission, of course. Maya politely declined, but Irene said that even though her family wasn’t all that religious, she would ask her dad. All Bernard said about it was, “Good start kiddo.”

Friday night came and Irene and her dad drove over. My dad invited her dad to stay also if he wished, but he had to go to a basketball game – his son Brandon was on the eighth grade team. Afterward, I brought Irene out to meet Bernard, but as I figured, he said nothing. She did however compliment his hat and moustache. As we were going back into the house, I glanced back at him and he winked at me. That was the beginning. Many of the other frustrations, teasing and ostracizing from the “in cliques” continued and they hurt my feelings – but not as much. Not nearly as much. I had at least one friend and of course, I had Bernard.

The following Friday, Irene’s whole family joined us. My family was not very religious either, but my Mom and Dad maintained some Jewish traditions, especially for keeping the family close. Eventually my dad, and Irene’s father, Marc became friends too, but all I saw that night was Brandon. He was four years older than me, but a crush is a crush is a crush. He was tall and gangly but had this huge smile and most importantly didn’t talk to me like I was some hick from Ash Fork. He even asked some questions about my hometown, which I was more than glad to elaborate on. My crush on him lasted until I got Mr. Finnegan in the fifth grade.

The only disturbing thing that night was the weather report. A warming trend was the forecast with highs in the low 60’s in the



day and 40's at night. All I could think about was Bernard. All my mom could think about, was why all the ice cube trays in the freezer were frequently not frozen. I emptied them as fast as they froze, and put scrap plywood and anything else I could find around Bernard and dumped the ice cubes around him as fast as they were ready. I saw with dismay however, that he was getting smaller every day. He kept talking to me right up to the end and assured me he would be back whenever I needed him and it was cold and snowy enough. I raced home from school Wednesday after the bell rang, but Bernard was gone. Only his hat and the Mr. Potato Head nose, moustache and ears were there, sitting in a puddle of water. That puddle got a little bigger, as my little girl tears flowed and flowed with the anguish of losing my best friend, the one who had changed my life and started it off in a better direction. Arizona was in a long drought at that time, and the rest of the winter was mild with no snow. Dad said the ski resorts like the Arizona Snow Bowl were really hurting, but I am here to tell you they weren't hurting like I was.

## BACK TO BACK

I thought about Bernard almost every day but I remembered his advice and comfort always. Through the spring and summer, I made a few more friends and joined two clubs. The Junior Scientists Club at school and an Okinawan Karate club at a Dojo near the University. One fueled my head, and one fueled my confidence and kept me trim. I also offset my penchant for Hershey bars and Doritos. Slowly the thought of Bernard faded and I only thought of him when I had a crisis, loss or run in with the school bullies. I thought the bullies would leave me alone as I advanced in my training and earned higher level belts, but for some of them it was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Some moron was always wanting to see how tough I really was. I talked most of them down or just refused to fight unless I had to. That is what my training said to do and most of the time it worked.

Summer ended abruptly with the coming of 5<sup>th</sup> grade and Mr. Finnegan. My crush was deep, but what kept it going was the fact he was also the advisor for The Junior Scientists

Club. Or maybe that was why it started! Who knows? It faded in time but my interest in science didn't as you can guess from the preface to this story. Things were in general going very well and I rarely missed Bernard. But as the saying goes, all things come to an end and the only certainty in life is change. The two things happened back to back.

Billy Moran was in the Science Club, but mostly only because his dad was in the science department at the University. He had been pressured into it but he wasn't really into it. What he *was* into was being a bully and throwing his considerable weight around. Apparently, Ho Ho's, Ding Dongs and Hostess cakes were his best friends. One afternoon he was being his usual obnoxious self, so most of us ignored him, but the more we ignored him the angrier he got. When my pal Tanner got in his way while he was cleaning up the lab, Billy gave him a shove and he stumbled over into me. Tanner was short, skinny and wore Coke bottle bottom glasses. An easy target for a guy like Billy. I got a little annoyed and said, "Knock it off Billy, do you feel good picking on someone half your size?"

"How about you little Miss Karate?" he shot back.

Here we go again, I thought to myself, only said, "Forget it Billy, I don't want any trouble." And neither do you fat creep, I thought to myself. As though he was reading my mind, Billy came right up on my and without warning smacked me in the face with his open palm. In Karate, this is often the prelude to an attack, so my training stepped up and I gave him a kick push to the chest to get him away from me. Now a kick push is just that – a push, but using your feet. Billy started to bluster and threaten, but neither of us had seen Mr. Finnegan enter the room. He saw the entire exchange and was obliged to haul us both down to the Vice Principal's office. The long and the short of it was that Billy got a lecture and I got SUSPENDED for a week. Why, was all I could ask myself, Billy was the aggressor and I was just defending myself.

My dad wanted to know why too and went to the school to inquire. As an ex cop it made no sense to him either. As it was explained to him, the issue was the use of the feet. The rules were specific and inflexible (no doubt written by some desk jockey my dad said later). Kicking was kicking and carried a mandatory one week suspension. Slapping and threatening was apparently okay. The only saving and ironic grace to the absurd affair was that a blizzard hit Northern Arizona that night and all schools were closed for four days – most of my suspension.

I was still upset and fuming about this when I thought of Bernard. The first time I had thought of him in a long time. So I gathered up the Mr. Potato head things, his straw hat and headed out back right after breakfast the following morning. As quickly as I could I built a snowman, the littlest snowman ever built on Route 66 I reckoned. Attaching the eyes, nose, ears and arms, I was plopping the straw hat on his head and waited. Nothing happened. Bernard had promised to come back. He promised. Deeply disappointed, I sat in the snow and tears welled up in my eyes.

"Omber a bif" I heard. "Omber ambnt telb inchs." What the heck? I thought. Then I understood and moved the snowman twelve inches to my left to exactly where he was last year.

"That's better," he said as the Potato Head eyes popped out and fell revealing his crystal blue eyes. "I forgot to tell you that I would always be back for you but only if you built me in the same place. Your tears are part of the ground where I sit. They always will be."

Now I really cried. I cried with relief and joy. Bernard and I sat for hours until I was nearly frozen and he suggested I get myself back in the house. When I told him of the events of the past year he laughed and told me I was the quickest learner he even encountered. About the suspension, he said little except to tell me that there are always things in life that seem or *are* unfair that was just how life is, if you're not a little snowman. "Build a bridge and get over it," he said, and "Move on."

The winter was a long and cold one and Bernard stayed around until early March. I had many friends by this time, but I vowed to never forget Bernard again, and I almost never did again until...

## ALWAYS AND AGAIN

Every winter after that, I built Bernard in the same spot whenever the snow came. He was with me through Junior High and right up to High School Graduation and beyond. Whenever I had a problem, a question or a joy to share I shared it with him. Boyfriends, career choices, losses of loved ones, achievements, disappointments or just plain catching up each year, I shared it all with Bernard. When I left for college, I made a point of returning in the winter at least once. That almost ended when in the summer between my junior and senior year, my father retired and my mom took a job at Arizona State University in Mesa, Arizona in the biochemistry department. I visited then that winter but took off for a day "to visit and old friend in Flagstaff" I told them.

I watched the weather reports and knew they had snow.

Sneaking into the back yard, I spoke with Bernard for what I feared was the last time, but he told me soon I wouldn't need him anymore. I asked him why but he wouldn't tell me, he just winked that knowing wink of his.

I got busy at graduate school and didn't get a chance to get back home for several years, but one winter after I had just broken up with my fiancée, I flew back and drove north to Flagstaff and there I was crushed! The new owner of my parent's house had expanded the kitchen back and the new room covered over where Bernard had to be built. When I came around front to get in my rental car, the owner pulled up. He looked vaguely familiar but it was hard to see him clearly through my tears.

When he saw my flooded eyes, and red running nose, he asked, "Can I help you?"

"Not unless you have a jackhammer," I replied through my sniffles."

"Now you have my curiosity piqued. Is there a story behind the need for a jackhammer?"

"It's silly, unbelievable and a real long story," I said to him. "You would never believe it anyway."

"Why don't you try me," he said. I'm a professor of literature at the University and a writer when I have time. It might make a good story. Come in please, I'll make some coffee and I have some Krispy Kreme doughnuts in this bag."

Why I trusted him or took him up on his offer I don't know. Maybe it was the oddly familiar face, or the fact that I had travelled a long way to talk to Bernard and needed to vent. Whatever the reason, we sat in his living room for three hours as I told him the whole story and the reason for my tears. He never once doubted me and only a couple of times asked a question or two to clarify what I was saying. This surprised me not a little.

"I've been here for three hours, ate four doughnuts and downed three cups of coffee," I said. "But I don't even know your name."

He smiled winningly and said, "My name is James Sanders, but you used to call me Jimmy when we were little. I had a little crush on you back then and I thought you had one for me too, but we were only eight years old when you moved away. I never knew where or why until today."

We had a light supper in Old Town that evening, but as I got in my car to drive to the small motel room I was staying in, he leaned on the door and said, "I know you are driving back to Mesa tomorrow, but if you don't mind would you stop by on your way. Please?" I told him I would stop by around eleven, and he said that would be fine.

I pulled into his driveway and James was waiting for me on the front porch. I got out and as I approached, he said nothing until I got to the steps.

"Please, come in. I never showed you the new dining room I added to your parent's house. I think you might like it."

I wasn't sure if I really wanted to see the addition, especially because of what it covered. "He should know that," I thought. But he seemed so nice and sincere about it I decided to humor him. When he opened the new French Doors, I found it hard to breathe for a moment. The room was empty of furniture, all the windows were wide open and there was a pile of snow in one corner. There was a big hole in the concrete floor and a jackhammer leaned in the other corner.

He stepped back and said, "I'm pretty sure Mr. Potato Head and a straw hat is in that oversize bag you're carrying. Take your time. I'll have coffee brewing in the kitchen when you're done."



## **I Am Not a Pilgrim**

I am not a pilgrim.  
I am the stillness in the morning dew,  
waiting for the sun to set me free.  
I am the silence between the music's notes,  
waiting for the night to let me be.  
I am the presence between my heartbeats,  
waiting for my love to come to me.

I am not a pilgrim.  
I walk with the wind at my back  
on dusty trails through neglected landscapes.

I am the stillness in the morning dew  
as the sun heats this deserted land.  
I am the silence between the music's notes  
as the night wolves begin to band.  
I am the presence between my heartbeats  
as the fire dies, and I begin to understand.

I am not a pilgrim. I am not a pilgrim  
when the wind does not blow across the sand.

~ Tom Geddie

**WORD**

**games**

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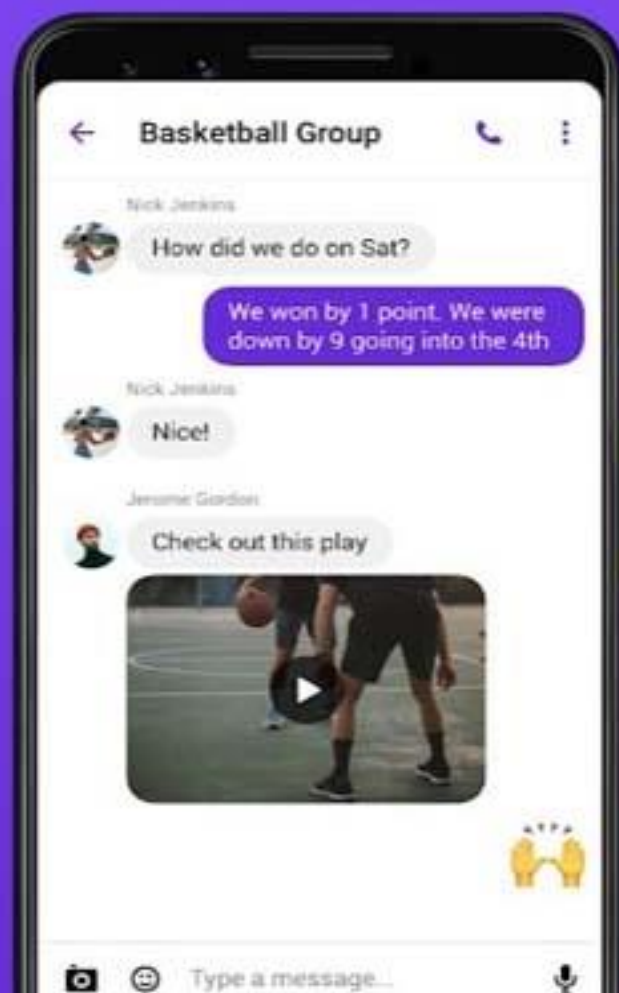
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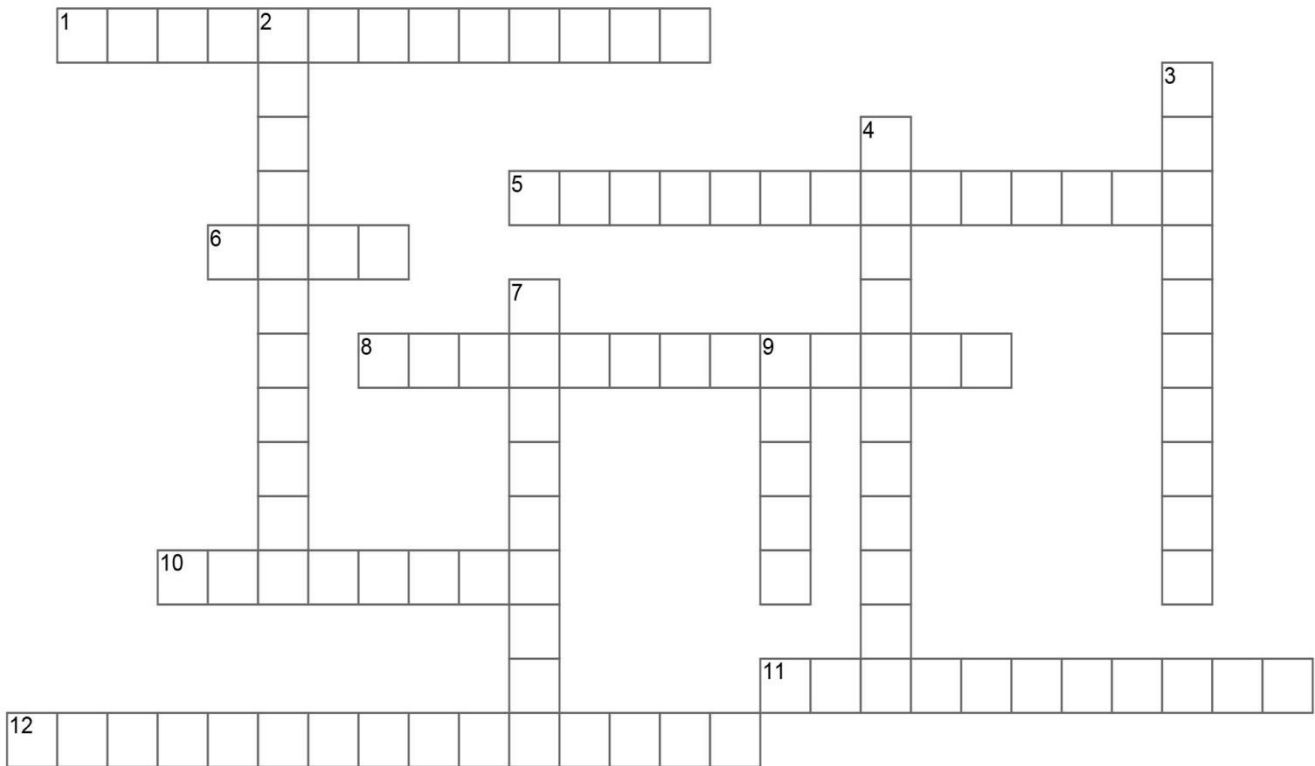
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# The Nightmare Before Christmas Crossword

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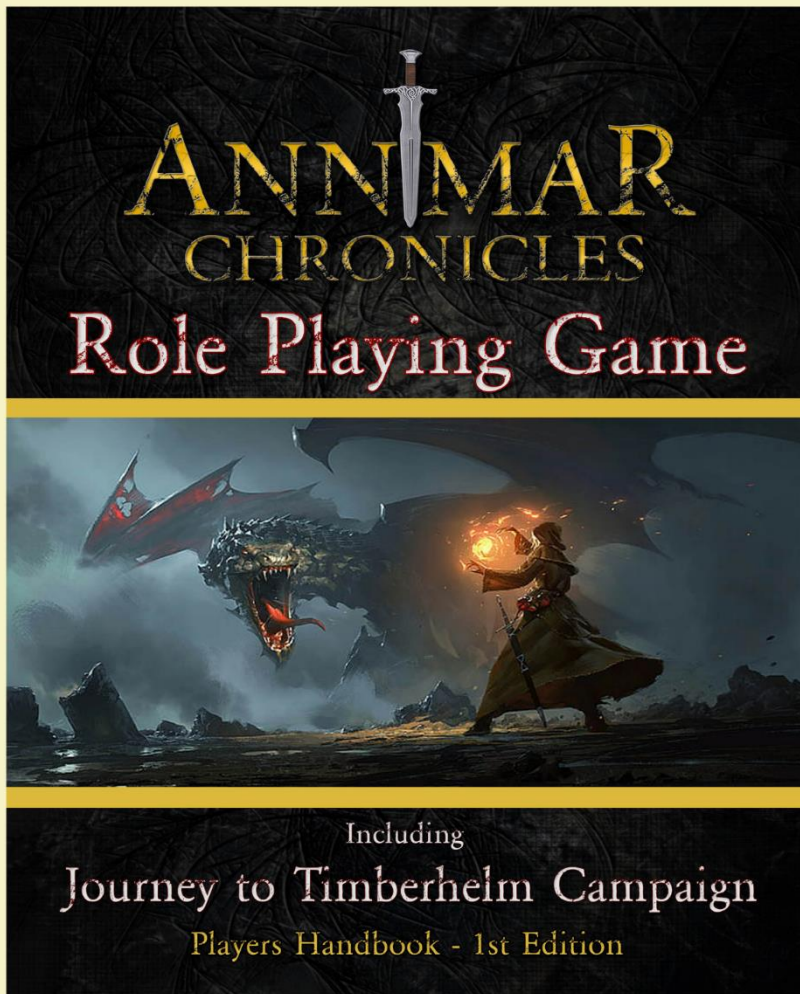
## ACROSS

1. One of the Holiday worlds.
5. He made hats made from dead rats and bats.
6. Ghost dog.
8. Mad scientist and the creator of Sally.
10. Head of Government in Halloween Town.
11. Captured by Lock, Shock, and Barrel.
12. Pumpkin King

## DOWN

2. Burlap sack filled with insects, spiders and a snake for a tongue.
3. Fixed Christmas and brings snow to the Halloween town.
4. Holiday worlds doors location.
7. Creator of the film.
9. She is made of various pieces stitched together, with dead leaves used as stuffing.

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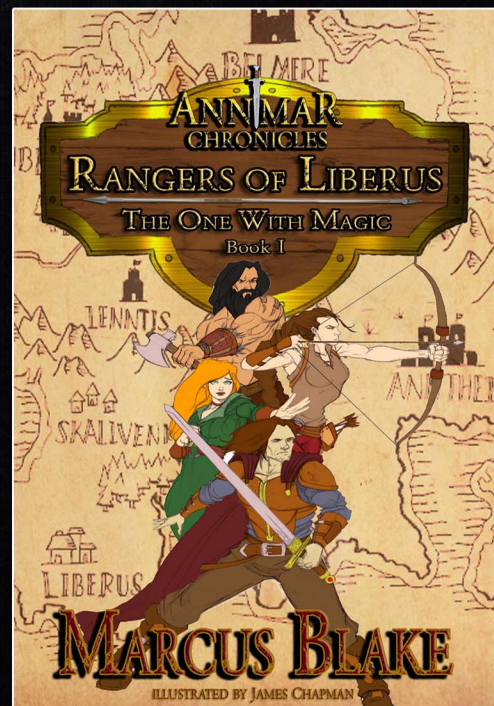
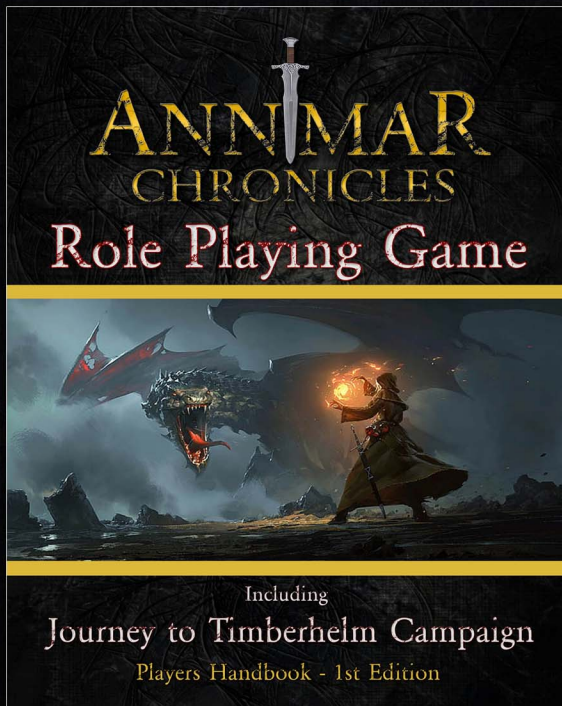


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