

CINEMANN

A FILM AND TELEVISION MAGAZINE

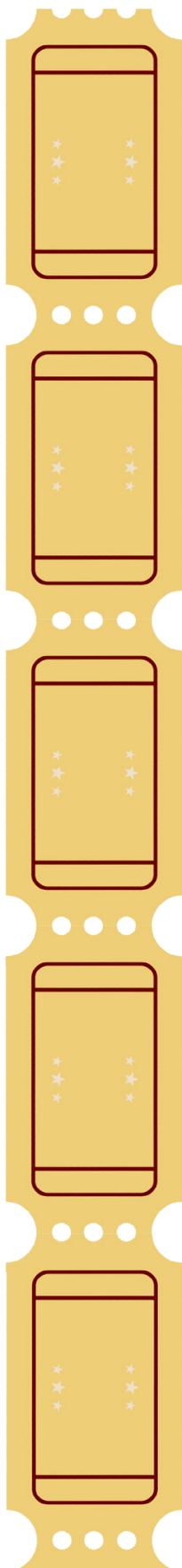


Nº 02
2021

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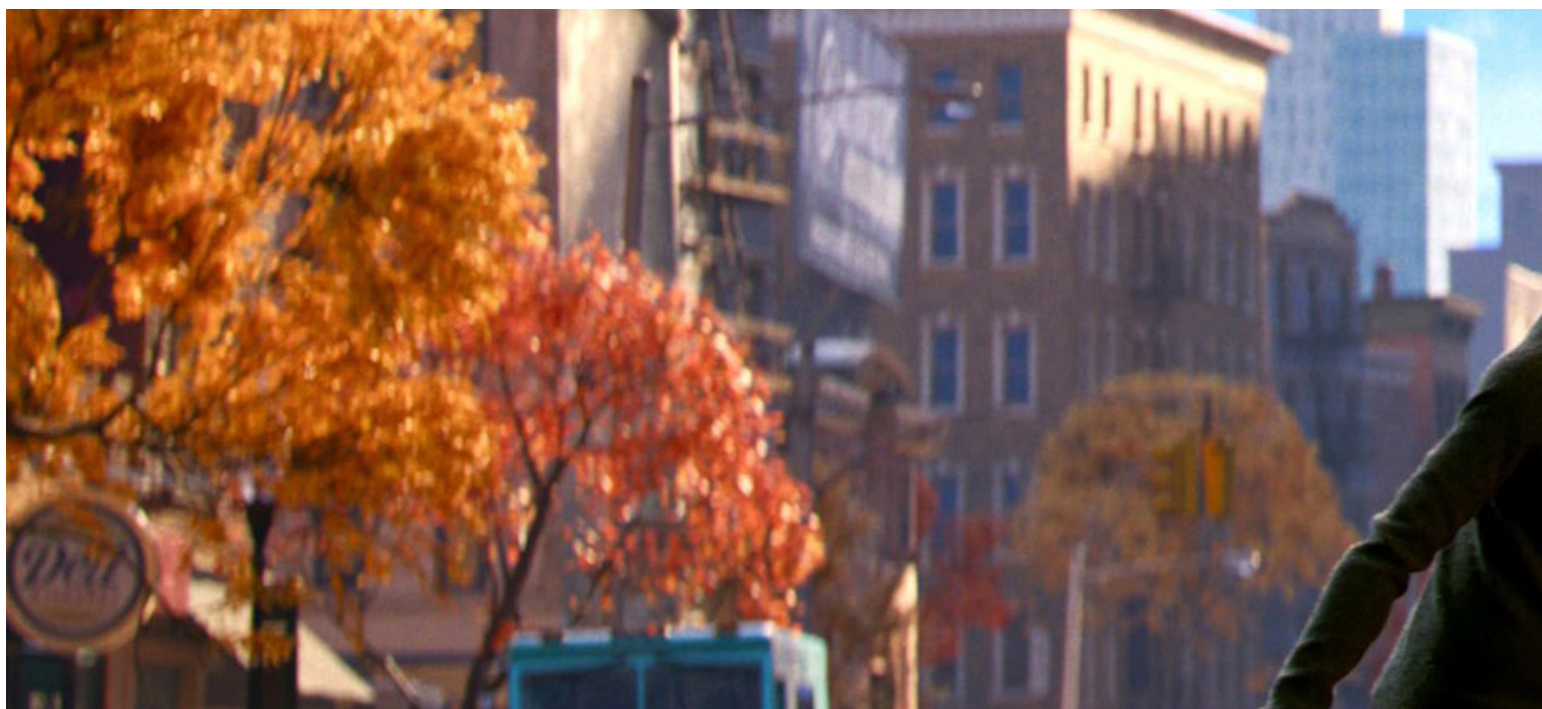
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SOUL

By Patrick Stinebaugh

Soul is the newest animated release from Pixar, one of Disney's many subsidiary studios. The film is Pixar's latest attempt at tackling every single insightful, thought-provoking concept out there. Soul tells the story of dead-end jazz musician Joe Gardner (Jamie Foxx) who dies and accidentally falls into the Great Before, where souls are given their personalities before birth. Along the way, he meets the rebellious soul "22" (Tina Fey) and the two get dragged into a journey where they discover the meanings of life, passion, and purpose.

Right off the bat, I can gladly say that this is another slam-dunk from Pixar. As someone who isn't as much of a Pixar fan as most people, for me, this was the most emotional, inspiring, and thought-provoking Pixar film yet. Its commentary on what a soul's "spark" is and what gives life meaning absolutely resonates. The reason that message works so well is that Joe Gardner is such a likable and passionate character that he gives the film an incredibly hopeful tone, and he's always driving the plot forward through how his passion affects others. Jamie Foxx's voice work plays a large part in that—you can feel

his excitement through the screen every time he begins to talk about music.

Another aspect of this film that stands out and has to be mentioned is the stunning animation. The film is set in New York City, and being from there myself, seeing the city come to life like this is amazing. The colors are vibrant, the background is active—the animators fully captured the character of New York in that the city is never resting. Even in the quiet moments of the film, the film makes sure to include what's going on in the background as part of the scene. That's not even getting to the portions of the film in the Great Before, which are almost equally beautiful but in a different way. While New York is alive, the Great Before isn't – that's the point. Instead of activity and hard edges, everything is given a soft, pastel look. Personally, I prefer New York, but the animation is still beautiful in both.

One part of the film that I've found myself revisiting is the soundtrack. Given that the driving motive for Joe Gardner is wanting to play music, it's necessary that the film itself has great music, and it does not miss a single mark. Composed by Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross, and John Batiste, the film has a wide variety of music that not only fits each respective scene, it actually improves each respective scene. I wasn't a huge fan of La La Land a couple of years back because it felt like I was just getting jazz shoved in my face, and I was worried that this film would make the same mistake, but the jazz parts of the soundtrack were actually the best parts, such as the song "Epiphany," which is played during my favorite scene in the film. I also want to give a quick shoutout to "Terry's Theme," another song played whenever the villain, Terry (Rachel House) appears. The track is off-putting in just the right way, as well as being incredibly tense.

One final great aspect of the film that I want to mention is the level of creativity behind it. The film finds



a way to merge pre-life, life, and death in a manner that children can understand and enjoy while still not being childish, a talent that Pixar has consistently been able to exercise throughout their extensive filmography. The film discusses how focus and passion in life can take us to "The Zone," a spiritual realm connected to the Great Before, but how too much focus on any one passion can then become an obsession, which doesn't drive someone's life forwards - it disconnects them from life entirely.

I want to make it clear before I get into the mixed aspects of the film that I had no real problems with this film, these are just some things that surprised me that I think it's important to be prepared for before watching the film. With that being said, the first mixed aspect of the film is that this film works far better as a celebration of life than it does an exploration of death. The trailers made it seem as though the focus of the film would be on the afterlife, but that's really not the case. The Great Before sequences are very good, but not quite up to the level of the real-world ones. If you're going in expecting another *Coco* where life after death is the main focus, you're going to be caught off guard.

From what I've seen online, the most common criticisms of this film surround the very end of it. Some have complained that the ending is a bit abrupt, which is true, but I don't believe that a somewhat sudden ending actually detracts anything from the overall film. Without getting into specific details, another, more serious criticism of the ending is that the film makes the safe choice of a happy ending instead of going all-in on the emotional resonance with a sad one. I believe that this criticism is completely unfounded and that ending on a sad note would compromise the uplifting message of the entire film, but it may be a matter of personal preference.

Soul is not just an amazing film in general, it is also a true showcase of the best of Pixar, a masterclass in

animation, and a celebration of New York City's energy and culture.

“The film's uplifting, optimistic message is exactly what was needed after such a long and difficult year, and while similar films may follow, I have trouble imagining them reaching the heights of this film's aspirations and creativity.





WW84

By Ana Maria Melián

After the success and quality of the original Wonder Woman in 2017, Wonder Woman 1984 (WW84) was one of the most anticipated movies of 2020. However, this sequel disappointed many fans who expected the high-quality story-building, effects, and action of the original movie. Wonder Woman 1984, released on HBO Max and in theaters on Christmas Day, follows Diana Prince/Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) as she saves the world after oil magnate Maxwell Lord (Pedro Pascal) and her colleague at the Smithsonian's Archeology department, Barbara Minerva (Kristen Wiig), abuse a newly-rediscovered mysterious artifact with the power to grant wishes.

WW84 was one of the most highly awaited releases of 2020 after being delayed for over a year due to production holdups and the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite receiving mixed reviews from critics, the film was responsible for the biggest box-office weekend since before the pandemic. Meanwhile, Warner Brothers' ambitious decision to simultaneously release the movie in theaters and on the HBO Max streaming platform likely increased viewership among those avoiding theaters due to health concerns. This approach was successful as over half of HBO Max subscribers streamed WW84 on its release day (December 25th). The film remained available on HBO Max until January 24th, then it moved to premium on-demand streaming for purchase.

Many viewers looked forward to the movie's setting in the 1980s. The film did deliver in terms of showcasing crazy outfits, classic malls, and the threat of nuclear war with Russia, but the setting overall had very little impact on the plot of the movie. Whereas taking place during World War I was central to the plot and conflict of the original Wonder Woman, this film's story felt fairly removed from the 1980s. While this did not significantly detract from the enjoyment of the movie, the setting did make the film seem a bit clichéd.

The most lacking parts of this movie were the dialogue and writing. Many of the movie's events were incredibly clichéd or predictable, and dialogue bounced between cheesy and awkward. Some of the most interesting aspects of the plot, like Diana and Barbara's early friendship, which soon transforms into a rivalry as Barbara turns into Wonder Woman's DC Comic nemesis Cheetah, are not deeply explored or fleshed out. However, the skilled acting of Gadot, Pascal, Wiig, and Chris Pine (as Diana's love interest Steve) manages to salvage the mediocre script. The aspect of the plot and writing that I most enjoyed is the movie's climax, in which Diana succeeds not through her physical or godly abilities but through the power of truth. In a polarizing and difficult time for our country and world, this film shows us that love and truth are more powerful than physical strength.

An essential aspect of any superhero film is the quality of its action scenes. Overall, WW84 suffered from an over-reliance on CGI rather than physical effects. Although Diana is a goddess, the use of these computer-generated effects made many action scenes obviously unrealistic. For example, the final battle between Wonder Woman and Cheetah, although intended to be the climax of the movie, proved difficult to follow and unimpressive due to the overuse of CGI. However, the movie succeeds in creating an action scene when Diana and Maxwell Lord

battle amid a moving convoy of armored trucks. As Diana begins to lose her powers in this moment, the effects become increasingly physical, featuring Diana accomplishing such feats as pushing apart two armored cars with her body and blocking bullets using her lasso. Overall, the scene is incredibly well put-together, shot, and directed, but sadly is an exception to the action scenes throughout the movie.

Overall, despite the many disappointments in WW84, I would still recommend it for any DC Comics or superhero fan. This movie could be exciting for a fan of action movies, as long as they are willing to sit through some often-boring dialogue and tolerate CGI effects. However, if you're not particularly interested in any of those aspects, maybe you should watch Avengers first.



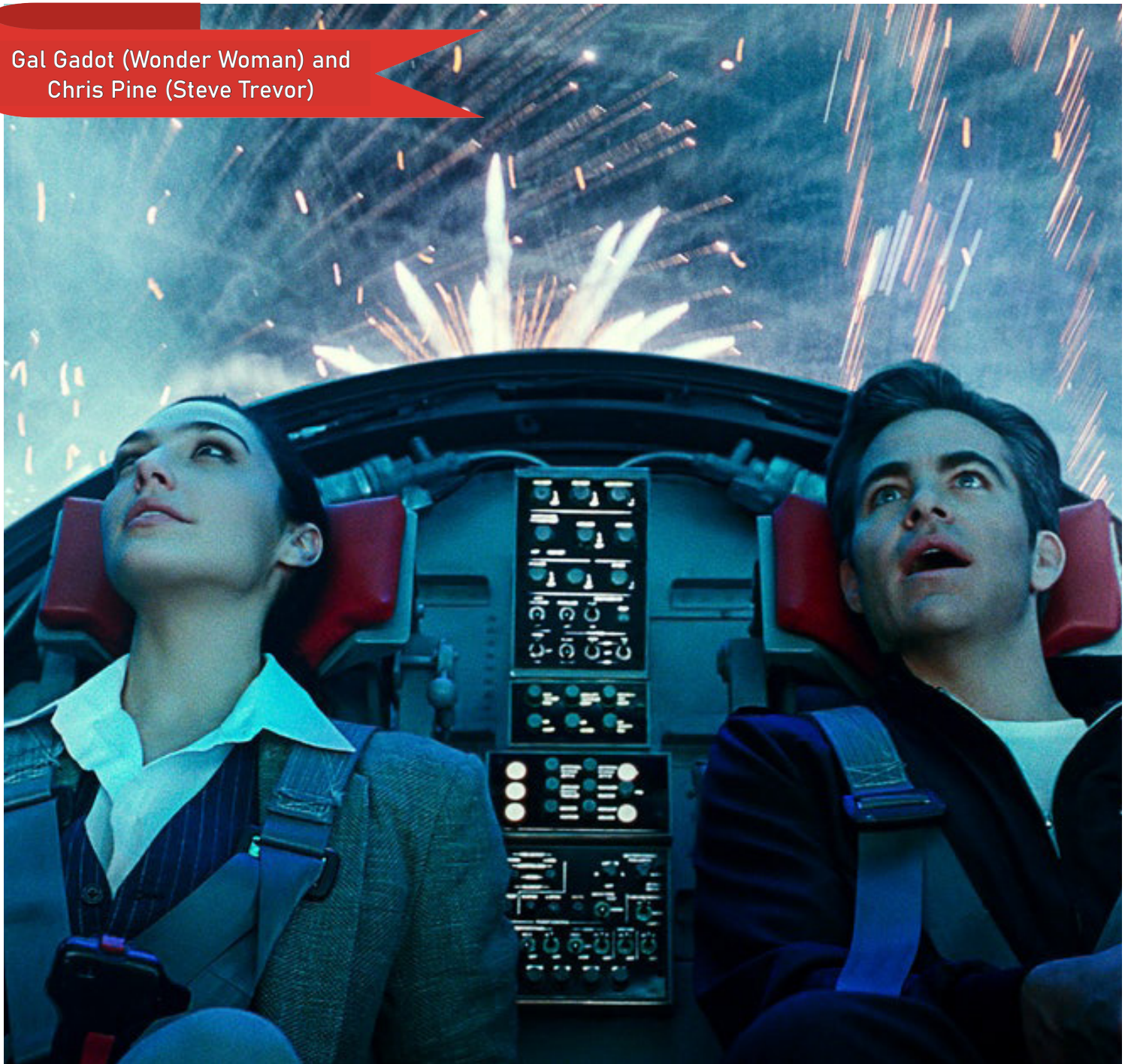
Critics Review: 59%
Top Critics Review: 71%



Audience Review: 74%

5.5

Gal Gadot (Wonder Woman) and
Chris Pine (Steve Trevor)



Anya-Taylor Joy
(Beth Harmon)



THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT

By Divya Ponda

Released in late October, *The Queen's Gambit* has been an unexpected hit. In fact, this thought-provoking show has received so much attention that Netflix revealed: "a record-setting 62 million households chose to watch *The Queen's Gambit* in its first twenty eight days." It has also been ranked number one on Netflix's top 10 in 63 countries. So, what is this show even about?

The main character in the miniseries, Beth Harmon (Anya-Taylor Joy) has a rather depressing, yet defining childhood, which leads to both her passion for chess and crippling drug addiction. The show opens depicting a young woman who abruptly wakes up in a disorderly hotel room, and scrambles to get dressed for a defining game of chess, who we later find out is against Borgov, the world champion at the time. I found this beginning to be strange yet gripping, and it made me want to know what had led up to this event.

Suddenly we are transported to a different time period, where Beth is a young child who is sent to an all-girls orphanage following the car crash leading to her mother's death. The orphanage is a dimly lighted and repressive, grey place, and the girls there are miserable. Every day, the girls are given pills, to keep them sedated. This is when Beth's addictive personality is revealed, as she soon becomes dependent on the tranquilizers, to the point where she stores them in secret hiding places. Beth finds an escape from this miserable place, after she stumbles upon the janitor, William Shaibel, after being sent to the basement to clean erasers. Shaibel becomes a huge mentor to Beth and is a crucial character in her growth as not only a Chess Player but also as a young girl. Soon later, Beth is adopted, and the following episodes portray her talented, yet troubled character preceding her math against Borgov.

One of the central themes in the show was the sexism in the Chess world during the 1960s. While there was a portrayal of the misogynistic era, such as when Beth is called, "too glamorous to be called a chess player," Many female chess grandmasters in our time have remarked about the blatant sexism in the Chess world, Judit Polgar, a female chess player that has been ranked in the top 10, even stated that some of her opponents refused to shake her hand because of her gender. Even now, there are barely any high-ranking women in chess.

While this era was quite misogynistic, it never seems to affect Beth's character- she seems indifferent to it. I felt that this made Beth an even more empowering and inspirational character (except for her slight madness). I played chess for about six years but stopped when I en-

tered high school, but after watching *Queen's Gambit*, I have started to play for fun again.

One of my favorite parts of the show was the friendship between Beth and Benny Watts (Thomas Brodie Sangster). Beth never really had anyone who understood her personality or way of thinking growing up, but when she met Benny, it was like a friendship made in heaven. The two characters pushed each other to be the best Chess players they could be, through speed chess, and more, and they also understood each other on a deep level as players.

While Beth did have the support of her friends, she never seems to ever be a stable character. After watching this show, I wondered what would happen to Beth after she beat Borgov. Would her drug addiction become worse? Would she become the world champion? Would she finally find stability and love? These questions all struck me, but the biggest one that really made me think was: Is genius always accompanied by madness? The irony in the title of this show is that while the *Queen's Gambit* is a chess opening that reaps many benefits for White, one also has to sacrifice a pawn in order to gain a better position in the game. The sacrifice in Beth's case? Her state of mind.

Although Beth Harmon is a fictional character, many of her traits are similar to those of Bobby Fischer, a world-famous chess grandmaster, who was the first American to win the World Chess Championship by beating Russia's renowned Boris Spassky. Fischer was found to be, quite frankly, crazy and mentally deranged. Many of the grandmasters who played against him even recommended that he visit a psychiatrist. After winning against Spassky in 1972 and becoming the World Champion, Fischer descended into madness and soon lost his title to Karpov in 1975. And Karpov does sound an awful lot like Borgov...

While the limited series does end with Beth beating Borgov in the final match, who knows what happens next in her journey? Unfortunately, *The Queen's Gambit* is a limited series so we as the audience can only imagine and hope for the best.

An incredible, unrivaled, and beautifully crafted show, the *Queen's Gambit* is truly like no other. The developed characters, delicate balance between glamour and struggle, and the clash between madness and genius, immerse the viewer into the world of chess and make the show an addictive watch. If you haven't watched the *Queen's Gambit* yet, the 7-episode miniseries is definitely worth your time and may make you want to get a chessboard out soon, and maybe try playing the *Queen's Gambit* - it's a cool opening!



By Sarene Choudhury

At a first glance, *A Rainy Day in New York* is a pleasant rom-com with all of Woody Allen's signature attributes. Looking deeper, viewers will find overused themes, characters, and general tropes in this film, which seem to hark back to Allen's last great film, *Midnight in Paris*. *A Rainy Day in New York* feels as if some lesser director tried to recreate *Midnight in Paris* in their own image, and failed. The film is tired to a degree where even the usually beautiful cinematography of Vittorio Storaro feels dull. It is the most recent of Allen's love letters to various cities, this one to Manhattan, but his inability to bring a fresh side to the newest installment of his famed city films is its downfall. The final punch comes in the film's delayed release in the US, as a result of renewed attention to Allen's sexual abuse accusations in 2018, right after the completion of the film.

The plot centers around two college sweethearts, Gatsby Welles (Timothee Chalamet), and Ashleigh Enright (Elle Fanning). They attend a small liberal arts school, the fictional Yardley College, and plan a weekend in Manhattan that leads to various misadventures. Chalamet's character is a poorly executed nod to Holden Caulfield (*Catcher in the Rye*), existing in a time where teenagers unironically wear tweed. His girlfriend, Ashleigh, is an overly peppy journalism major from Arizona, and the plot kicks off with her chance to interview the brilliant yet tortured filmmaker, Roland Pollard (Liev Schreiber). As they venture into the city, the couple spends only a short time together before separating for Ashleigh's interview. Gatsby wants to have a fancy weekend to show Ashleigh around his hometown while avoiding one of his socialite mother's big parties. They both get led down different paths and Ashleigh is sent on a madcap adventure after her experience with Pollard, while Gatsby wanders through the city by himself

and encounters various people, most notably, Chan (Selena Gomez). Chan is the younger sister of one of Gatsby's old girlfriends and is introduced in such a fashion that she becomes a love interest. The resulting love triangle is a standard Allen setup, with the same clumsiness with which this film was concocted.

The basic idea of the film seems simple enough, but it all falls apart with the execution, and the storyline becomes more convoluted with different recycled Allen themes. The name "Gatsby Welles," is enough to raise a red flag for viewers, being based on a combination of Jay Gatsby and Orson Welles' names. Those intrepid souls who continue watching the film will find that their fears were warranted. Both Chalamet and Fanning are some of the best actors of their generation, yet even they cannot save Gatsby and Ashleigh. Seeing either actor in any other film would make apparent that they were instructed to deliver their lines in the traditional Allen way. Gatsby already embodies a stereotype that is overused, but his accompanying mannerisms make it difficult to watch him. He almost never makes eye contact with whom he is speaking, and he constantly shrugs and twitches his head, creating the effect of a nervous turtle. Allen may have gone for Salinger's Caulfield with Gatsby, but ended up with Gossip Girl's Dan Humphrey (Penn Badgely). However, Ashleigh is somehow worse. Between her peppiness-turned-ditziness, her guileless nature, and her hiccuping when "sexually conflicted," Ashleigh is, quite simply put, annoying. Most would find her intolerable, as her giggly persona overtakes any redeeming qualities that could be found. It is unfortunate that such a talented actor as Fanning falls victim to the Allen stereotype of the shallow woman who only exists for the purpose of a man.

The three main female characters may all lack depth, but the misogyny of the film extends much further than just that. The plot revolves around the fact that Ashleigh 'ditches' Gatsby for her interview, ruining their day together and leading them to go on their separate adventures. Ashleigh is villainized for her ambition, and while both parts of the couple are unfaithful, Gatsby is absolved due to his loneliness. Gatsby being melancholy about going one day without female validation exemplifies Ashleigh's villain status as well as the misogynistic undertones of the film. Chan only exists to provide Gatsby the approval that he sought, and Gatsby's mother is vilified before we even meet her. Furthermore, the film is so unoriginal, that viewers can draw direct lines between these shallow stereotypes for women to those in other Allen films.

In *Midnight in Paris*, the main character, Gil (Owen Wilson), experiences a similar love triangle to the one featured in *A Rainy Day in New York*. His wife (Rachel McAdams), an unquestionably horrible woman, is fair-haired, high voiced, and lacks motivation besides her shallow greed. The woman Gil is tempted by (Marion Cotillard), is a husky brunette who understands him. The exact parallels between the *Midnight in Paris* triangle and this one are too similar to allow that of *A Rainy Day in New York* to be considered anything new, and further, solidify the villain

that Ashleigh has been made into.

A Rainy Day in New York was shelved for two years following the wake of backlash against Woody Allen in the US. Amazon broke its four-picture deal with Allen and allowed him to dispose of the fully-finished film as he pleased. Allen ended up brokering several distribution deals with European territories, and the film was subsequently released in those territories, starting with Poland in 2019. When the film was finally released in the US in October of 2020, it was a disappointment.

“From the hateable characters to the worn out tropes, A Rainy Day in New York is not worth a watch.”

Timothee Chalamet
(Gatsby) and Elle
Fanning (Ashleigh)





THE CROWN

By Eliza Becker

The Crown is a drastic change of scenery for most teen Netflix viewers. Rather than a fast-moving drama with multiple twists and turns, it's a much more slow-paced realistic drama based on the true romance and political rivalries of Queen Elizabeth II and the Royal Family from the mid-1900s to early 2000s. As Season 4 begins in 1979 with a now 53-year-old Queen Elizabeth (Olivia Colman), and a 31-year-old Prince Charles (Josh O'Connor), the show's romantic aspect heavily shifts to Charles, while the focus on Elizabeth is almost completely political. As Season 4 introduces the controversial politics around the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Gillian Anderson), and the dramatic adulterous marriage of Prince Charles and Princess Diana (Emma Corrin), The Crown Season 4 continues to depict the lives of the Royal Family as entertainingly as possible.

Coming from a teen's perspective, I found Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's storyline less engaging compared to other aspects of the show. Gillian Anderson's depiction of Thatcher was accurate and compelling; her stiffness, her elegant power, and her clashing relationship with Queen Elizabeth are all clear from her first appearance with the Queen, despite it only being displayed through her tone and subtle facial expressions. The way she refers to the Queen as "your majesty" makes you feel like you're really in the 1900s in Buckingham Palace. Although I found the politics that Thatcher was involved in interesting and I felt that it was good for me to know about them, they didn't have much to do with the Queen or the royal family. Rather than feeling entertained during the scenes on politics, I felt educated, which may or may not be a bad thing depending on what you look for in a TV

show. While I certainly appreciated learning about British politics in the 1980s, these scenes are really what slowed the showdown for me. As Thatcher was such a controversial figure in politics, the writers were clearly hesitant about whether to depict her as a hated character or a loved character. I felt that the writers could've done a better job in making Thatcher a character that the audience loved to hate, rather than one that I ended up just "sort of disliking." I do, however, think that the writers chose the right moments to take creative license in altering reality, especially when they depicted the argument between Thatcher and the Queen on establishing sanctions for Apartheid.

A gripe some viewers may have with this new season is how much screen time is given to Prince Charles and Princess Diana instead of Queen Elizabeth, but in my opinion, this was an astute decision made by the writers. Although Queen Elizabeth is the main character of the show, the fact of the matter is that there was much more drama in her son's life than hers at this time. Season 4 almost completely revolves around the new royal couple. Through the toxic relationship of Charles and Diana, The Crown shows just how cruel the royal family and its traditions can actually be. The graphic depiction of Princess Diana's eating disorder lets the audience into her catastrophic world, and we see that her life was not a fairytale at all, but rather a prison. Although I ended the season passionately hating Charles for his selfishness towards Diana, the writers still truly made me invested in both of the characters and their relationship. When the two tried to give their marriage another chance, I let myself fall into the characters' world of seeing a nice future with each other, despite knowing how the relationship really ended.



The couple's storyline is the best example from *The Crown* of how the show makes the audience feel like they are being let in on the personal lives of the royal family.

Finally, something I found outstanding about Season 4 and *The Crown* in general when compared to other shows, is the cinematography by Adriana Goldman. I would attribute the powerfully compelling nature of Princess Diana's storyline in large part to Goldman's cinematography. The way each scene captures the good moments, such as the scenes after Diana and Charles decide to try harder in their marriage, when they play with baby William in a desert, and when they dance together in front of an audience, and the bad moments, such as when the couple fights and Diana is seen binge eating, truly imprints the emotion of each scene in the viewer. Throughout the entire season, the elegance of royal life was transmitted through my screen, and I felt as though I was living the royal life simply by watching the show. It felt like a painting could've been made out of almost every scene. The most memorable scene, in terms of cinematography, for me was the assassination of Lord Mountbatten, also known as Uncle Dickie (Charles Dance). Leading up to the scene is a series of quick scenes of Princess Anne (Erin Doherty) hunting deer, Prince Phillip (Tobias Menzies) hunting birds, and Prince Charles fishing. As each of these characters loads their gun or rod, the scene cuts back to Dickie, and as he throws a lobster back into the water, the camera angle cuts so that we are viewing his boat from deep underwater. First, we see the lobster fall in, and after a few seconds of pause, we see his boat explode. This scene was so captivating that I had to rewind it and watch it again to fully appreciate it.

Although *The Crown* is not targeted at teens, like *Vampire Diaries* or *Riverdale*, if you're interested in switching it up for some higher quality but slower-moving TV, or if you're used to that type of TV, I highly recommend *The Crown*.

Season 4 was just as intriguing if not more than the last 3 seasons, and I'm eager to see the lives of the royal family play out to the present in the show's final two seasons.



28 Days

By Jhanae Ottey

During a recent family movie night, Netflix recommended the 2000 film, *28 Days*, and we all said something along the lines of “Oh, Sandra Bullock is in it.” or “Sure, I wouldn’t mind watching it.” Looking back on that night, I realized that this movie doesn’t seem to offer much at face value; however, in reality, it is an amazing and well-thought-out film that everyone should watch.

28 Days, directed by Betty Thomas and starring Sandra Bullock, is an amazing film about the harsh realities of drug addiction and its psychological consequences on the addicts and those in their lives. The film is riddled with comedic moments that many have critiqued for disregarding the seriousness of drug addiction, but in my opinion, the comedic factor shows how there can still be light even in the darkest times of someone’s life. For Gwen and a majority of the characters, this darkest time is in rehab.

The movie starts with Gwen (Sandra Bullock) and her reckless boyfriend, Jasper (Dominic West), partying the night before her sister’s wedding which she ruins in a drunken stupor. After crashing the wedding limo into a house, the court orders that she can either spend 28 days in rehab or face jail time. As the film progresses, Gwen’s recurring confrontations with herself, such as why she never asks for help or how she and everyone she knows perceives her to be a bad person, helps the viewer see the crucial mental progress that she goes through in order to find out who she is behind the shield of drugs and alcohol.

There are many aspects of this movie that are done well because of its fast-paced, organic, and witty vibe. Similarly, the personality of each character is individualistic, yet don’t subtract from the flow of the script. Though deceptively simple, a particular scene where their unique personalities shine through was during the first group therapy meeting where Gerhardt (Alan Tudyk) breaks down crying for seemingly no reason and struggles to articulate his words. Everyone else had an array of subtle reactions; Bobbie (Diane Ladd) is concerned, Gwen and Oliver (Mike O’Malley) are snickering and holding back laughter, Daniel (Reni Santoni) and Roshanda (Marianne Jean-Baptiste) are unamused and annoyed, and Andrea (Azura Skye) is bored.

The beautiful part of this movie is how all characters have feasible and important-to-the-plot character arcs—even its seemingly one-dimensional comedic relief, Gerhardt. At the beginning of the movie, as depicted before, he is constantly crying and struggling to express his emotions. In the middle of the movie, he asks what most would perceive as an embarrassing question: “Once we all

leave, we have needs that are going to need to be filled... by people... physically... at times. How and when can we do that? Not how just when?” This proved that he gained the confidence and clarity to speak his mind. Cornell (Steve Buscemi) who runs the rehabilitation center, suggests that he should buy a plant and a pet and if he can keep them alive for 2 years then he is ready to start a relationship. In the last (and in my opinion the most iconic) scene in the movie, Gwen finds Gerhardt arguing with the owner of a plant store about how his plant has died and turns to Gwen sobbing “I’m never going to get laid.” As hilarious as this was in the moment, this last scene shows how although Gerhardt has made it through rehab, the path of being a “normal” member of society in sobriety has quickly proven itself to be a hard and daunting one.

Gerhardt’s character arc shows how *28 Days* can use even the simplest of characters to expose the viewers to the realities of drug addiction. And in every moment possible it reveals to the viewer new insights on what it is like to have a drug or general addiction problem. It does this through character monologues about how they don’t necessarily feel like a drug addict, flashbacks of childhood traumas, family visits at the rehab center which show how family members are emotionally affected, and much more.

So, for your next movie night, I suggest that you watch *28 Days* for an all-encapsulating cinematic experience that will keep your eyes glued to the screen. You will laugh and you will cry, but most importantly you will learn something new.



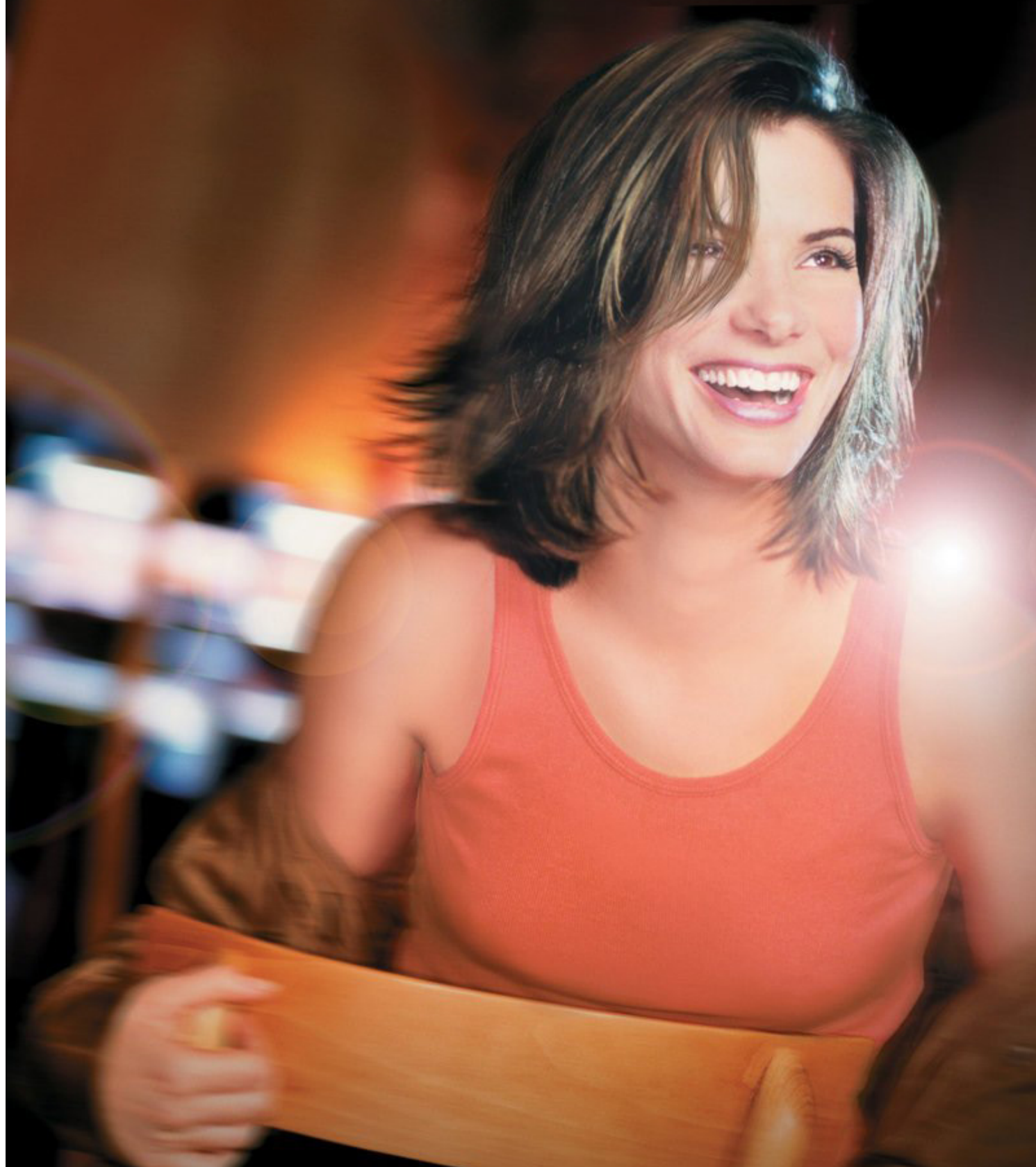
Critics Review: 33%
Top Critis Review: 41%



Audience Review: 50%



Sandra Bullock
(Gwen)





AMAZON ORIGINAL *The Grand Tour*

By Sam Siegel

We all did it. We all waited. Every week we glued ourselves to the computers in our home and waited. Whatever day it might be whatever time or whatever place. To the car lovers among you, this scene of bated breath is a familiar one. We made our way over to Amazon and up to the search bar. We all typed in "The Grand Tour". We all repeated this weekly.

2020 was a year of uncertainty, as TV shows were delayed or canceled, leaving the loyal viewer craving their escapist fix. The Grand Tour, a British adventure show which features cars, and stars three presenters Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond, and James May was a show plagued by this fate. Almost a year after its promised release date at the beginning of 2020, The Grand Tour premiered its latest special in December of 2020 on Amazon prime... and it was glorious.

The Grand Tour is a show that paints an elaborate picture of a land far away with three wise men fighting to reach a spot far out of their normal comforts. While using and reviewing cars along the way. The latest installment of The Grand Tour called a Massive Hunt depicts a hunt for pirate treasure, a truly epic quest for riches and rewards. The show stars three extremely well-versed car reviewers: Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond, and James May. It also co-stars three cars whose role is to facilitate the

journey around Madagascar.

As viewers, we watched with bated breath as the off-road modified versions of the co-stars traversed terrain forged rivers and ultimately delivered our stars to their fate. But the adventure and excitement are not what make The Grand Tour such a great show, they are merely a factor. To a viewer of The Grand Tour the true excitement, and the reason we watch is the visceral hilarity in the chemistry between the stars. From pranks to put-downs I found myself unable to control my laughter as Jeremy, Richard, and James acted more like a family than as actors on a TV show.

This humble car show has encapsulated a generation of car lovers not for the fast and modern supercars gracing our screens but for the personality of the people driving them. These three men interacted in ways that left most of us unable to breathe, clutching our stomachs as we let out large gut laughs. Jeremy, James, and Richard are amazing regardless of the show encapsulating their personalities (illustrated by James recently creating an amazing cooking show). So as normal car people flooded Amazon once again for another weekly installment of the Grand Tour, we were shocked to see Jeremy stand tears welling in his eyes. As the three explained the Grand Tour was ending. But not in the way we all thought. Instead,



they elaborated that the show would be switching to a special-only situation.

To most Grand Tour fans the specials were the best part. The three guys all together building on each other's comedic might in another country just trying to finish a journey encapsulated us. We were used to these special occurrences about every two years. But not anymore. Now about every year or so we get an hour and a half long special. Nothing else, no more studio, only the world, and our stars. But the real question is did it work. And the answer is yes, sort of. I don't think we really miss the studio and the car reviews as in the age of the internet The Grand Tour seemed to lag behind the fast publication ability of the internet. Why wait several months for a Grand Tour review of a car when an equally as cinematic version is available almost instantaneously on Youtube?

Many years after this decision and several specials later a definite change can be seen. It's almost as

if the majesty of the specials is gone. We used to have to wait for so long building it up in our heads and when they didn't disappoint, we hailed them as the best car programs ever created. But now, it's different. Now we expect the specials we expect the laughter. And it's made the wonderful moment less joyful. So, we all still wait, we all still sit. But we wonder if our dislike for what we are seeing is the story itself or the glue that is holding all car people to the past Grand Tour.

I am constantly and habitually waiting for the irregularly released installment of The Grand Tour. Growing up I watched The Grand Tour religiously: hunched over the TV screen crying as laughter escaped my body. When placing 2020 into history most people will remember the heartbreak and worry associated with such a year. Personally, I hope to remember the heartbreak as well as shows like Grand Tour which used comedy to lighten the toll this past year took on my soul.

THE WALKING DEAD

By Jordan Wasserberger

After two years of dealing with The Whisperers, The Walking Dead's creepiest enemy to date, we've finally seen how our 10-year old group of survivors will live to fight another day. Simply put, well-done TWD! The Whisperer War was one of the best storylines in The Walking Dead's decade-long run, right up there with Woodbury, and The Saviors. The Walking Dead has always had tremendous villains, but the skin-wearing prophecy-chanting group of manic degenerates was undoubtedly among the best.

SPOILERS AHEAD FOR TWD SEASONS 9 AND 10

While The Whisperers as a group were thrilling, their leaders, Alpha (Samantha Morton) and Beta (Ryan Hurst) really stole the show. As the main antagonist for all of Season 9 and most of Season 10, the audience really got to know Alpha. We understood her wants, her motivations, why she wears the skin of the undead, and her complex relationship with her daughter, Lydia (Cassady McClincy). Alpha was one of the best characters in the history of The Walking Dead, and Samantha Morton's brilliant portrayal didn't hurt. After the season-and-a-half period in which we didn't have a true antagonist between The Saviors and The Whisperers' storyline, Alpha was exactly what this show needed. Without her, I highly doubt I would've enjoyed seasons 9 and 10 as much as I did. I genuinely looked forward to every single scene with her. Thus, when she was killed by Negan in episode 12 of season 10, I was genuinely sad that she met her end. Then again, she did mount the heads of 10 people from our group (including two kids and one of my favorite all-time characters on the show) on spikes, so it's not as if she didn't deserve it. Nevertheless, Alpha was easily one of the best things to grace The Walking Dead, so kudos to season 10 for further developing an already phenomenal character.

With Alpha's death, Beta became the new leader of The Whisperers. Prior to Alpha's demise, Beta was just your average knife-wielding-zombie-worshipping lunatic. After her death, he was the same except he wore half of her face on top of his and became really hateful of country music. Nevertheless, just as Samantha Morton depicted Alpha's complex evil fantastically - so too did Ryan Hurst with Beta's brutish savagery. It's rare for a show to have two great villains back to back - even rarer for it to happen episode after episode. The four episodes with Beta at the helm of The Whisperers were mostly great, and overall the villains were easily the best part of season 10.

As usual, Norman Reedus, Melissa McBride, and Danai Gurira played their characters tremendously, and all three had individual moments this season in which they

brought their portrayals to new heights. The bar for acting has always been high on the show, but these three really stepped it up in season 10, in part I'm sure due to the absence of Rick. By far the most interesting part of their respective storylines was seeing how each character struggled internally, and how each of them wanted to deal with The Whisperers in their own way. I was pleasantly surprised that this conflict wasn't contrived, and Darryl and Carol's choices fell in line with their established personalities and decision-making tracks. Michonne's decisions, on the other hand, were blindingly moronic.

Unlike Darryl and Carol, who were heavily involved in the conflict with The Whisperers, Michonne took more of a backseat role - focusing on her relationship with her daughter, Judith (Cailey Fleming). After learning about a cache of weapons on a nearby island, Michonne temporarily departs in order to go retrieve these essential armaments. Naturally, in true Walking Dead fashion, no such cache exists, and instead, Michonne ends up caged on the remote isle, held hostage by newcomer Virgil (Kevin Carroll), and sent into a drug-induced hallucination. This was actually one of my favorite parts of the season. As an avid fan of alternate-history stories, seeing what would've happened if Michonne had not saved Andrea (Laurie Holden) at the end of season two was fascinating, and Danai Gurira did an excellent job portraying this "evil doppelgänger" version of herself. Eventually, Michonne escapes and abandons her daughter and loved ones to travel up to New Jersey on the slight chance that Rick was there at some point over the past year and a half. Are you kidding me, TWD?

This is undoubtedly season 10's worst moment. Michonne's departure from the show is completely antithetical to her 8-season long character arc and goes against everything we understand about her. I refuse to believe that Michonne would leave all her friends and her two children based on a random ship dossier she found, on an island she was brought to based on a lie. Never mind the fact that the man who brought her there immediately locked her up and drugged her with hallucinogens. Just to add insult to injury, The Walking Dead had the audacity to make Michonne's departure one of the most beautifully filmed moments of the entire show, with a soundtrack that actually brought tears to my eyes. I want to love this sequence. From a filmmaking perspective, it is tremendous, and everyone behind the scenes on The Walking Dead continues to raise the bar for a television production. However, the glaring inconsistencies with Michonne's story and the tragic way in which it undoes her entire arc as a character, make it one of the biggest mistakes a show of this caliber has ever made.

Outside of those three, the non-"trinity" group members were all great. Ezekiel (Khary Payton) and Jerry (Cooper Andrews) continued to shine in their endearing bromance, and both remain fantastic parts of the ensemble. Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) reached new heights - the question of his true motivations and loyalties permeated throughout the season, making the reveal of his

role in Carol's master plan all the more satisfying (his confrontation with Beta in the finale was also one of his best moments ever). The newcomers, for the most part, were also good, creating some genuinely interesting new relationship dynamics with old characters. The Walking Dead's supporting cast has always been great, and season 10 proved that yet again.

The Walking Dead managed to pull off another brilliant display of savage glory peppered with heartfelt drama, and the show has yet again proved it's still kicking as we enter its long-awaited denouement. Season 10 ended with a gripping cliff-hanger, and I am pulsing with excitement for new episodes to premiere on February 28th. Let's hope it meets our expectations.

“The Walking Dead has proven time and time again that it can be the platinum standard for television. It just needs to do it for one final year.



Spike Lee and the
cast of the film



DA 5 BLOODS

By Sarene Choudhury

Spike Lee is widely known as a brilliant director, and once again he delivers with the thrilling film, *Da 5 Bloods*. It takes the traumas of a group of black men who fought in the Vietnam War and places them at the forefront of political consciousness. *Da 5 Bloods* may be a heist movie, but it explores themes much deeper than that. It critiques both the Vietnam War as well as American culture as it tackles the issue of race. The film has static energy that draws viewers in; the running time may be over two hours long, but there is never a moment where the viewer is not engaged. Perhaps one of Lee's most ambitious films yet, *Da 5 Bloods* is a unique take on war, camaraderie, and Black Lives Matter.

The film opens with a montage of the passionate Civil Rights battle that American citizens waged against their government during the Vietnam War. Famous and powerful voices, including those of Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, and Angela Davis are featured during this evocative signifier that race will be the main theme of the film. This churning montage demonstrates how the sociopolitical situation was a mess, especially for black citizens such as those the movie centers around. They were asked to fight and kill for a country that did not even recognize them as full citizens, a concept that can not be fully understood by most Americans until watching this film. Demonstrating the mark of a Spike Lee film, *Da 5 Bloods* takes on racial injustice within the first few minutes. As a result, the first 160 seconds of the film start off strong and set the scene, both historically and politically.

In the first scene we meet the four main characters of Otis (Clarke Peters), Eddie (Norm Lewis), Melvin (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), and Paul (Delroy Lindo), aka the 'Bloods.' All veterans of the Vietnam War, the former squad are reuniting after years in Ho Chi Minh City. The men were part of the Army's First Infantry Division, otherwise known as the Big Red One. They have come together again after all these years with the goal of finding the remains of the squad leader, Stormin' Norman (Chadwick Boseman), who was killed in a firefight years ago. Together, the Bloods and Norman made up *Da 5 Bloods*. However, their motivation to find Norman's remains is accompanied by their desire to find the goal that was buried near those same remains all those years ago when they hid it there. In this scene, viewers can immediately get the feel of the dynamic between them, as well as what it means for the film. After the serious montage, the emotional spectrum

of the characters becomes apparent in this first scene, and the film is set up to be a film that is neither light nor heavy. While this may seem like a tall task, Lee and the cast handle it perfectly, managing to keep the film away from depressing while still addressing social and political issues of the deeply entrenched racism in America. Each of the characters is crafted with the issue of race in mind, rounding out the movie with a seamless connection between the Bloods and the message Lee sends with this film.

In their minds, each of the Bloods took on their own, romanticized version of Norman. He became an entity of mythical grandeur, and on the same level as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X to the Bloods. Boseman's performance is nothing short of captivating, even as a supporting character, emulating heroes like Black Panther in his portrayal of Norman. He features in the wartime flashbacks of the Bloods, which crop up throughout the film. Each of these strengthens the storyline that allows the viewer to get a clearer sense of his death and the how/why behind what happened. This technique specifically aids the development of the character of Paul. As we get to know him more after his jarring introduction wearing a MAGA hat, we discover how achingly haunted he is. As a result of his contrasting political beliefs, the relationship between Paul and the other Bloods reflects the tumultuous, nationwide divide of America. Various sources that are revealed throughout the film allow viewers to realize the storm of anger, regret, resentment, and more, as the most conflicted character.

Da 5 Bloods is a thrilling film that has that Spike Lee film sense to it, even being as unique as it is. Taking on mature themes, Lee is accompanied by a cast who play their characters with more depth than most actors could only dream of. While it does have Netflix feel, it is all the more charming for it.

“The film could be timeless, but its release after the events in the summer of 2020 in terms of the Black Lives Matter movement makes it take a place in the center of the political and social movements across the country, as the United States endures its inner battle with race and identity.



WandaVision

By Jordan Wasserberger

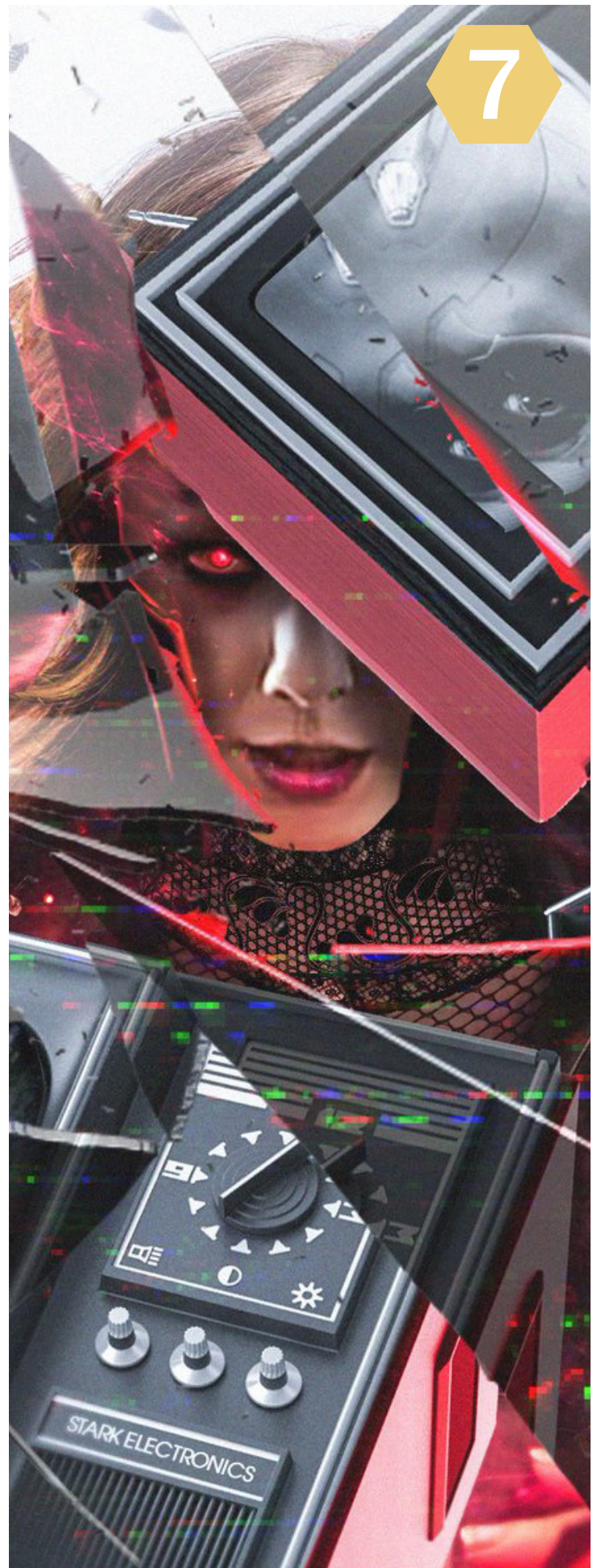
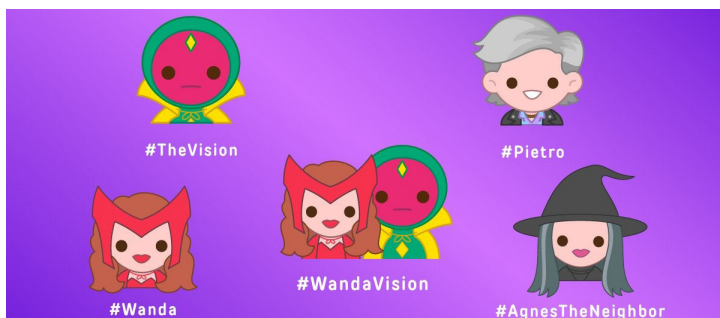
The Marvel fan base has been starving for new content within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) since the release of *Spider-Man: Far From Home* on July 2, 2019. 1 year and a half years later, Disney delivered in a big way. Enter: *WandaVision*.

Set right after the events of *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) *WandaVision* tells the story of... something. We don't actually know. Thus far, six episodes have been released, and I couldn't tell you what in the world is going on. The basic premise is that Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen) and Vision (Paul Bettany) are living out an idyllic sitcom-esque life in a suburb called Westview. Each episode takes place in a different decade, beginning in the 1950s. As such, the first two episodes were filmed almost entirely in black-and-white, with the third being the first to appear in color. However, not all is as it seems. Obviously, our charac-

ters are not actually living in the 1950s, nor is the world actually in black-and-white. In the third episode, things change. Wanda is suddenly pregnant, the world is in color, and now we're in the 70s. This is also the first episode where the characters directly confront the fact something is wrong here. Vision is increasingly suspicious of his surroundings, after noticing a myriad of abnormalities such as his neighbor seeing through a concrete wall or Wanda's pregnancy advancing at an alarming rate. Eventually, he directly asks his neighbors/friends Agnes (Kathryn Hahn) and Herb (David Payton) what's going on, and for a brief moment, it looks like we might get some concrete answers. Alas, Agnes and Herb stop themselves before anything can be revealed, yet again plunging us into a fit of uncertainty. Wanda is unbothered by these abnormalities though, instead of focusing on her pregnancy and more menial, day-to-day tasks. The pregnancy itself goes fine

- Wanda gives birth to twins Tommy and Billy Maximoff, and if not for a few telepathic hijinks you'd think it was a totally normal event. That is, until Wanda remarks on how she used to have a twin, Pietro, and her friend Geraldine (Teyonah Parris) asks, "he was killed by Ultron wasn't he?" This moment is absolutely insane, as up until now we had only seen tangential references to the rest of the MCU. A Hydra logo here, a Stark Industries advertisement there, but nothing super concrete. Thus, when Geraldine (who's really Monica Rambeau from Captain Marvel (2019)) directly references Ultron, it's undeniably creepy. It also becomes clear that while Vision may suspect something is wrong, Wanda knows what's going on, because she is behind all of it. In a fit of rage, Wanda blasts Geraldine out of Westview, right outside of some sort of field camp, and directly leading into the fourth episode, entitled: "We Interrupt This Program."

Episodes 4, 5, and 6 are all great in their own respects. From showing us what's happening with S.W.O.R.D on the outside of Westview to the introduction of Evan Peters' Quicksilver from the X-Men universe, WandaVision is thriving. Episode 6 in particular is a remarkable 40 minutes. In such a short span of time, we get several major story beats, setting up the inevitable collapse of Wanda's false reality. Episode 6 is also one of the darkest in the show, a departure from typical Marvel style and a welcome one at that. WandaVision is a breath of fresh air for the MCU. The show brilliantly blends the campy atmosphere of the Westview sitcom with jarring moments that reveal the true scope of Wanda's creation. It's dark where it should be, epic where it deserves to be, and genuinely interesting all the time. It's a show built on delayed gratification, and in an era of streaming entire seasons in one night, I applaud WandaVision for taking it slow. It certainly feels like we're approaching something big, whether it be another big plot twist or simply a major development. I truly hope this reveal isn't that there's some other villain controlling Wanda, as putting an Avenger in the villain role is part of what makes WandaVision so unique. It's heart wrenching to see one of our beloved heroes turn evil, and makes the show much more than good guy vs. bad guy. Nevertheless, thus far WandaVision is peak MCU, and if this is the level of quality going forward, we should be in for a wild ride. Do I know what's actually going on? No. Do I have a myriad of questions and theories? Absolutely. Am I excited to see what happens next? Yes, and you should be too!





THE FALCON AND THE WINTER SOLDIER

By Sarene Choudhury

It has been over a year since the thrilling end to Marvel's *Avengers: Endgame* and the continuation of Captain America's legacy are about to finally be released in the form of *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*. This six-episode series is expected to be more of a traditional show compared to *WandaVision*, which is both sitcom and blockbuster. However, it will have a more comedic undertone than your average Marvel production due to the fun dynamic between the two leads of the Falcon (Anthony Mackie) and the Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan). The series was originally supposed to be Marvel's first release of Phase Four in August 2020, but after numerous delays and reshoots, the series will now be released in March 2021, two months after *WandaVision*.

Sam Wilson, the Falcon's alter ego, and Bucky Barnes, the Winter Soldier's, are the stars of this show, which will follow them navigating the post-*Endgame* world and the legacy that Captain America left behind. The former Shield agent, Sharon Carter (Emily VanCamp), and Batroc the Leaper (Georges St. Pierre) will return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) after their respective roles in the movies *Captain America: Civil War* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. However, the most anticipated return to the MCU is that of Baron Helmut Zemo (Daniel Gruhl). Zemo's family was killed during the events in Sokovia of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, leading him to seek revenge in *Captain America: Civil War*. His goal

was to avenge his family by breaking apart the Avengers, and he succeeded. Although Zemo's role in the film was brief, his impact was lasting, as his attempts to fracture the Avengers were what led to the major events in *Civil War*. A highly intelligent and cunning character, Zemo's storyline left off after killing the other Winter Soldiers he had sought out in an old Hydra base, and being imprisoned by the Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman). After being left off the big screen since 2016, there is no telling what Zemo has planned since then.

The plot of this series will pick up sometime after the iconic scene of Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) giving his shield to the Falcon in *Endgame* — essentially handing off the mantle of being Captain America. Both Sam and Bucky were 'snapped' during the events of *Avengers: Infinity War*, so their recent return to the MCU before the start of the show implies that they will have to re-establish themselves in their world. While already difficult for Sam to assimilate back into society after being presumed dead for five years, Bucky is in the unfortunate situation of having been a mind-controlled criminal for some 80 years. Though many assume that in the aftermath of *Endgame*, Bucky's status as a wanted criminal would have been resolved, it has not been confirmed and may become a potential issue in this series. *Spider-Man: Far from Home* did gloss over the difficulties that come with returning to society after being snapped, but with the extended screen time of

a series over a film, Sam and Bucky's acclimation to an unfamiliar world is bound to crop up.

The show is supposed to revolve around Sam's decision of whether or not to accept the role of Captain America, focusing on that character-driven decision. He will have to make this decision without the support of the US government and while fighting new enemies. We will see new additions to the MCU, brought to life from the comics and introduced as characters in the series. The most notable is John Walker (Wyatt Russell), who will be a major antagonist against Sam's claim to becoming the new owner of Cap's vibranium shield and all it stands for, that being the constant battle against evil. Throughout the comic history of Captain America, many have taken it upon themselves to unofficially assume the role of Captain America, and now the MCU will be bringing one of these imposters onto the screen. John Walker's character is based on the comic anti-hero and occasional villain, US Agent. He was originally introduced as an enemy to Captain America, but after this introduction, he served on various superhero teams of the Marvel Comics, such as the Force Works, the Jury, and S.T.A.R.S. Walker has a complicated history, which has led many to believe he will be equally as complex as an antagonist in the upcoming series. The reason Walker will be such a major antagonist is that his claim to the mantle of America's protector does indeed have the support of the US government who prefer him over Sam's Falcon. There is no doubt that this will lead to strife between the two, but the greatest new enemy shown in the trailer is the group, Flag Smashers.

In the comics, the villain Flag-Smasher is the antithesis of Captain America. This villain stands for anarchy, and especially despised the nationalism of the Captain. In the trailer for the Falcon and the Winter Soldier, there are multiple people wearing masks marked with red handprints, and a released logo revealed their connection to the comic villain. While it is generally unknown of the group of Flag Smashers' position in the show, it

is safe to assume that their motivation is linked to their comic connection. This brings about the interesting question as to whether or not the Flag Smashers' existence will force an alliance between Sam Wilson and John Walker. As assumed opponents of nationalists, it is likely that these antagonists will target the government-supported Captain of John Walker, besides just Sam. Marvel has long been known to keep their villains in varying shades of gray, where they are not pure evil—the most known example being the biggest villain of the franchise so far, Thanos, who wanted to end world hunger. However, it is expected that Walker's character will follow more along the lines of Loki, who constantly switched between ally and enemy.

The Falcon and the Winter Soldier is the second installment of Marvel's Phase Four and will help set up the rest of the phase with the introduction of new characters, easter eggs, possible cameos, and more. All fans of Marvel are sure to enjoy this deeper dive into the previously supporting characters of Sam Wilson and Bucky Barnes.





LOKI

By Isabel Melián

Disney's favorite sort-of villain, Loki, Thor's brother, is coming back in his own Disney+ series this May, entitled *Loki*. This series' storyline is based on *Avengers: Endgame*, where a young Loki steals the Tesseract (one of the six Infinity Stones) and escapes from custody using a portal. This moment opens up a new alternative timeline in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The series will explore what will happen to Loki in this new timeline. As part of Phase Four of the MCU, which kicked off on January 15 with the release of *WandaVision*, *Loki*'s first season will consist of six episodes, with a second season in development.

The series takes place right after the events of the original *Avengers* movie, which have been altered in *Endgame*, so the events from later movies have not yet taken place in this universe, resulting in Loki still being considered a 'bad' guy. Loki will be an unlikely influence on historical events in the MCU, and Hiddleston has revealed that the character will come up against "more formidable opponents." Much of the plot remains unclear from the trailer, but we know that it will contain lots of action including jumping out of planes and intense fight scenes.

Previously seen in the *Thor* and *Avengers* movies, in this installment, after escaping through the portal, Loki (Tom Hiddleston) is arrested by the Time Variance Asso-

ciation (TVA), as seen in the Marvel comics. It is unclear what either Loki's or the TVA's intentions are, but throughout the series, the TVA sends Loki on secret missions to alter time and history throughout the MCU.

Other than Hiddleston, it is reported that Sophia Di Martino, Owen Wilson, and Gugu Mbatha-Raw will be starring as prominent, but unknown characters in the show. The series is going to be written and produced by Michael Waldron, the writer of the popular show *Rick and Morty*. This serves as a sort of confirmation that in *Loki* there will be lots of the timely, witty, and beloved comedy that the MCU has come to be known for.

Many have been waiting with anticipation for this new series that has been generally kept under wraps. Loki, an essential and powerful character to the *Avengers* series, with conflicting emotions and morality will continue to have a plot-line even after his death in *Avengers: Infinity War*. As Loki is one of my favorite Marvel characters and knowing that the show will contain a plethora of action, I am so excited for the show that I am counting down the days until it comes out. Fans are widely anticipating the release of *Loki*, expecting mischief, magic, and many *Avenger* cameos. Much is kept under wraps about this new show, but Marvel fans are all waiting for the day it is released.

Owen Wilson (Mobius) and
Tom Hiddleston (Loki)





F9

By Sam Perlman

At this point, the Fast and Furious movies have become iconic to those involved or engrossed by cinema. Since *The Fast and the Furious* released in 2001, the creators have been pumping out another edition every two or three years for the past two decades. While some think that the movies have strayed too far away from the originals and their roots, the majority of viewers love these movies for what they have evolved into: fast-paced, action-packed, funny, emotional, epic, familial, and all-around awesome.

With all of the curveballs that 2020 presented came a number of botched movie releases, the newest issue of the Fast and Furious franchise, *Fast & Furious 9*, being one of them. Its intended release date set for May 22, 2020 has been postponed for more than an entire year with the new release date being June 25, 2021. With the trailer having been out for months already, the anticipation for the film has been marinating and fans are eager to watch.

The most recent iteration of the series, *The Fate of the Furious*, ended with the whole squad coming together,

naming Dom's (Vin Diesel) baby after their friend who gave up the fast and furious lifestyle, O'Conner (Paul Walker) and the gang seemingly being ready to settle down. However, the trailer for *Fast & Furious 9* indicates that Dom and his crew didn't quite settle down for good. The trailer opens with a scene where Dom and Letty (Michelle Rodriguez) are living on their farm with their son, who the crew had to rescue in *The Fate of the Furious*. The trailer goes on to explain that the crew can't leave their old life behind because there is a new threat: Dom's brother (John Cena). The trailer then goes on to show a series of stunts, fights, cars, and destruction in the battle against Dom's brother and his brother's crew.

The biggest question that the trailer for *Fast & Furious 9* raises is, has the series gone too far from its roots and become closer to superhero films? The answer is subjective, but here's what I think. I believe that the series has had a clear thread of progression. It began as a street racing series set in Los Angeles; then went international by the third film, experienced a reboot for the fifth film, and has continued to progress to more and more epic movies with crazier villains, stunts, cars, and plots. With the series' evolution in mind, *Fast & Furious 9* is nothing out of the ordinary when looking at how the series has grown. In the last film, they rescued Dom's child from a terrorist while also stopping a nuclear missile. To me, that seems even crazier than the stunts featured in the trailer for *Fast & Furious 9*. In my opinion, *Fast & Furious 9* will be on the same level as *The Fate of the Furious* in terms of how crazy the plot is, how evil the antagonists are, and how incredible the stunts are.

What needs to be said, however, is that the language in the trailer for *Fast & Furious 9* sounded very similar to that of a superhero movie. The language to describe the villain, such as "you've pushed yourself to be faster [...], smarter [...], stronger," sounds very similar to the way



antagonists are described in superhero movies. Although some may see this as the franchise veering even further away from its LA street racing roots, this may have been intentional. As I touched on above, the series has progressed to become more and more large scale and amazing with every film. Going from street racing in the first film, to a money heist in Brazil while being hunted by the FBI in the fifth one, to defeating a UK terrorist and stopping a moving cargo plane in the sixth one, to eliminating a massive US cyberthreat while combating a terrorist in the seventh one, and finally to stopping a nuke while rescuing a baby from a terrorist in the eighth movie, indicates that

maybe transitioning to make the main character, Dom, an actual superhero in the ninth isn't such a stretch.

Regardless of the direction that the Fast & Furious franchise is choosing to go in with this new iteration, the fact remains that fans all around the world are anxious to see this film and are prepared to be wowed. This film could be the make or break point for the franchise; it could decide if the franchise is running out of ideas and scraping the bottom of the barrel, or if it will successfully take a new spin on the feats of the gear-shifting family viewers have come to love.



FATE

THE WINX SAGA

By Tess Abraham

Fate: The Winx Saga is an upcoming teen drama inspired by the Italian animated series *Winx Club*, created by Iginio Straffi. The original show centered around six fairies: Bloom, Stella, Flora, Tecna, Musa, and Aisha. The show revolves around Bloom and her friends' adventures at the Alfea College for Fairies. Throughout the show, the Winx club encounters different villains, such as Trix, a trio of witches. Over time, due to studio and animation issues behind the scenes, the character design has changed drastically from their original looks. However, out of the variety of interpretations of the story, Netflix's *Fate: The Winx Saga* is the most different.

Netflix completely revamped the once colorful and playful setting of *The Winx Club*; like other Netflix produced teen dramas, the show looks dark and has a serious tone. What made the original *Winx Club* animated series stand out was the characters' colorful costumes. Fairies were characterized by their crop tops with glittery material, flashy accessories, and high platform shoes. Though sometimes their costume design ventured towards being "campy," it was a characteristic that defined the show. The *Winx Saga*, however, features a distinctly lifeless and monotonous wardrobe. With these changes, the previously

joyful tone is taken away. What's left is the same atmosphere as many other teen fantasy shows within an academic setting, such as *Legacies* or *The Magicians*.

In the live-action versions of *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and *Riverdale* both of them also moved far away from the wholesome image of their original comics, favoring violence and gore over milkshakes. It makes sense that these adaptations need to look mature for their target audience, teens, however it also leaves room for these shows to look and feel exactly the same.

Why did producers feel the need to strip everything that made *Winx Club* familiar to those who grew up with it? It seems like the teen drama formula— involving a dark mood, love triangles, unnecessary drama— demands to make all fantasy shows uniform.

I think it's valid to question why *Winx Club* was chosen for a reboot in the first place. Its original source material wasn't necessarily revolutionary to the world of television.

In cinema, for example, young adult book adaptations have been reliable sources of cash flow from audiences for years. As the target audiences for such movies, adolescents and teenagers are frequently targeted because of the enormity of their demographic. Since the past decade, we have moved on from YA dystopian adaptations, like *Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. Similarly, throughout the past few years, studios have been rebooting TV shows by the dozen. Disney, above all, is the most guilty of this: they've rebooted many of the original princess movies (without innovating much) to mixed critical and audience reviews. Television series such as *Charmed*, *Roswell*, and even *Gossip Girl* have been rebooted and revamped with the purpose of updating and modernizing their storylines. Audiences are quick to point out the marketability of nos-

talgia; some argue that producers have been capitalizing on the nostalgia of millennials. It's easier to reboot shows that will guarantee an audience than take risks on creating new stories that aren't personally connected or already familiar to people. In the end, many of these reboot attempts have only disappointed fans because of their lack of creativity, innovation, and proper revision. Perhaps it would have been better to make Fate: The Winx Saga an entirely different show than a reboot of Winx, as it already deviates from the original.

Fate: The Winx Saga (2020)

Critics Review: 33%

Top Critics Review: 50%

Audience Review: 76%

Winx Club (2004)

IMDB: 6.2/10

TV.com: 8.0/10





NOBODY

By Eli Scher

Nobody, an upcoming film hitting theaters on April 2nd, follows Hutch Mansell, played by Bob Odenkirk, a seemingly ordinary father and a husband who is jolted back into his past as an auditor after his home is burglarized. After he channels his hand-to-hand combat skills and fights back against the thieves, Mansell finds himself targeted by Russian drug lords and is forced to protect his family.

From its trailer, the film appears very unique and gripping... until about the second half, where it begins to exhibit a number of action movie tropes, such as drawn-out hand-to-hand fight scenes. This is certainly normal for just about every action movie trailer, but Nobody already has a significant number of factors working towards its potential success.

If you're new to the action genre and looking for a reason to get excited for the release of Nobody in February, it should be its lead actor, Bob Odenkirk. Emerging with his role in Breaking Bad and currently starring in Better Call Saul's title role, Odenkirk has become a household name. The comedy actor is making a vast jump from lawyer to heroic combat fighter, but his refined small screen acting ability will certainly translate well for the seventh film he has acted and written, directed, or produced. Odenkirk actually likened choreographing fight scenes to working in a writers' room on a comedy show.

Joining Odenkirk in production is David Leitch, who also worked on the John Wick films. There is perhaps no better action film to draw inspiration from than the three in that franchise, and Leitch's input will certainly be a valuable part of the film's creation.

With an interesting concept of an everyman-turned-soldier and a stellar lead actor and producer, what remains to be seen is whether or not Nobody will separate itself from other action and revenge films. Will it rely too heavily on drawn-out fight scenes—a problem action films fall into far too often—or will it make the most of Odenkirk's acting abilities and the potential of its plot to tell a unique story? We'll find out when Nobody is released in theaters on February 26th.



Best Villains Part 2

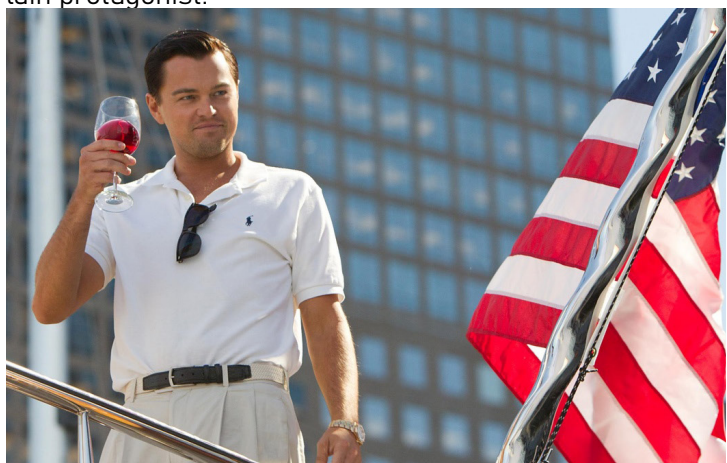
By Jack Komaroff

Throughout the history of cinema, certain villains have always stood out amongst the pack. These memorable villains command the screen and make every second memorable and thrilling. Continuing this idea from "Best Villains" in our last issue, here are four more of the best villains in film and television history.

The Villain Protagonist

Most film villains are usually secondary characters/antagonists, and as a result, they don't have nearly as much screen time as the protagonist. With a villain protagonist, however, they become the lead character with the most screen time and the film revolves around them. Jordan Belfort (*The Wolf of Wall Street*, 2013) played by Leonardo DiCaprio

In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, the protagonist Jordan Belfort is a sleazy stockbroker in New York during the 1980s. He constantly breaks the law and swindles his customers as a "twisted Robin Hood who takes from the rich and gives to himself and his merry band of brokers." What makes Belfort such a good villain is that we view his mistakes through his unique perspective which gives the movie and the character an intimate feel. In the three-hour film, we spend a lot of time with Belfort and track his multi-year journey filled with drugs, sex, alcohol, and most of all, his quest for money, no matter the cost it has on the lives of others. Even more terrifying is how his portrayal asks the audience to question what they would do in a similar situation (as the movie is a mostly accurate retelling of the real Jordan Belfort's book with the same title). Belfort starts off as a poor stockbroker and does everything he can to build himself up to a multimillionaire. Sometimes, the audience is even rooting for Belfort to succeed, which makes him a very complex character. DiCaprio's oscar-nominated performance brings a swagger and charisma to the character that only increases his appeal to the audience, and makes him a classic film villain protagonist.

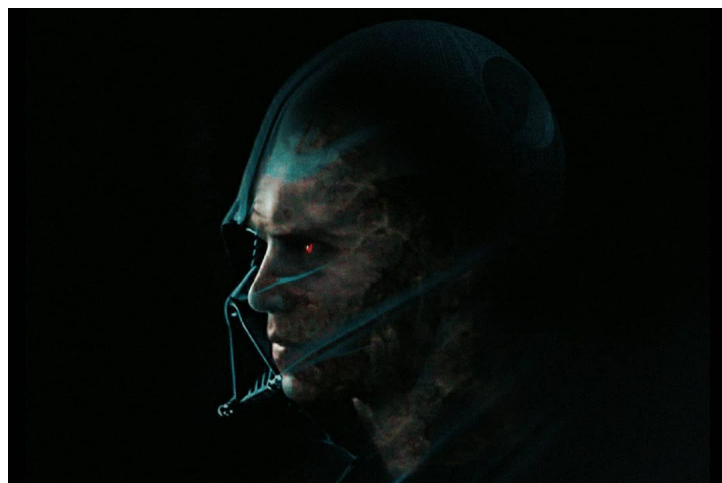


The Fallen Hero Villain

This type of villain doesn't start out with evil intentions. They begin their character arc as a hero, but over the course of time, events cause them to fall from grace and become a villain. The Fallen Hero Villain is particularly hard to watch because the audience is used to them as a hero, which makes their turn to evil all the more significant.

Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader (*Star Wars Saga*, 1977-2005) played by Hayden Christiansen (Anakin Skywalker), David Prose (Darth Vader actor), James Earl Jones (Darth Vader voice).

In countless film lists, Darth Vader is always



ranked near the top. He is without a doubt the most iconic villain of all time. Dressed in all black armor with a bright red lightsaber, he is a true embodiment of the dark side and evil. However, before he was Darth Vader, he was Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker. In a 6-movie arc, Anakin is forced to leave the only family he knew to train to become a Jedi. Anakin falls in love with Queen Padme Amidala, who eventually gives birth to their children, Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa. Anakin is arrogant and thinks he deserves more than what the Jedi are offering him, and through the persuasion of the evil Darth Sidious, Anakin turns to the dark side. His transition is painful for the audience to watch, as Anakin is overcome with grief for his wife who died as a result of his actions. Anakin's best friend cuts off his limbs and shortly after he becomes the evil Darth Vader. Vader is a tall warrior with a booming evil voice who becomes one of the most powerful Siths. The epic hallway fight in *Rogue One* (2016) with Vader in his prime is all the evidence one needs to confirm that Darth Vader is one of the best villains of all time.

The Non-Villain

This type of villain can be viewed as a villain or a complicated character aiming to do, in their opinion, the right thing. This character can be very scary as they blur the lines between hero and villain, causing discomfort in

the audience.

The Joker (*The Dark Knight*, 2008) played by Heath Ledger or Thanos (*Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018) played by Josh Brolin

Both of these villains believe that their actions are justified in their quest to restore order to the universe. The Joker is an agent of chaos—he doesn't have an evil master plan. He sees the evil in the world caused by Batman and wants to upset the established order. The Joker's actions are undoubtedly wrong, but through the way the story presents him we begin to understand his actions and why he does what he does. Thanos has a similar story, as in the movie he only does what he feels is necessary to deal with the overpopulation and lack of world resources. Thanos, possibly even more than Joker, can be viewed as a villain or a hero. In his own view, he is trying to fix the world by ending half of life so the other half can live. While these two characters are definitely villains, their backstories and motives make them complicated characters who exhibit some heroic characteristics.



The Reverse Hero

This type of villain is the exact opposite of the hero. They match them in skills, powers, even wearing similar costume styles. They present a dangerous threat to the hero because they are so similar.

The Reverse Flash (*The Flash*, 2014–present) played by Tom Cavanaugh



The Reverse Flash is the direct opposite of the protagonist, Barry Allen/The Flash. His powers are identical to that of the flash; their costumes are also the same design with different colors. The Flash wants to save the citizens of his city while the Reverse Flash only wants to harm the Flash and his family. Over the course of seven seasons, the Reverse Flash is obsessed with using his powers to kill the Flash and ruin his life and the life of his family. Because the two speedsters are so evenly matched, the quality of their battles is elevated and the audience cannot instantly know who will come out on top. This makes the Reverse Flash a fantastic villain who always pushes the hero to be better and become faster. Cavanaugh's cool and calculating performance also elevates the evil of Reverse Flash to another level.

STAR WARS



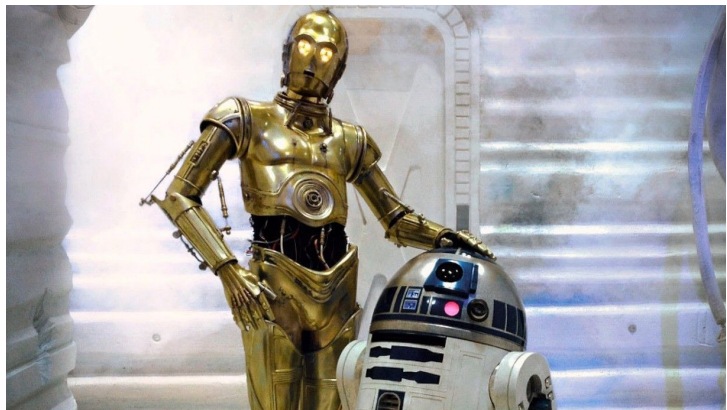
By Patrick Steinbaugh

(Warning - Mandalorian Season Two spoilers ahead)

The Disney Investor Day stream had plenty of surprising announcements for each of the company's many different properties, such as Marvel and Pixar, but none were quite as exciting as the announcement of nine new Star Wars shows slated for release over the next four years. Ever since Disney acquired Lucasfilm (the production company behind Star Wars and Indiana Jones), they've been getting their money's worth out of Star Wars, and their plans only seem to be growing from here. With that being said, here is my ranking, from worst to best, for all of the announced Disney+ Star Wars shows based on how much potential I believe they have.

#9 - A Droid Story

A Droid Story is an animated show that follows a new, undescribed hero who is guided by the classic droid duo of C-3PO and R2-D2. Based on the description, this show seems almost doomed to fail. Not only is this a show nobody was asking for, it feels like a show nobody will like. C-3PO is generally one of the most annoying characters in Star Wars, so taking him and making him one of the two leads of a show sounds tedious and uninspiring. R2-D2 is much more beloved, but once again is not a deep or interesting character - he's a droid who can't even talk. Un-



less the new hero is compelling enough to carry the entire show, which I doubt, this will be a slog to get through.



#8 - Visions

Visions is a collection of ten short films animated in a style that has so far not been done in Star Wars - anime. Unfortunately for this show, the anime style seems to be its big hook, and while that does sound interesting, collections of short films tend to lack a lot of substance since they have to tell such a quick, self-contained story. There's no major negative to this show that turns me off instantly, but a novel animation style alone might not be enough to make fans excited to watch it on release.



#7 - Rangers of the New Republic

Rangers of the New Republic is a live-action series that will focus on the transition from the Rebellion at the end of the Original Trilogy, to the New Republic, which has yet to be delved into due to its utter destruction at the beginning of the Sequel Trilogy. What I appreciate about this concept is that it's Star Wars attempting to do something new, but it loses me in the specifics. We've seen a couple of New Republic Rangers during season two of The Mandalorian, but they haven't been incredibly interesting and, thus far, don't seem to lend themselves to being major characters of a show. I do want to make it clear that this show has the potential to shoot far up this list, but until more information comes out I just can't get invested in it.



#6 - The Bad Batch

Already jokingly dubbed "The Clone Wars: Season Eight" by fans, The Bad Batch is a show animated in the style of The Clone Wars (the animated TV show that ran from 2008 to 2020) that follows a group of clones with genetic mutations trying to get by in the aftermath of Or-

der 66. What frustrates me so much about this show is that it's doing exactly what I want Star Wars to move away from – it's telling another story set between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*. For reference, of the shows on this list, *A Droid Story*, *Lando*, *Andor*, and *Obi-Wan Kenobi* are also set within the said time period. That's five out of nine shows exploring the same time period that already has *Rogue One*, *Solo*, and *Star Wars: Rebels* focused on it. So much emphasis on one time period makes the Star Wars universe so small when it could be massive. That being said, there was a trailer shown for this during the stream and it did look relatively interesting. So while the show itself could be good, I have trouble imagining it adding much to the universe at this point.



#5 - Lando

There is very little information released thus far on *Lando*, just that the show will focus on the infamous, charming swindler Lando Calrissian's younger days. There hasn't even been a confirmation if Donald Glover will reprise his role from *Solo* as the younger Lando. While my biggest grievance with this show is how it's set in the same time period as *The Bad Batch*, what makes *Lando* more compelling is that it feels as though it could add something to the universe. If the show picks up where *Solo* left off and explores the seedy criminal underbelly of the Star Wars universe, I'm on board completely. That's uncharted territory in Star Wars as of yet, and delving into more of what *Solo* started to explain sounds like one of the only interesting stories left to tell in the post-Order-66 time period. However, if they disregard that and just focus on

Lando being Lando, this show drops significantly from this top-five spot.



#4 - Andor

Andor is a spy thriller set during the Rebellion time period that focuses on Cassian Andor, one of the main characters in *Rogue One*. Aside from the fact that it's the familiar time period between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*, the biggest problem with this show is that possibly the biggest complaint about *Rogue One* was the characters, specifically how forgettable they were. To take one of those characters and focus a show around them seems doomed from a first glance, but looking deeper, this show has some very interesting and exciting components. The main source of that excitement is that the show is written by Tony Gilroy, the writer of the first four films in the *Bourne* series. Gilroy is a tried-and-true spy thriller writer, and I have faith in him to lean into and explore more

of the moral ambiguity of the Rebellion, which is possibly the most interesting part of *Rogue One*. This show has serious potential to be the tensest, edge-of-your-seat piece of content to come out of the Star Wars universe.



#3 - Obi-Wan Kenobi

Obi-Wan Kenobi is a live-action series set a decade after the battle on Mustafar between Obi-Wan and his former padawan Anakin as Obi-Wan attempts to remain hidden from the Empire. The big announcement about this show during the Investor Day Stream was that Ewan McGregor will be reprising his role as Obi-Wan and, even more surprisingly, Hayden Christensen (the actor for Anakin Skywalker) will be returning to play Darth Vader in this show. It was even teased that there would be a duel between Vader and Obi-Wan at some point. Kenobi is one of the best characters in Star Wars, so any content centered around him is of course going to get me excited. I

do have some concerns about the fact that Darth Vader will be appearing and how that might mess with the larger timeline, but other than that, this show is absolutely the exception to my grievance with the time period of *The Bad Batch*.



#2 - Ahsoka

Ahsoka is a live-action series set during the time period of the *Mandalorian* that will focus on Anakin Skywalker's former padawan, Ahsoka Tano. Rosario Dawson will be reprising her role from season two of *The Mandalorian* as Ahsoka. When we saw Ahsoka in Chapter Thirteen of *The Mandalorian*, there was a big name-drop moment where we learned that she was searching for Grand Admiral Thrawn, and I pretty much lost my cool. Grand Admiral Thrawn was the main villain of *Star Wars: Rebels*, which means that this show will likely be the long-awaited *Rebels* sequel. *Rebels* is my favorite piece of content to ever come out of Star Wars, and its cliffhanger ending

left so much to be explored. When you couple that with the fact that Ahsoka is already a fantastic character who fans have seen grow so much since her first appearance in season one of The Clone Wars, it makes me more than excited for the show's release in 2022.



#1- The Acolyte

The Acolyte is a dark-side focused mystery show set in the final days of The High Republic. For those who don't know, The High Republic is set around two centuries before The Phantom Menace, and is the period in which the Jedi were at their strongest and most populous. With my biggest complaint about the majority of the shows announced on this list being the fact that they aren't doing anything we haven't seen before, this show that seems to be completely uncharted territory has me hooked. A show that focuses on a time period and location we've never seen in Star Wars? Check. A show focused on the unexplored dark side of Star Wars? Check. A mystery combined with those two prior elements? Check. This show has room to make mistakes, but it has infinitely more room to expand



the universe and take us somewhere in Star Wars that we've never been before. For that reason it is absolutely the most compelling and interesting announcement made for Star Wars yet.

Closing out, all of this is obviously just my opinion and we're almost definitely going to disagree - that's the fun part! I believe that what makes Star Wars so great is that, at its core, it has something for everyone. While my preference may be that we move away from the characters and stories we've already seen, I by no means want to discredit the opinion of someone who is more excited for a fun, new adventure between two classic droids than they are about unfamiliar shows with characters that they may not like. We all like different things and I appreciate that Disney is giving every kind of fan something to look forward to - it only makes me more excited about the future of Star Wars as a whole.



Best Family Animated Movies

By Jaden Kirshner

Even as an 18-year-old, I still find myself loving G and PG-rated animated movies because they evoke a sense of nostalgia while also teaching valuable life lessons. Although their target audience is younger viewers, I want to recommend four animated films that will entertain and move you no matter your age.

KUNG FU PANDA (2008)

Plot: Po (Jack Black) the panda is the clumsy son of a noodle shop owner, but he aspires to become a kung fu master in his hometown Valley of Peace. When Master Oogway envisions Po as the Dragon Warrior, Po becomes the only hope of protecting the Valley from the impending attack of Tai Lung (Ian McShane) the snow leopard.

Kung Fu Panda is an iconic film that follows the story of a character realizing that through believing in himself and hard work, he can transform into the person he wants to become. What separates Kung Fu Panda from the rest of children and adult films with a similar premise are the seemingly unbeatable obstacles stacked up against Po. A couple of minutes into the film, he is immediately put into a high-pressure situation by being selected as the Dragon Warrior. Consequently, all the other characters try to sabotage him because they don't think he is worthy. Meanwhile, his father is also telling him to quit pursuing his kung fu dream and continue working in the family business of noodle-making instead. Finally, to raise the stakes to the max, the evil Tai Lung has just escaped prison and is threatening to destroy the Valley of Peace. The viewer is led to empathize with Po because although he was given the opportunity of his dreams, it seems like Po's only option is to give up because of the conflicts with friends, family, and the antagonist. This is why Po's character development into the Dragon Warrior is so cathartic and inspiring. The beautiful message combined with the visually astounding animation makes Kung Fu Panda one of the most memorable children's animations ever produced.



TOY STORY FRANCHISE

Plot: The Toy Story Franchise is a 4 part franchise about the adventures of toys that pretend to be lifeless in front of humans, but are actually living.

As part of my senior year Independent Study, I explored the financial aspects of Toy Story 3. In my analysis, I learned how Toy Story makes billions of dollars in industries other than movies (ie. merchandise, books, video games, etc). Learning this led me to conclude that Toy Story is a perfect franchise in every sense. Narratively, the Toy Story films resonate with all age groups because of their interesting characters and plotlines; the relationship between Woody (Tom Hanks) and Buzz (Tim Allen) is one of the most captivating to watch develop in film history. Technologically, Toy Story 1 completely revolutionized computer-generated animation. Financially, the franchise is worth \$30+ billion and has made immense sums of money across various industries and countries. Thus, Toy Story not only sparks your imagination as a child, but it also becomes even more incredible as you grow older and learn more about the impact it has had on the film industry as a whole. By putting out four high-quality movies, the creators of the Toy Story films have consistently proven that these films deserve to be the cultural icons they have become.



PADDINGTON 2

Plot: After Paddington (Ben Whishaw) the bear is framed for stealing an antique book, he is sent to prison for 10 years. While his family, The Browns, searches for the real thief, Paddington tries to use his positivity to transform the prison.

Paddington 2 demonstrates what happens when a visionary director, talented artists, and a great cast of actors come together to produce a film that blends animated and real-life elements. This film is both an incredible feat of technology and creativity. Paddington, who is an

animated bear, interacts so flawlessly with the actors and his surroundings that at times you question if Paddington is actually animated. For instance, in the opening scene, Paddington is drowning in a river. At first glance, we might not realize anything too complex about the shot, but the artists behind this shot had to make real water, computer-generated imagery (CGI) of water, and a CGI character all interact with each other. The artists also contributed to making Paddington the loveable character he is by giving him beady eyes, soft-looking fur, and a clumsy sense of movement. The story is perfect for a family movie night because Paddington's positivity and mini life lessons are as inspiring to the audience as they are to the supporting characters. A rare example of the sequel being better than the original, Paddington 2 is unBEARably fun.

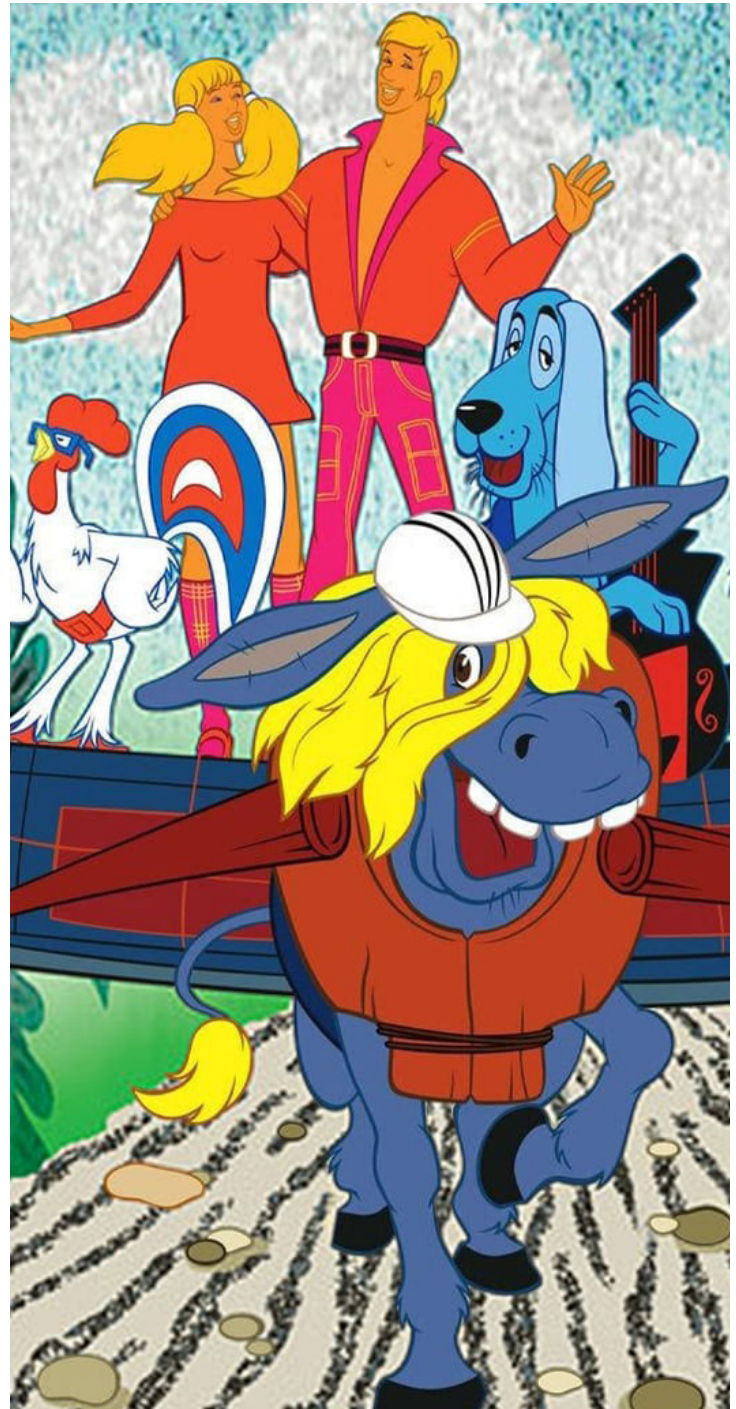


BREMEN'S TOWN MUSICIANS (1969)

Plot: A band of traveling musicians (consisting of a human, dog, cat, rooster, and donkey) anger the king of a local town after a catastrophic performance. However, when the human falls in love with the king's daughter, he and his band try to win her back.

Review: Bremen's Town Musicians (BTM) is one of the films that made me fall in love with Russian animation, a genre I still hold extremely close to my heart. Like most Russian animations, the story is simple; it's the tale of forbidden love between a traveling musician and a princess.

However, BTM demonstrates that how you tell a story is just as important as the story itself. BTM has no dialogue at all and instead uses songs, lyrics, and music to evoke the characters' thoughts, motivations, and deepest emotions. What separates the use of music in this film from an American musical is how it never feels like the characters just arbitrarily break into a song and dance number; every note and lyric feels essential to the tone and plot. Additionally, the songs explore themes related to friendship, love, and hope in ways that are interesting for both a younger and older audience. Even if you do not speak Russian, find the two 20 minute films on youtube, turn on the subtitles, and transport yourself to a fairytale land like no other.



TOM CRUISE RANT

By Alison Markman

Hollywood actor Tom Cruise made headlines in early December for flying into a rage after spotting two crew members violating distancing measures on the set of *Mission Impossible: 7*. A leaked recording of Cruise publicly scolding two workers circulated in early December. The recording reveals Cruise shouting at members of the crew, warning "If I see you do it again, you're f---ing gone. And if anyone in this crew does it, that's it."

When signing onto the 7th installment of the beloved *Mission Impossible* franchise, Cruise made it his aim to set an example for the film industry and show that projects could continue safely with the proper provisions. In the leaked clip, Cruise tells his crew that he wanted the *Mission Impossible: 7* production to be the "gold standard" for Hollywood. He went on to say that he had been in dialogue with numerous studios, producers, and insurance companies who were all "looking at us and using us to make their movies." (CNN). Cruise even went as far as paying \$500,000 for a cruise ship where the cast and crew could live in isolation during filming. He maintained that his biggest concern for the film was keeping strict safety precautions. Cruise's rant garnered public attention; however, many perceived the event differently. Some criticized Cruise for his pontification, while others agreed with his words which seemed to express a grasp for the gravity of the global pandemic. "You can tell it to the people that are losing their homes because our industry is shut down," Cruise said. The *New York Times* reported that the actor wears a mask on the set and has been personally enforcing COVID-19 protocols in efforts to prevent further delays in shooting (NYT). Cruise's rant comes after one interruption in filming due to increased COVID-19 cases amongst crew members, which explains Cruise's frustration with his peers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a colossal impact on the film industry. Across the world, cinemas and movie theaters have been closed, festivals have been canceled and film releases have been postponed or even canceled completely. Due to theater closures, the global box office has dropped by billions of dollars (NPR). Many large film franchises scheduled for release have been postponed/canceled, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars in the industry. Cruise, aware of the film industry's struggles, believed that making *Mission Impossible: 7* would secure jobs for those in a dying industry. "We are creating thousands of jobs," he stated in his rant (NPR). *Mission Impossible* was one of the only movies cleared to resume filming throughout the pandemic.

Though Cruise's means may have been aggressive, the actor shed light upon the larger issues of COVID-19.

Millions of workers are out of jobs while COVID cases continue to rise. The irresponsibility of some is costing the lives of others, and Cruise's rant is the reminder we needed to take this pandemic seriously.

Tom Cruise on the set of *MI:7*



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