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EDITORS' NOTE

To the Horace Mann Community,

Over the past several months, Cinemann writers, editors, and designers have been hard at work to deliver this spring issue. This issue features reviews of international films, explorations of the movie industry, film analysis, and so much more. We hope you enjoy it!

Sincerely,

The Cinemann Editors in Chief



<https://abc.com/show/d72316c9-c889-491b-bb3c-a48266fb326d/about-the-show>

Need a Laugh? Feeling Down? You Can Always Count on *Modern Family*

By Kate Komaroff

There are very few shows I can count on to consistently cheer me up when I am in a bad mood: *Modern Family* is one of them. This witty 30-minute comedy follows three related families. Separated by their backstories and personalities, the Pritchett-Dunphy clan is composed of a cultural blend of characters whose unique attributes add to the comedic nature of the show. Whether mispronouncing words or engaging in physical comedy routines, *Modern Family* is guaranteed to relieve the stresses of our everyday lives.

One of the main ways that *Modern Family* broaches this task is by depicting relatable characters confronting real-life situations but with comedic twists like double entendres and witty remarks. The plots of each episode are independent from one another, allowing the viewer to watch at any point in the series. The difficult subjects the writers attempt to conquer with a humorous approach include parenting, peer pressure, academics, cultural differences, sibling rivalry, and generational gaps. In one scene, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, originally from Columbia, is trying to place a delivery for an order of baby cheeses. Due to her thick Colombian accent, the person taking the order thinks she says she wants baby Jesus! This scene is a pertinent example of the slapstick comedy used in the show to tackle subjects like cultural barriers.

Another way the show succeeds in creating a light-hearted, watchable experience is through the “mockumentary” style it employs. By having interview-like segments in which the characters break the fourth wall, the viewer is “in on” the joke. Whether the actors make discreet faces at the camera or subtly roll their eyes, they effortlessly connect with the audience.

There is also a sense of comfort and belonging that comes with watching a show repeatedly. I often find myself relating to the character Alex Dunphy. Alex is a teenage girl who feels the enormous academic pressure of being a dedicated and driven student yet never wants to admit that the stress impacts her. We watch throughout several seasons as Alex learns to be vulnerable and that her insecurities do not detract from her intellectual abilities. By admitting that school can be very demanding and acknowledging her need to be perfect, Alex voices many concerns that other teens feel.

By injecting current humor and making witty comments that reflect the changes we face today, *Modern Family* delivers fictional scenarios that ring true for many people. The show's unique dialogue and style have helped create an enduring legacy as a brilliant comedy that will remain a classic for years to come.



<https://scriptslab.com/tv-show/modern-family-season-four-ratings-2658/>



<https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-5610335>

***Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is my Favorite Show... Here's Why It Should Be Yours Too**

By Aanya Gupta

What are your favorite movie genres? Comedy? Drama? Action? Detective Fiction? What if I told you that *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* encompasses all these genres? *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is an eight-season series that follows the lives of the detectives in the NYPD's 99th Precinct, starring Andy Samberg as Jake Peralta, Stephanie Beatriz as Rosa Diaz, Terry Crews as Terry Jeffords, Melissa Fumero as Amy Santiago, Joe Lo Truglio as Charles Boyle, Chelsea Peretti as Gina Linetti, and Andre Braugher as Raymond Holt. It's my all-time favorite show, and here's why it should be yours too.

There are various shows that viewers find extremely interesting, that is, until they realize that each episode follows the same predictable pattern, causing the series to become monotonous and boring. After viewers realize and notice that the show is also extremely long, they feel discouraged from finishing it. Hence, they move on to watching another, more interesting one. A perfect example of this pattern is *Criminal Minds*, which follows the work of a group of detectives in the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit. I started watching the show from Season 3 (because those of you who've watched it know the OG group only starts there), and at first, I loved it. Every time I turned on the TV, I would watch *Criminal Minds*. However, by Season 6/7 I realized that each episode was the same; the team took on a new case, solved it, and went home. After coming to this realization, the show quickly became really, really tiresome. I simply couldn't make it past season 7, let alone to season 15.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine is nothing like that. Most of the episodes are "stand-alones," and are each unique. Hence, it's impossible to predict what will happen in any given episode (in the best way possible). As a result, viewers can re-watch the series countless times without getting bored (I have rewatched it six times). I like that the show doesn't just focus on the detectives' work, their relationships with one another, and who they are as people. Every character is extremely funny (I have laughed out loud at least once in every episode I have watched), personable, and real. When I say "real," I don't mean that they're actually real because they're still just fictional characters. However, each character is easily relatable, regardless of life experiences. For example, one character, Jake, faced the common challenge of picking between two things he loves when he had to pick between a vanilla or habanero frosting for his wedding cake (he's a MAJOR foodie)! In that way, the show has a perfect balance of light-hearted comedy and heart-to-heart or profound moments (both of which are also sometimes intertwined).

For all these reasons, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* has become my go-to com-

fort show, and it was a shame that Netflix removed it from its catalog for some time. Now that it is back (or at least part of it), I'm definitely planning on re-watching it for a seventh time. Having read this far, it would be a shame if you didn't watch (or re-watch) it, too!



<https://www.ignite.com/shows/brooklyn-nine-nine/10329981/>



The Top 3 Disney Princess Movies of All Time...

By Aanya Gupta

7.5

In **THIRD** place...
Mulan!

I have a question for YOU: In your eyes, who are the greats? What are some classics? You might have thought of *The Beatles*, *Albert Einstein*, or even *Pride and Prejudice*. Why did you pick who/what you did? What is so special about these people/items that make them “greats” or “classics?” Here’s the answer: they never get old. Each “great” or “classic” has a long-lasting appeal and has the power to influence the modern world no matter when they lived/were created. In addition to who or what you thought of, another set of examples that should be added to this list are the 11 original Disney princess movies.

Don’t get me wrong, all of the Disney princess movies are amazing. However, certain ones stick out above the rest. Here are the top 3 Disney princess movies of all time!

Mulan does a great job of seamlessly taking the viewer through a rollercoaster of emotions in the most enjoyable way possible. It is rare to find a movie that easily transitions from a heart-breaking scene to a funny one, but *Mulan* accomplishes this feat. For example, one minute, we see Mulan’s father yelling at her, and the next, we see her grandmother using a “magical” cricket to guide her across a busy road while her eyes are closed. The emotional aspect of the movie is also noteworthy. However, the timing of each scene and the plot could have been better. What I mean by that is that the directors could’ve lengthened some scenes that needed to be explained more, and in turn, they also could’ve chopped down on some unnecessarily long scenes. Even so, it’s still an amazing movie!



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In **SECOND** place...
Princess and the Frog!

Princess and the Frog is funny, imaginative, thought-provoking, and sometimes tear-jerking (in the best way possible). Every song in this movie is so amazing that I could sing them in karaoke 100 times without wanting to stop. Another positive aspect of this movie is that each character is unique and authentic; they are all so relatable and magical simultaneously, which means that every viewer can identify with some part of each character. In my opinion, the plot has no flaws (which is **EXTREMELY** rare), and every scene is riveting. Not to mention, the mix of magic and realism is genius and well thought-out. Overall, I think you can tell that this movie is, simply put, a fantastic piece of work and a must-watch for people of all ages.

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In **FIRST** place...
Tangled!

Tangled is hilarious, heartwarming, charming, powerful, and a devilishly clever piece of art. The animation is absolutely spectacular, and the details in each scene are so intricate, which further adds to the overall beauty of the movie. I mean, just look at the poster! Honestly, every part of this movie is perfect: the plot, characters, songs, scenes, and more. However, if I had to choose, I would say my favorite aspect of *Tangled* is the characters and their development throughout the movie; each character is raw, relatable, and authentic. Plus, Flynn Rider is the best Disney prince (and that's not up for debate). I've watched *Tangled* over eight times, and it wows me each time I re-watch it. If any movie deserves the title of being a "classic," it's *Tangled*, being the brilliant movie that it is.



<https://www.businessinsider.com/nailed-it-netflix-baking-fails-photos-2018-3>



What's So SWEET About Baking Shows?

By Aanya Gupta

Think about the most scrumptious dessert you've ever tasted. Now, imagine re-creating it yourself. Sounds hard, right? What if I told you there was a way to experience the same satisfaction you would feel when baking (and eating) your own creation without actually making anything? The answer: Baking shows!

Critics say that entertainment (including, but not limited to, songs, shows, and movies) should be relatable to their viewers. Baking shows are unique in the sense that they're relatable in an indirect way. People who watch these shows have a range of baking experiences, from professional chefs to those who've never used a whisk. It's easy to understand how people who regularly bake can relate to the contestants on these shows. However, I am more interested in why those who don't bake can relate to these shows.

A concept called multimodal mental imagery answers this question: visual and auditory imagery activates our perception of taste and flavor, allowing us to vicariously eat through what is presented on our TVs without the extra time, effort, and money spent. Rather than crying

over a burnt tart that took hours, viewers can indulge in a contestant's [literally] flaming baked alaska.

Apart from being so popular, baking shows are also extremely diverse in their content and the emotions they evoke. Just like their viewers, these shows include contestants with vastly different experiences in the kitchen, from professional chefs to those who have never cooked a day in their lives (or have tried and failed miserably). One of my favorite baking shows, *Nailed It!*, is actually notoriously famous for its hilarious baking fails. In contrast, *Zumbo's Just Desserts* features a high-stakes, high-pressure baking environment where contestants strive to achieve perfection.

Baking shows can also elicit different emotions in viewers; viewers might anxiously watch their favorite contestants try to win or laugh their heads off. So, depending on how you're feeling—or how you want to feel—there's a show for everyone! Plus, if you can't bake, watching baking shows might not only provide you with the technical information to improve your skills but also the motivation to do so!

WHY ANYONE BUT YOU WAS A HUGE FLOP

By Aanya Gupta

Have you ever watched something and thought, “This movie has got to be the unfunniest thing I have ever seen,” or “Wow, I wish I could get back the time that I wasted watching this?” That was my reaction to Will Gluck’s newly released romantic comedy *Anyone but You*.

The movie begins with a meet-cute between the two main characters; Bea (Sydney Sweeney) enters a coffee shop and asks the barista if she can use their bathroom. After the barista tells her it’s for paying customers only, Ben (Glen Powell), a nearby customer at the front of the order line, pretends that Bea is his wife. The two talk for around 30 seconds (apparently enough time to decide they felt a real connection), then spend the night at Ben’s place. Now, I’m all for an in media res opening, but in this case, there should have been a few “set-the-stage” scenes. With more context, the meet-cute wouldn’t have been so sudden and would have had gravity to it (since we later find out that this scene is really, really important). I will admit that I usually love meet-cutes, even the cheesy ones, but after watching this movie for a couple more minutes, I quickly realized that this encounter was more of a meet-weird. Sydney and Powell had no on-screen chemistry together (though I can’t say the same for their off-screen connection), and it was painfully obvious.

The next day, Bea sneaks out of Ben’s apartment (for some unknown reason), and Ben, who thought they had a connection, is saddened to find her gone when he wakes up. Halfway through Bea’s walk home, she realizes she really likes Ben and heads back. However, when she gets to Ben’s door, she overhears him bad-mouthing her to his roommate as a defensive mechanism because he liked her, and she ghosted him. This leads to a huge misunderstanding between the two, and they don’t reconnect until six months later when Bea’s sister, Halle, becomes engaged and invites the two to her wedding in Sydney. Somehow, they are still holding a grudge against each other. It just doesn’t make logical sense that Ben and Bea would still be mad at each other six months later after knowing each other for, at maximum, a couple of hours. The misunderstanding causing the grudge could have been cleared up with a 30-second conversation, but instead, it was stretched out for 1 hour and 44 minutes.

I’ll repeat: the directors should have lengthened the early scenes between Ben and Bea because they were so important



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to the rest of the movie. If they had, the viewers would have been more invested in the characters and their relationship.

Somehow, the rest of the movie just gets cringier. It’s as if someone asked the directors, “How many romance tropes do you want in this movie?” and the directors responded with “Yes.” However, despite all that being said, it’s not as if I disliked the entire movie. Some of the jokes were actually pretty funny, but the timing and delivery were just not the best. But if you’re ever having trouble falling asleep, watch this movie, and you’ll be out like a light!





Why **Suits**

Is The Best Binge Watch Show

By Nicole Au

What is the first image that pops into your head when someone mentions the show *Suits*? I would guess that it is probably Meghan Markle. While this is a valid reason to start watching this show, many other aspects of this series go beyond just her role. *Suits* has broken several streaming records, becoming Netflix's most-watched series over one week and reaching Nielsen's Top 10 most streamed acquired shows in 2023. So what makes this show so special that it became a binge-watching favorite in just one summer?

While many shows center around criminal law and criminal justice, there are very few that spotlight corporate law. *Suits* allows the audience to see how corporate law firms operate through an incredibly fascinating dramatization lens. Furthermore, I have watched many law movies and shows, but many involve taking cases to court because that appeals to viewers the most. However, this show is more in touch with reality because there are more cases where the lawyers get clients to settle instead of taking that case to court. Other shows use court scenes, which are suspenseful and action-packed, to excite and hook viewers. However, *Suits* can relay those feelings of excitement solely through their well-written scripts and acting. For example, in episode 12, season five, when secretary Donna Paulsen (Sarah Rafferty) has a flashback to her childhood, the pacing is slow, and the dialogue is simple but meaningful, which makes the scene all the more powerful.

Normally, when I watch shows centered around lawyers, I find myself uninterested due to the legal terms I can't understand. However, this show taught me parts of the legal system I didn't know existed without mansplaining every action the characters make. There is a balance between giving me enough information to pleasantly watch the show while also being able to learn about the legal system on my own. For example, in episode seven, Season One, when the firm is witnessing a mock trial, the show does a good job of providing a legal term (such as defamation) and then explaining more in-depth what the term means in the context of the scene (negatively impacting the reputation of someone).

Suits also does a fantastic job incorporating sub-storylines to enhance characters and their development in the show. Budding romances and upsetting past experiences allow the audience to understand why a character acts a certain way. In later seasons, the show does an exemplary job of using flashbacks to add depth and dimension to each of the core characters, especially two prominent lawyers, Louis Litt and Harvey Specter. We can see how Louis' (Rick

Hoffman) experience of being tormented by his classmates in his youth causes him to work extremely hard and also why he is upset when he doesn't get validation for his efforts. One of my favorite backstories is Harvey's (Gabriel Macht) because the show explains how Harvey's witnessing his mom cheating on his dad caused him to have severe attachment issues. The show also utilizes therapy to further portray how the characters feel emotionally. Through therapy, we see some of the core characters open up about their past trauma and how talking about it impacts their character development.

Despite the many male actors in the cast, this show highlights the role of females in the legal world through the female characters Jessica (Gina Torres), Rachel (Meghan Markle), and Donna. While many shows include female characters, this show addresses the hardships of female lawyers, paralegals, secretaries, and other employees. Rachel learns to be more assertive when getting something done and doesn't let herself be pushed around by clients or other lawyers. It was refreshing to see the show include Jessica blatantly talking about her status as managing partner under constant attack and her struggles as a woman to reach such a level of authority. I find her hardships relatable in some aspects. I admire how a popular show has addressed a growing issue that needs more recognition. Despite the actions taken towards equal treatment for both males and females currently, there is still a prejudice against women in the workplace, and this show flawlessly executes those issues.

Suits has everything that a well-written series should have. There are the perfect number of unexpected plot twists and a handful of incredibly satisfying scenes, such as when Harvey destroys an opposing lawyer in open court with incriminating evidence. If I were asked to identify this show's genre, I would not be able to come to a definitive answer. While the overarching genre is drama, romance is also built into the plot. There are also many witty jokes and friendly banter between the cast, which keeps the show lighthearted and funny even though it's about corporate law, a topic that doesn't interest everyone. Because of this, I was constantly entertained throughout each episode, even the ones that weren't as action-packed and eventful. Overall, this show transcends the criteria of a great film through its accessible dialogue, well-developed characters, and diverse storylines. Even if you just watch one episode, I assure you that you will be hooked on watching the rest of the show.



<https://people.com/Suits-cast-where-are-they-now-7511475>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/web-series/Suits-ted-lasso-most-viewed-streaming-shows-of-2023-101706580722587.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/aug/17/Suits-netflix-america-most-watched-summer-show>

My Must Watch Rom-Com List (Ranked)

By Nicole Au

I am a sucker when it comes to rom-coms. I love their uniqueness, complexity, and detailed plots - they never get boring. Even though these are the rom-coms on my "must-watch list," writing this list was not easy, and there are tons of other films that I would 100% recommend you watch. After reading this, I hope you will watch at least one of these five incredible movies.

CRAZY RICH ASIANS

This movie did not disappoint when it chose to use the word "Crazy Rich" in the title. Rachel Chu (Constance Wu) is an economics professor at New York University who was raised in the middle class by her single mother in America. She meets Nick Young (Henry Golding), who invites her to his best friend's wedding in Singapore. Rachel agrees to attend, but when they arrive, she is told that Nick comes from an extremely wealthy family. Throughout her stay in Singapore, Rachel must face the wrath of jealous, stuck-up socialites and Nick's disapproving mother.

The set design for specific scenes in this film is gorgeous, and these families' true wealth is portrayed. I loved the intricate architecture and interior design of Nick's mom's mansion. My eyes were drawn to the abundance of teal, green, and gold colors in the house as well as the stunning Singaporean art that adorned every inch of the mansion. When Rachel and Nick attended Nick's best friend's wedding, I was taken aback by how extravagant the wedding was: the flourishing greenery, the beautifully lit Asian lanterns, and the majestic live singing of "Can't Help Falling In Love." Even more decadent was the flowing water shown as the bride walked down the aisle in the most breathtaking dress I have ever seen. In addition to how well-executed this film was, it was also a beautiful representation of Asian-American culture. We see Rachel's struggle for approval within Nick's family because she comes from a different background than Nick's. This movie voices the struggles of seeking approval and validation from others,

especially within the Asian community, because oftentimes, people do not feel "Asian enough" for certain communities, something that I can personally relate to. Despite having seen a decent number of movies, it was invigorating to watch a film that could successfully capture Asian culture.



13 going on 30

I cannot even count how many times I have watched this movie. The film *13 Going on 30* stars a teen girl named Jenna Rink (Jennifer Garner) who, sick of being unpopular at her high school, wishes to be an adult. Her wish is granted, and Jenna wakes up the next morning as if she were herself, but 17 years in the future. She learns to navigate holding down a job at one of her favorite magazine companies while also learning about the person she grew up to be.

This film does a fantastic job portraying the moral of enjoying your childhood by incorporating specific scenes that allow Jenna (Jennifer Garner) to express her child-like personality and remind the audience that she is still a 13-year-old girl despite looking 30. For example, they have infamous scenes, such as when Jenna starts dancing to Thriller at a business event to liven up the party. They also slip in subtle aspects like how Jenna behaves, somewhat confused and clueless all the time with where she is and what she is doing, a typical behavior that a 13-year-old would exhibit. This film is perfectly balanced, portraying Jenna's life as a working adult and incorporating her budding romance with Matt Flamhaff (Mark Ruffalo), her childhood best friend.

Each scene is filled with entertaining lines of dialogue, and I never felt bored for one second during this movie. The most crucial aspect of this film was the ending because it helped me realize how important it is to live in the moment and appreciate those around you. As fun as growing up sounds, kids should enjoy their time as teens because everything has its timeline.



loveactually

This is my all-time favorite Christmas movie (Elf does not come close to this film). *Love Actually* is a film that combines nine stories that center around the theme of love. The movie focuses on relationships between: a manager and a rock and roll singer; the prime minister of Britain and a young junior staffer; a best friend who is in love with his best friend's wife; a graphic designer whose brother prevents her from having intimate relationships; and a 10-year-old British boy who falls for his American classmate.

The difference between this romance movie and others is it features various plots, which, at the end, are all revealed to be intertwined. Each plot in this movie is incredibly well written, and I enjoyed their complexity. Some storylines had happy classic movie endings, and others had more elaborate endings, such as when a wife chooses to stay with her husband despite his falling in love with another woman. The cinematic choices in this film are powerful because there are so many scenes where the directors allow the actors to use solely their facial expressions to portray their feelings without speaking. There is a balance between spoken and unspoken moments, and

she's all that

Despite being quite a cliché movie, this film was surprisingly very entertaining. This film is about picture-perfect high schooler Zach Siler (Freddie Prinze Jr.), whose girlfriend, Taylor (Jodi Lyn O'Keefe), dumps him for a reality TV star she met during spring break. To ease his pain and convince Zach that Taylor can be easily replaced, he bets with his friend Dean (Paul Walker) to turn awkward art student Laney Boggs (Rachael Leigh Cook) into prom queen in six weeks. This cute and quirky film is lighthearted and has unexpected elements (such as Taylor's boyfriend breaking into an extremely embarrassing dance at a party), creating an engaging watching experience.

Although some scenes warranted an eyebrow raise, the film amazingly captures the duality between Zach and Laney's personality types. Even though some critics would disagree with me, I believe that in this movie, Zach didn't change who Laney was but instead helped her grow and become a better version of herself, which is exactly what a healthy relationship looks like. He teaches her to go outside her comfort zone and see past the evils of the world. Laney learns to become more sociable and outgoing and can also find newfound genuine happiness in her high school life. Conversely, Laney also

HOW TO LOSE A GUY IN 10 DAYS

This movie was light yet entertaining, and I found the originality of the plot to be super funny and even relatable in some aspects. Andie Anderson (Kate Hudson), an advice writer for a magazine, wants to do an article on how to get a guy to leave you in 10 days (or quicker). Ben Barry (Matthew McConaughey), an advertising executive, bets a client that he can make a woman fall in love with him in 10 days. When Andie and Ben cross paths, things get interesting because neither Andie nor Ben want to reveal their true intentions. Despite their hidden motives, they slowly start falling for each other.

Many teens have experienced what it's like to drive a crush away, and this movie plays on those relatable experiences. Viewers can understand why Ben would get annoyed at some of the things Andie does in an attempt to get him to break up with her, such as making him miss the final shot at a Knicks game to get her a soda. These relatable moments allow viewers to imagine themselves in either one of the character's shoes and compare how they would feel, making it a lively

viewing experience. What I enjoyed the most about this film is the underlying competition between Ben and Andie. I kept asking myself, "Is he going to get fed up and break up with her, or will he stay with her?" I continued to wonder who was going to give in first. Every time Andie did something that would have personally sent me over the edge, I watched in suspense to see if this would be the final straw for Ben.



exposes Zack to new experiences, such as participating in an abstract drama show. This movie emphasizes that teens should embrace their individual personalities and who they are while trying to learn new things about themselves. Laney and Zack bring out the best in each other rather than changing who they are to please the other. This is a central theme in a society that emphasizes the norm of conforming to a standard to fit in and be liked.

The opposite version of this movie called *He's All That*, came out in 2021, and it became infamous on TikTok for starring Addison Rae, a TikTok creator with little to no acting experience. I beg you never to watch that movie, as it did not do the original film justice. The dialogue is extremely cringy, and the cinematography is atrocious (I can see the greenscreen when I watch the movie). Please do not associate the wonderful film *She's All That* with the disappointing film *He's All That*.



viewing experience. What I enjoyed the most about this film is the underlying competition between Ben and Andie. I kept asking myself, "Is he going to get fed up and break up with her, or will he stay with her?" I continued to wonder who was going to give in first. Every time Andie did something that would have personally sent me over the edge, I watched in suspense to see if this would be the final straw for Ben.





The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes

Why this film can't hold a candle to the originals

By Nicole Au

“Do you hear that, boy? It's the sound of snow...falling. of snow...falling.”

“Do you hear that, boy? It's the sound of snow...falling.” That line from *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2023) had every Hunger Games fan, including me, in a chokehold. However, this movie was a huge disappointment, and I would not recommend watching it if you want to preserve the perfect image you have of *The Hunger Games* series.

The Hunger Games is a series that takes place in a dystopian nation called Panem, where the people are broken up into 12 districts. After a failed rebellion from the districts against Panem's dictatorship, the government created the punishment known as *The Hunger Games*. Every year, one female and one male tribute are chosen from each district to fight to the death in an arena. The film *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is the prequel to the much-adored film series *The Hunger Games*, except this film focuses on the rise of the dictator of Panem, Coriolanus Snow (Tom Blyth). Viewers are taken back to when Coriolanus was a student attending the Academy in the Capitol. The Capitol is a metropolis where the nation's richest and most high-class socialites live and where the government of Panem is located. Coriolanus is tasked with mentoring Lucy Gray Baird (Rachel Zegler), the girl chosen from District 12 to compete in the 10th annual Hunger Games. As they work together to ensure Lucy's survival, they share one thing in common: they will both do anything to survive.

Going into this movie, I was eager to see the actual Hunger Games play out in the arena. I wanted to compare the games in this movie to the original Hunger Games movie with Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence). However, I was sadly disappointed after watching this film— at two hours and thirty-seven minutes long. However, the actual portrayal of the games was relatively short. The movie focuses mostly on developing Coriolanus and Lucy's relationship while preparing for and after the games when Lucy wins. The actual fighting in the arena is less emphasized than in the previous films. Because this film is supposed to be a prequel to the original Hunger Games, the games aren't as developed as in the original films. For example, the arena in the prequel is smaller and doesn't have as many hiding places, while in the original films, *The Hunger Games* take place in a huge forest with many trees and caves. That said, I still wish they dragged the games out and added more action in the arena. Even though the idea of fighting to the death is horrible, that is what this movie franchise has been centered around. It would have been better for them to expand on how these games became such a huge hit. The games add so much suspense to *The Hunger Games* films, and even though there

was some suspense in *Songbirds & Snakes*, it wasn't as exhilarating as the previous films.

Furthermore, the movie's overall pacing is awkward, and the development of the characters suffered the most. In this movie, fans were most excited to see Coriolanus' malicious character arc and see him turn into the character that we all know (and hate) in the current Hunger Games movies. However, there isn't much character development, and his switch to “evil” is quite sudden. For example, he never expresses any remorse after killing one of the tributes in self-defense, even though it is the first time he's ever killed someone. Even though this would have been a beautiful creative choice to show him slowly becoming the sociopathic dictator that he is in the current films, there was no build-up to this in his character. I hoped to see Coriolanus' more innocent side before he became evil in this film, but sadly, my expectations were not met.

The acting in this movie is mediocre at best. However controversial my opinion might be, I hated Rachel Zegler's acting the most. Her delivery seemed forced, some of her “wittier” moments were hard to watch. I also didn't feel she did a great job making me believe she was in love with Coriolanus. This element was crucial to this film because the storyline heavily focuses on their relationship. I will admit, however, that her singing was super powerful, and I enjoyed listening to her songs.

While I wasn't a fan of the movie, it would have been ranked much higher had it not been for the ending. Towards the end of the film, Coriolanus and Lucy Gray escape into the woods after Coriolanus murders the mayor's daughter, Mayfair, who threatens to reveal the contents of a rebel meeting, which would get them both killed. While in the woods, Snow accidentally reveals to Lucy Gray that he sold out his friend, Sejanus Plinth (Josh Andrés Rivera), which leads her to slowly turn on him. As they seek refuge in a lakeside cabin, Coriolanus finds the gun he used to kill Mayfair and starts to think of ways to dispose of the evidence, so he can return to Panem. Lucy Gray slips away to collect Katniss's plants along the shore but instead bolts into the woods, causing Coriolanus to run after her and in turn, shoot her because she knows the truth about him. What I hated about this is that although we see Lucy Gray fall to the ground after being shot in the distance, we never actually see if she is dead or if she survived. Even though this was a creative choice by the directors, I don't see the relevance here, especially since the movie is a prequel. It left me leaving the movie theater with an unresolved feeling because I didn't know if she had died or not. Sometimes, leaving the audience with questions is a very powerful film tactic. However, in this case, it was pointless. It just left the audience, including me, antsy and unhappy with the ending.



Heartstopper and the Show's Portrayal of Mental Health and Eating Disorders

By Nicole Au

Heartstopper does an excellent job overcoming the stigma surrounding eating disorders as well as having an accurate representation of what eating disorders look like. In the film industry, eating disorders have most commonly been depicted as disorders that only affect Caucasian, thin, young, and wealthy women who strive to perfect their body images. While twice as prevalent in females, it should be noted that the representation of males with eating disorders has rarely shown on television. This lack of representation creates the misconception that males rarely suffer from eating disorders, which is not the case. Recently, movies and shows like *Heartstopper* have brought these lost stories to light.

Heartstopper is a coming-of-age show that centers around the two main characters, Nick (Kit Connor) and Charlie (Joe Locke), as they navigate their school lives while diving into an exciting new romantic relationship with one another. As we enter season two, we follow Charlie as he deals with stress from his schoolwork, family arguments, and, on top of all of it, finally trying to reconcile with the homophobic bullying from his schoolmates last year. As a result of his chaotic life, he starts depriving himself of food, as it is a way for Charlie to gain some control and stability. He feels that the only thing he can control is what he eats.

One thing that stood out to me was that the show didn't make Charlie's eating disorder the entire focus of the season, and this was an accurate representation of what eating disorders are like. Viewers witness how Charlie's disorder slowly creeps up on him to the point where it affects his daily life. Although Charlie's eating disorder is a heavy burden on him, he does his best to shield what he is going through from his friends. I think this is because it isn't always obvious when someone is fighting a mental health battle. People rarely exhibit signs because they don't want to burden the people they care about with their internal struggles. We see Charlie slowly avoid food while

also attempting not to draw attention to the fact that he isn't eating. He talks to his friends and pushes his food around to convince them he is okay. He also resorts to lying and saying, "I already ate," or "Oh, I'm not hungry," which is a realistic representation of how individuals with eating disorders tend to push the issue under the rug.

Later into the season, Charlie faints in the Louvre because he hasn't eaten anything. While this scene was significant in portraying how serious Charlie's eating disorder is, it saddens me to think that the filmmakers had to include such an extreme scene to get the point across. However, this was a powerful choice because it highlights how difficult it is to diagnose an eating disorder and how a lot of people don't consider a disorder in the realm of possibilities until something severe happens.

This show opens up conversations about eating disorders and, more specifically, male experiences with eating disorders. There is a stigma that surrounds eating disorders, and males tend to think that eating disorders are "for females" and that it is shameful to have a "female disorder." Especially in the media, males have been expected to look fit, muscular, and strong. In actuality, a growing 25% of people with eating disorders are male. Additionally, this show spreads awareness of the ways trauma, such as bullying, can manifest into severe issues and how hard it may be to diagnose those problems. People who are fighting a mental health battle don't always make it obvious, and this show accurately represents that internal struggle. The show avoids any glamorization, stereotypes, and clichés of eating disorders, which I deeply respect as it touches on an incredibly sensitive topic. The show-makers were successfully able to portray the banal reality of disordered eating with a male protagonist, which is a huge step in working towards healthy and diverse mental health representation in the film industry.

<https://www.hillbarntheatre.org/mean-girls/>

MEAN GIRLS

By Evie Steinman

When you're watching a YouTube or a sports game, you may see a trailer for *Mean Girls*, a film released on January 12, 2024. Before watching the trailer, you would think that this is a remake of the iconic film released in 2004, which starred Rachel McAdams, Lindsay Lohan, and Tina Fey, among others. The film follows a teenage girl new to a school getting wrapped in the superficial and mean world of the Plastics, a popular clique. However, what the trailer did not mention is that this *Mean Girls* remake was a hybrid of the Broadway musical and the original film. Before entering the theater, I had already heard about this and was slightly weirded out. I wondered how the producers would pull that off, which is why I suspected they tried to hide that major detail. However, when Cady (Angourie Rice), the protagonist of the film, belted into song in the first scene, most in the quarter-filled theater laughed. After the first song, I was extremely nervous for what was to come. To put it bluntly, the song was a mess. It was terrible, and so were the one hundred songs following. I don't have any other words to describe them other than "cringy." Many reviewers complained about the excessive number of songs, far worse than those on Broadway. Although the songs were a very large part of the film, I could not peg the *Mean Girls* remake as bad. The parts that weren't sung were actually pretty good, especially for the fact that it had to live up to one of the best comedies of the early 2000s. Tina Fey who not only co-wrote the script but played Ms. Norbury in both versions of the film, capitalized on iconic scenes from the original movie.

For example, "Stop trying to make fetch a thing" and "She doesn't even go here," which are fan favorite lines from the original *Mean Girls*. The actors were mostly well cast, especially René Rapp who played Regina George, not only in this 2024 version but also on Broadway from 2019 - 2020. She took on Rachel McAdam's role as Regina George executing the character's iconic lines perfectly. A reviewer described her as "the saving grace of the film." Another great casting decision was Jaquel Spivey as Damian Hubbard, the flamboyant best friend of Janice Sarkisian who describes him as "too gay to function." Rapp and Spivey's portrayals of their characters were my favorites, but that is not to say that the other actors did not have impressive performances. The problem was not necessarily with the acting, but rather the script and direction, leaving the three antagonists of the film with little personality.

Although the musical aspect of *Mean Girls* did not ruin the film for me, there was still something missing: Meanness. It is self-explanatory in the title that *Mean Girls* will be about mean girls, but in the 2024 remake, no girl is that mean. The Plastics are known for being the coolest, prettiest, cruelest clique in school. By making them too "nice" from the start, the entire premise of the film is ruined. As one reviewer described the problem: "Cady made a HUGE transformation during her time with the plastics, but it doesn't seem that way in this movie.. This *Mean Girls* fails to highlight their manipulative interactions with not only others but also each other. Many iconic lines were taken out of



Cady

<https://people.com/how-you-know-the-cast-of-the-2024-mean-girls-movie-musical-8420477>



Regina

<https://people.com/how-you-know-the-cast-of-the-2024-mean-girls-movie-musical-8420477>



Gretchen

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2024/01/12/mean-girls-2024-cast/72153759007/>



Karen

<https://stylecaster.com/entertainment/tv-movies/1696586/who-plays-karen-mean-girls-musical/>

the 2024 version, and the ones that were kept in were often toned down. For example, when Regina George is wearing sweatpants on a day when the plastics are not allowed Gretchen (Lacey Chabert) yells: "You can't sit with us!" In the 2024 version, Gretchen (Bebe Wood) asks Cady for her opinion on the matter, and Cady calmly tells Regina she's not allowed.

The original *Mean Girls* was released in 2004, exactly 20 years ago, at a time when cancel culture did not exist. Tina Fey not only changed aspects of the film but also brought *Mean Girls* into a new era with new technologies. Throughout *Mean Girls*, real-life influencers appear in the film, making Tik-Toks reacting to The Plastics' drop on the social pyramid, and their relationship with Cady. I didn't really know what to think about this addition, but I found it disturbing. While the original was less diverse, most of the main characters in the new *Mean Girls* are either Latina, South Asian, or Black. However, an added plotline to the movie is that Janice is a lesbian. In the original film, Janice is rumored to be a lesbian but she is actually Lebanese. It's an ongoing joke that in some ways, sets the premise for the entire movie.

Overall, I'd say that this *Mean Girls* remake was unnecessary. I didn't think it was the worst objectively, but comparing the film to the 2004 version, makes it look like trash. The fact that the Plastics couldn't be too mean because of the fear of offending anyone also annoyed me. Like I said earlier, real *Mean Girls* are rude and offensive, and they definitely do not care about

hurting anyone's feelings. If you're wondering whether or not to watch the remake of "*Mean Girls*," I'd recommend you pass. It's fun, but there are much better movies out there, including the 2004 version.



<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11762114/>



<https://people.com/how-you-know-the-cast-of-the-2024-mean-girls-movie-musical-8420477>



<https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/11/entertainment/el-camino-breaking-bad-movie-review/index>

How *El Camino* was the Perfect Follow-Up to *Breaking Bad*

By Charlie Friedland

After finishing *El Camino: A Breaking Bad Movie*, I was sad because I realized that no matter how hard I tried, I would never be able to engage with the cinematic masterpiece that is the *Breaking Bad* universe again. *El Camino*, the follow-up to the much-adored drama series *Breaking Bad*, came out in 2019, six years after the series' final season. The sequel gives every fan the satisfaction of getting to see what happened to the drug dealer named Jesse Pinkman after he sped away in his iconic red and black Chevrolet *El Camino*.

Finishing *Breaking Bad* felt surreal. After watching five seasons of one of the most creatively crafted and well-written shows ever, I had trouble believing it had ended. In the final scene, Jesse narrowly escapes death. Everybody wanted to know what happened to Jesse, and *El Camino* gave every *Breaking Bad* fan just that. I was worried before watching the movie that it wouldn't feel like the *Breaking Bad* I knew and loved, but to my delight, I was completely wrong. Adopting cinematic tricks and flashbacks to the time period of *Breaking Bad*, *El Camino* is a perfect extension of the incredible series.

Breaking Bad is known for its unpredictable plot twists, and *El Camino* was no exception. Walter White, the arrogant yet clever protagonist in the show, was often faced with sticky situations, but he always used his vast understanding of science to escape them. Similarly, at the climax of *El Camino*, Jesse lures the antagonists into a fight with him, eventually killing them and letting the rest of the crew go into an unbelievable and explosive fight scene. Jesse, like Walter, had one last trick up his sleeve, but characteristically, not a scientific one. Vince Gilligan, the creator of *Breaking Bad* and *El Camino*, perfectly preserved such aspects from the original show and incorporated them into the movie while reminding the fans that what they watched was not just another episode.

As *Breaking Bad*'s final season ended, every fan empathized with Jesse, who seemed to have suffered a worse fate. Due to his miraculous survival, watching him for an extra two hours felt like a treat. Aaron Paul continues his masterful performance by portraying Jesse's pain and struggles years after the series ends.

Was *El Camino* a necessary movie to make? Absolutely. It's impossible to watch *Breaking Bad* and not wonder what happens to Jesse after the show ends. Not only does *El Camino* provide an interesting and believable story about Jesse, but it also does so in a way that feels so "*Breaking Bad*-esque" that the movie becomes a must-watch for every *Breaking Bad* fan.



<https://dailynexus.com/2019-10-23/in-review-el-camino/>

O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?

By Kai Abbott

Our story begins in the vast tobacco fields of deep Mississippi during The Great Depression. Working in the hot southern sun, a band of prisoners - Ulysses (George Clooney), Delmar (Tim Blake Nelson), and Pete (John Turturro), break free from their chains. They sprint to the forest in their daring escape, chased by police and dogs. In search of their way home, the gang will face numerous hardships, such as seductive sirens, one-eyed *Monsters*, and even sorcerers who turn men into beasts. To the average person, this story would sound an awful lot like Homer's *The Odyssey*. However,



it is also the plot of Ethan and Joel Coen's cult classic film *O Brother Where Art Thou?*

O Brother Where Art Thou? was released on December 22, 2000, by the Coen brothers, arguably cinema's most legendary directorial sibling duo. Having released their Academy Award-winning film *Fargo* (1996) four years earlier and comedic classic *The Big Lebowski* (1998) two years prior, expectations were high for the Coen brothers' eighth feature film. They worked with cinematographer Sir Roger Deakins. After premiering to a positive reception at the AFI Film Festival on October 19, 2000, the film ultimately grossed \$71 million worldwide on a \$26 million budget. It was later nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Cinematography at the 2001 Academy Awards.

Despite never having read *The Odyssey*, Ethan Coen described the epic as "one of [his] favorite storyline schemes." Co-star Tim Blake Nelson, who has a degree in classics from Brown University had to educate the Coen's on the exact contents of the epic, as their perception of the epic poem came from modern adaptations and references in popular culture. Similarly, the brothers were inspired by Preston Sturges' 1941 film *Sullivan's Travels*, which includes related scenes with prison gangs, church choirs, old-time music, and small Southern towns. While still preserving its Homeric roots, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* also represents Southern life in the first half of the 20th century. Dominated by the traditions, institutions, and manners that characterized life then, the film is just as much an homage to *The Odyssey* as it is to 1930s Montgomery, Alabama.

But how closely does the film's narrative complement the Greek poet's tale? To start, *The Odyssey* follows the story of the Greek hero Odysseus (known as Ulysses in Roman myths), king of Ithaca, and his ten-year journey back home after the war in Troy. While away, Odysseus' wife Penelope faces a group of suitors trying to court her. Meanwhile, Odysseus must deal with beautiful sirens who lure his crew to death, a Cyclops who kills half of his crew, and a God who turns men into animals.

These vital plot points are hilariously covered in *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in the same sequential order. Ulysses and gang cross three women near a creek, who pour moonshine into their gaping mouths while signaling and dancing seductively around them. Waking up hours later, the group is penniless, dumbfounded, and down one man, as Delmar believes the "witches" turned Pete into a frog. This scene mirrors the lotus flowers that cause Odysseus' soldiers to sleep and forget their journeys home. Meanwhile, the so-called shapeshifting of the sirens resembles the Greek sorceress Circe, who turns Odysseus' men into wolves and swine.

As previously mentioned, the Roman name for Odysseus was Ulysses, who shares many of the same characteristics as his namesake. Both men are attractive, quick-witted, and on a quest for treasure and the retrieval of their lovers (although, in Ulysses's case, his wife does not want him anyway). Both characters are also ridiculously arrogant, though Ulysses holds no apparent right to act as such, given his low-life status as a convicted con man who has escaped prison. Ulysses often talks on behalf of the group and assumes leadership in almost every situation, while Odysseus fastidiously does the same on every occasion.

Certain minor characters in the film are also similar to the ones featured in *The Odyssey*. Tommy Johnson (Chris Thomas King), a skilled blind blues musician, shares multiple similarities to Homer. Both are blind and musicians, as some believe Homer was not a published poet but a singer who sang his poems to crowds of on-lookers. Meanwhile, Daniel "Big Dan" Teague (John Goodman) is a one-eyed mugger and member of the Klu Klux Klan who masquerades as a Bible salesman. He is perhaps the most recognizable character from the film, with his booming presence almost identical to Polyphemus, the Cyclops from *The Odyssey*.

The endings of the film and book are also similar. In the film, Ulysses dresses as a homeless man to lure his wife, Penny (Holly Hunter), back into his life. The gang then breaks out into their hit song, Man of Constant Sorrow (which debuted at #34 on Billboard when the film was released), catching Penny's attention and causing her to recognize her long-lost husband. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus shoots an arrow through a dozen axes to win his wife. Ultimately, the poem and film end happily, with the family reuniting and the characters developing into better men.

The Coen brothers' refreshing take on *The Odyssey* uses traditionally proven tropes and creative spins, making *O Brother Where Art Thou?* a masterpiece. Together, Ethan and Joel Coen craft a unique but faithful and enduring piece of art.



My Top 10 Favorite Horror Films

By Evie Steinman

GET OUT

One of my favorite movies of all time! This film not only terrified me but also intrigued me to the point that I refused to shut my eyes even during the scariest scenes. *Get Out* leaves you with so many questions as well as revelations at the end of the movie. For me, I rewatched this brilliant thriller about America's racist history by the talented director, Jordan Peele.

THANKSGIVING

One of the best slasher films I have seen! The plot would seem simple at first because of the slasher genre's reputation, but after watching the movie you could see how carefully crafted each scene was. "The kills" were originally conceived and incredibly gory. Although I consider this a must-watch, I have to admit that this film is not for the faint of heart, as in every other scene someone is getting brutally killed.

EVIL DEAD RISE

As someone who is not that big on supernatural films, I nonetheless loved "*Evil Dead Rises*." This film was full of plot twists; normally I can easily guess what is roughly to come in horror films, but for this movie, I was repeatedly surprised. Like many of these films, I do have to give a warning that this horror is especially brutal. "The kills" were creatively conceived (another grisly film, FYI), and the plot was interesting and suspenseful.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

This is a fantastic (and frustrating) film that left me on the edge of my seat until the film's last chilling moment. The incredibly talented actress, Elizabeth Moss, who plays the protagonist, Celia as well as the victim of the Invisible Man, injects the film with great power and suspense. Based on the 1897 novel by H.G. Wells, and the 1933 movie of the same name, this film brings *The Invisible Man* into a whole new era, with technology as well as a compelling storyline.

10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

For a person who does not love dystopian films, I must say this is a fantastic movie! "*10 Cloverfield Lane*" was captivating from the very start. Although there are only three characters in the film, every scene was well done raising suspenseful questions from the beginning. Is Howard (John Goodman) crazy? Are Howard and Emmet in this together? Most importantly, was there truly an apocalypse? I'd recommend this to anyone who enjoys thrillers.

SICK

Notwithstanding the bloodshed, I found *Sick* quite humorous at times. This film capitalizes on the recent Covid pandemic and the paranoia that grew around it. The movie follows two young women quarantining in a scenic house in the middle of nowhere. What could go wrong? The storyline, although odd, was clever and in some ways relatable to how people reacted to the pandemic.

SISSY

This movie was surprisingly amazing! This film, although it goes from zero to one hundred pretty quickly, has it all: gore, symbolism, and a solid storyline. There are also flashbacks, and who doesn't love a carefully crafted flashback? I must say, after watching "*Sissy*," I gained a lot more respect for Australia.

WRONG TURN

Every horror film that is set in the woods automatically makes it 10 times scarier. So it was no surprise that "*Wrong Turn*" freaked me out (and I am not one to be easily scared). As psychotic as this sounds, one of the best aspects of this film was the unique ways the characters died. I can't say too much more, except that I was extremely intrigued (For those of you who are horror fans, you know that).



Get Out (2017)

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/02/get-out-jordan-peele-review>



The Invisible Man (2020)

<https://wordpress.lehigh.edu/screams/2020/03/20/the-invisible-man-2020/>



Misery (1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=USEFLL-FhIZI>



10 Cloverfield Lane (2016)

<https://www.cinematary.com/writing/2016/4/10/10-cloverfield-lane-by-dan-trachtenberg>

MISERY

Adapted from the ingenious Stephen King novel, "*Misery*" is a fantastic film that deals with how love for your favorite author can lead to an unhealthy obsession. Kathy Bates plays, at first glance, the sweet woman who helps aid her favorite writer after his car accident near her home, but we later find out there is something incredibly wrong with this woman and Bates's incredible acting brings this to life! I recommend this film to anyone who likes thrillers.

ZODIAC

Although not as gory as others on my list, this film is arguably one of the scariest. The fact that "*Zodiac*" was based on real events made watching the film even more haunting. This film follows an investigation of a serial killer known as "the Zodiac killer" which was brought to life by great actors such as Robert Downey Jr., Mark Ruffalo, and Jake Gyllenhaal.



Evil Dead Rise (2023)



Zodiac (2007)

Sick (2022)



<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/sick-movie-review-2023>



<https://deadline.com/2024/03/civil-war-review-alex-garlands-journey-through-desolation-loses-its-way-sxsw-1235859621/>

CIVIL WAR

By Jeffrey Dai

To be very clear, I did exit the theater in shock—the incredibly loud and powerfully mixed sound of bullets and jarring needle drops elicited strong emotion. But the movie’s only compelling idea is that this could happen in America. An all-out war where journalists are “killed on sight” and civilians killed for being from the wrong state. And while this fear did a good job of keeping my eyes on the screen and my mouth hanging agape, I felt the emptiness creep in just a few hours later. Just because a horror movie scares you doesn’t mean it’s a good movie. You should watch it for yourself and form your opinion on this well-directed action film. Still, for me, no provocative imagery or well-directed action can hide the emptiness of *Civil War*. Even Mickey Mouse’s movie about CGI supes with laser beam hands fighting frisbee golf champion Chris Evans had a more substantial and meaningful ideological conflict than *Civil War*, whose poster turns Lady Liberty’s torch into a sniper nest.

What’s worse is that the film knows this. It gives us little drops of ideological buzzwords like “Portland Maoists” or “antifa massacre” to seem relevant. It even uses the mask of spoken language for the latter example to keep us guessing if the screenplay reads “antifa” or “Antifa,” which might give us just a little hint of what is happening or what the characters believe. But by deliberately erasing us an atrocious depiction of American geopolitics, the film keeps us locked into the main message: war journalism is hard. The film expects these war journalists to become almost robotic in their battle-hardening, making themselves neutral in pursuing the perfect shot. With filmic language, it seeks to punish the partial. Yet, there is no such thing as a neutral camera. War journalism is certainly the least neutral. The most neutral camera in the room is the camera used to film this movie, and even that’s because the entire conflict is fake. Beyond the fact that the film thanks TERF journalist Helen Lewis and sources archival footage from fascist “journalist” Andy Ngo, the film’s apolitical stance is, of

course, inherently political. An expert’s hands fluidly weave the few plot threads together, but the threads start to split when you take a closer look. Human drama is mostly pushed out in favor of shocking imagery and grueling action scenes. Underdeveloped stories and underwritten characters leave this film hollow despite its excellence in visual storytelling. With its muddling politics and middling plotline, *Civil War* is a hollow epic where provocative imagery only conjures emotion without thought.

“We record so other people ask.” In the end, there is nothing to ask except the question of what the exact purpose of this film’s existence is other than letting people know A24 is more than just cool, meaningful indie cinema. They can do cool, meaningless blockbusters, too.



**"WE RECORD SO THAT
OTHER PEOPLE ASK."**





<https://www.comingsoon.net/movies/news/1465716-Challengers-poster-revealed-for-zendaya-mike-faist-sports-drama>

CHALLENGERS

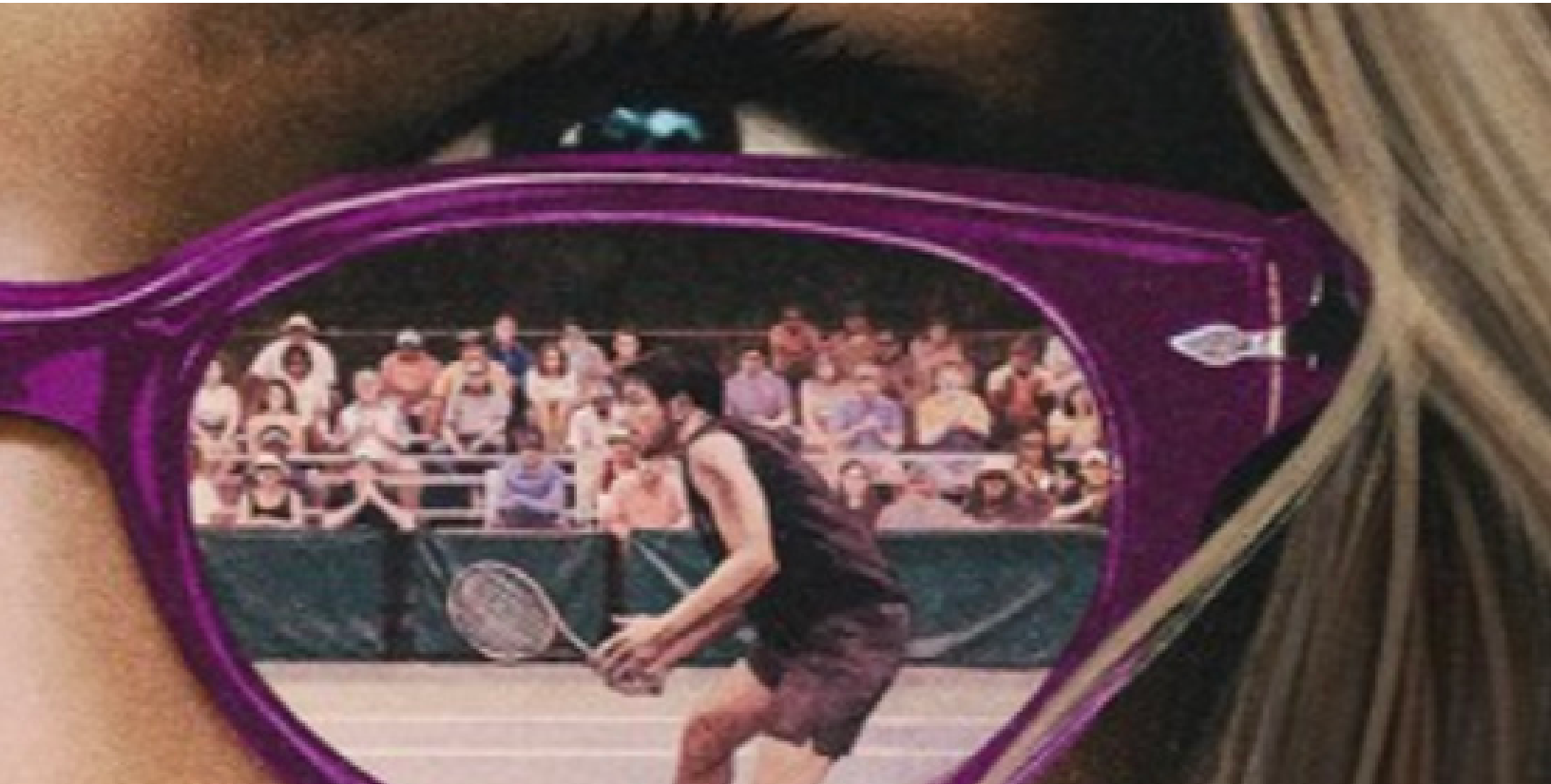
By Jeffrey Dai

Look, I liked *Saltburn*. But if you're not missing the half-baked queerness and concerning social message, look no further than Luca Guadagnino's *Challengers* for an erotic thriller that will always have you on the edge of your seat. Starring Zendaya, hot off *Dune: Part Two*, Mike Faist, and Josh O'Connor, this romantic sports drama told in a non-linear storyline akin to that of *Oppenheimer* feels just as explosive and thrilling. Playwright/novelist/screenwriter Justin Kuritzkes penned the script for Guadagnino. It's no coincidence that Kuritzkes is married to Celine Song, whose phenomenal directorial debut last year with *Past Lives* was also about a love triangle. This power couple is sure to be seen at the Oscars year after year, with Kuritzkes and Guadagnino soon releasing another collaboration in *Queer*, and Song currently in production on her second film, *Materialists*. However, *Past Lives* and *Challengers* could not be more opposed. The latter is filled with intensely well-written melodrama of betrayal and heartache, as opposed to the former's more subtle and mature character study. *Challengers* burst to the brim with passion, where a relationship and conversations are equated with tennis matches and tennis matches are equated with sex. Directed with unending energy and enthusiasm, Guadagnino quite literally puts the audience inside of the ball as we're hit back and forth between two guys fighting to catch Zendaya's sunglass-obscured gaze. The energy is only aided by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross' incredible techno score, making dialogue scenes feel as thrilling as tennis. Zendaya gives us an incredible performance in a role that finally separates her from the high-schoolers she keeps getting typecast in and serves as the evolution of Tashi Duncan from a prodigal tennis player to a mature tennis coach and

mother. Faist and O'Connor portray their archetypal characters to perfection. Guadagnino is known for pulling star-making performances out of actors, but here, perhaps it wasn't needed. What a way to turn the quiet game of tennis into an audiovisual wonderland where the chemistry and eroticism ooze from the screen in a riveting bisexual fever dream.



<https://www.comingsoon.net/movies/news/1465716-Challengers-poster-revealed-for-zendaya-mike-faist-sports-drama>



Monster: A tragic and beautiful triptych by Hirokazu Koreeda

By Jeffrey Dai

Japanese arthouse cinema experienced a boom in 2023: Wim Wenders' *Perfect Days* premiered at Cannes, winning the coveted Best Actor prize for Koji Yakusho and going on to be nominated as Japan's entry for Best International Feature at the Oscars. Ryusuke Hamaguchi, fresh off a 2021 sweep of critics awards, premiered *Evil Does Not Exist*, marking a second collaboration with Eiko Ishibashi and winning the Grand Prix at Venice, with the film set to make its U.S. premiere this May. Hayao Miyazaki's *The Boy and The Heron* premiered at TIFF as his retirement film, winning an audience prize, nabbing the Oscar for Best Animated Feature, and undoing Miyazaki's retirement for the umpteenth time. *Godzilla Minus One* emerged as a sleeper hit in the United States, winning an Oscar for Best Visual Effects and its tremendous box office performance. However, the film that may unfortunately go the most unrecognized is Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Monster*. A Cannes favorite, Kore-eda premiered his film at the festival, picking up Best Screenplay for Yuji Sakamoto and the Queer Palm. This is the first time since his directorial debut, 1995's *Maborosi*, that Kore-eda has directed a screenplay, he did not write. No offense to him, but this may be his best work yet.

A Rashomon-inspired triptych fable of misunderstandings that draws drama not from the awkwardness or tension of miscommunication but from its fallout. The film tells the tale of two elementary school boys, Minato Mugino and Yori Hoshikawa. Minato's mother arrives at the school after a teacher, Mr. Hori, is accused of hitting Minato. Mr. Hori claims that Minato was

bullying Yori. The truth unfolds from three perspectives: Minato's mother, played by a brilliant Sakura Ando, Mr. Hori, played by Eita Nagayama in an incredibly layered performance; and Minato, played by Soya Kurokawa in a star-making performance. Its tale of childhood queerness, something incredibly politicized today, is so thoughtfully done and all the more tear-jerking because of it. The film is ultimately about childhood innocence and who we each paint to be the "Monster" in our lives. When Minato's mother is convinced Mr. Hori is the "Monster," we go to his perspective, wherein Minato is the "Monster," and we switch to Minato's perspective. The true villains in the film are the ones who are never revealed as such, and the subtle brutality of the events is sure to wrest tears from your eyes. This film spins towards its center with the force of a thousand suns yet does so with the delicate touch of sunbeams hitting the river to make it shine. Something that can only be achieved by veteran director Kore-eda, who has yet to miss in his entire filmography. Of course, the whole film is aided by the sparse yet powerful score by the late Ryuichi Sakamoto, in whose memory the film is dedicated. Although he only composed two original pieces for the film, the piano and violin needle drops from his discography are incredibly well-placed. Much of the film is left unscored, making the moments when his emotionally devastating pieces are audible that much more impactful. This is ultimately just an incredible miracle of a movie.





Pedro Almodóvars' Mujeres Al Borde De Un Ataque De Nervios: An Introduction To His Work

By Lucía Simonian

As Lola Beltrán's "Soy Infeliz" fills the speakers and the iconic Pedro Almodóvar coloring fills the screen, the melodramatic story of Pepa Marco begins to unfold. *Mujeres Al Borde De Un Ataque De Nervios* (1988) is Almodóvar's big foreign hit, nominated in 1988 for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Not only is the film entertaining and thought-provoking, but also a reflection of the themes, ideas, and cultural impacts that Almodóvar uses in his films. Almodóvar started his film journey in 1974 but only gained international recognition with *Mujeres*. And with its obvious "Almodóvar" characteristics, I thought it would make a good introduction to his work.

The story opens in Madrid and follows Pepa (Carmen Maura) in the lasting ripples of her breakup with Iván (Fernando Guillén), her long-time boyfriend. Just a few minutes into the film, the story feels so crazy and yet real. In a frenzy, she puts her shared penthouse apartment up for rent, packs a bag for Iván, and throws her phone out the window. The emotions portrayed by Maura are so realistic and justifiable, but they were just over the top enough to fit into Almodóvar's reputation of intense melodrama and ill-placed humor. Just within the first 10 minutes of the movie, Almodóvar's intense and vivid coloring and costume design of the characters bring you back to the 80s. Soon, we're introduced to Iván's other lover, Lucía (Julietta Serrano), and their son, Carlos (Antonio Banderas), along with a secondary plot character, Candela (María Barranco), Pepa's best fugitive friend, who was manipulated into housing terrorists that were arrested. Carlos, played by Antonio Banderas, and his fiancée Marissa, Rossy de Palma, visit a house they want to rent after Lucía kicks him out, where they discover it is Pepa's penthouse apartment. Up to this point, the movie introduced every significant character, played by actors and actresses with whom Almodóvar had a history. It is known that Rossy de Palma was a favorite actress of his to use after they met in 1986. If you choose to watch more of his films or already have, the most obvious similarity between them is the actors. Once

Almodóvar found actors he enjoyed working with, he continued to use them; almost all of the actors in this film started their careers with him. He often gave these actors their first jobs, like Banderas. Antonio Banderas started working in the film industry after working with Almodóvar.

Further into the film, the gazpacho drugged with sleeping pills causes Marissa to fall asleep, and an unusual relationship unfolds between Carlos and Pepa. Once they are introduced and share their experience with Iván, both unhappy ones, they begin to bond as mother and son. This relationship sheds light on Almodóvar's own life. He was born in a small town in Spain and was surrounded by feminine influence from his mother, sisters, and grandmother. In his films, the importance of female power is shown by the secondary role that men take. In this case, Carlos is a passive character under the influence of Pepa and Candela, with whom he develops a relationship within the 12 hours his fiancée is asleep. The film's climax occurs when Lucía attacks Iván at the airport after he tries to leave with his third lover, and Pepa stops her with help from a friendly taxi driver.

Another important influence in Almodóvar's life is the effect of Francisco Franco's dictatorship on cinema. In 1967, he moved to Madrid to attend the National School of Cinema, which was closed by Franco—who believed cinema was a communist creation—in 1969. This forced Almodóvar to create and develop his style while supporting himself by working odd jobs.

This is all to say that Almodóvar's films create an environment of constant laughter, intriguing characters, and dramatic plot twists. While watching *Mujeres Al Borde De Un Ataque De Nervios*, I could not stop giggling at the offhanded comments, admiring the incredible acting, and appreciating the dedication of everyone who worked on the film. If there is any international movie to watch, it is Almodóvar's masterpiece *Mujeres Al Borde De Un Ataque De Nervios*.

Dr. Strangelove

Or: How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb

By Kai Abbott

Dr. *Strangelove*, or *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), recounts the terrifying prospect of a nuclear holocaust at the height of the Cold War. The film is based on the novel *Red Alert* by Peter George and stars legendary comedic actor Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden, and James Earl Jones (future voice actor for Star Wars's Darth Vader). Often described as one of the greatest films of all time, Kubrick, specifically *Dr. Strangelove*, has received its fair share of flowers. Nominated for four Academy Awards and placed at #72 on IMDB's top 250 greatest films of all time, it is just as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. Stanley Kubrick could not have picked a better time to release a comedy about the end of the world, seeing as it came out just 14 months after the world nearly ended for real.

On October 14th, 1962, U.S. fears of a potential nuclear missile launch site in the Western Hemisphere were confirmed when a spy plane took photos of Cuban launch sites for ballistic missiles in the south of the island. For the next 14 days, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. teetered on the edge of yet another World War; only this time around, the threat was much graver than ever before. In this conflict, there would be no winner, no exchange of power, and no victory parade to celebrate the perseverance of the free world. Instead, the destruction of all of humanity would be ensured by the military strategy of mutually assured destruction (MAD). This theory suggests that the use of any nuclear weapon by an attacker on a nuclear-armed defender would destroy both the attacker and the defender (Britannica).

Luckily, for humanity's sake, Krushchev and Kennedy agreed to de-escalate and avoid certain doom. As Nazi scientist *Dr. Strangelove* put it in Kubrick's film, "Deterrence is the art of producing in the mind of the enemy the fear to attack (*Dr. Strangelove*)." Right?

Well, it's not so unrealistic that one man could destroy the world because of their psychotic or misguided views. Perhaps no scene in *Dr. Strangelove* illustrates this concept better than when Group Captain Lionel Mandrake (Peter Sellers) meets with Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper (Sterling Hayden). Standing at Burpelson Air Force Base, Mandrake receives orders from the President and his war room to secure the codes needed to recall the U.S. aircraft poised to strike Russia. In a harrowing sequence, a composed and confident Ripper, cigar in mouth, reveals to Mandrake that he is responsible for initiating the bombing. He confesses to Mandrake that he can no longer tolerate "Communist infiltration, Communist indoctrination, Communist subversion, and the international Communist conspiracy to sap and impure our precious bodily fluids" (*Dr. Strangelove*). He later discloses that his theory was formulated while experiencing difficulty in being intimate with his wife, a challenge he attributes to a "feeling of fatigue and emptiness that followed," which he links to his "loss of essence" (*Dr. Strangelove*). As the film concludes, Ripper's wild theories ignite an apocalyptic nuclear conflict.

Kubrick implies that humanity should never control such devastating weapons regardless of who possesses them or the alleged safety measures implemented. Kubrick deemed it necessary to shift to satire after realizing the absurdity of a scenario where one nation held the power to determine the trajectory of the human race. It's darkly comical yet frightening to acknowledge that the whims of one deranged individual could end everything that we know.



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