

That Nerd Show

MONTHLY

MARCH/APRIL 2025

FILM / TV NEWS,
GAMING NEWS,
COMIC BOOK NEWS,
REVIEWS, COSPLAY,
TRIVIA, AND EDITORIALS

VOL. 23



A MESSAGE
FROM YOUR

"SQUAD LEADER"

"AVOWED"

XBOX'S SHITTY RPG

FORTNITE

APEX

THE EVOLUTION OF ESPORTS

FROM NICHE TO BILLION-DOLLAR BOOM

BY JIMMY ALFORD

LEAGUE LEGENDS



LATEST REVIEWS

DOTA 2





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MARVEL STUDIOS


THUNDERBOLTS*

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A promotional poster for the video game Assassin's Creed Shadows. The central figure is a samurai warrior in ornate armor with a large, horned helmet, holding a katana. In the foreground, a hooded assassin is seen from the chest up, holding the samurai's arm. The background features traditional Japanese architecture, a full moon, and red maple leaves. A large red 'X' is superimposed over the scene.

ASSASSIN'S CREED SHADOWS

アサシン クリード シャドウズ

11月15日発売

3-20-25

THE EVOLUTION OF ESPORTS

From *Niche* to Billion-Dollar Boon

By Jimmy Alford

Early-gaming-era daydreams realized as fans, massive prize pools thrusts Esports into era of legitimacy!!!

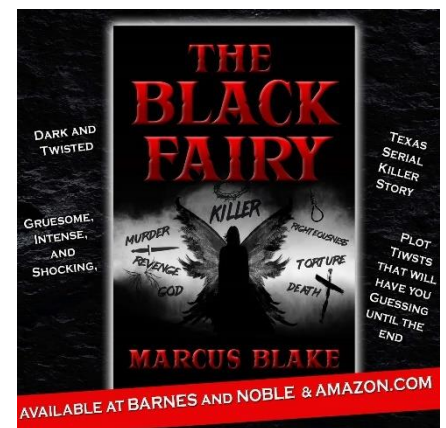
This is a deep cut, but some fans out there may remember 1989's *The Wizard*. If not, this cheesy 80s flick is worth a watch just as a nostalgic glimpse into an early gaming, but also as a somewhat odd vision of what could be. In *The Wizard* a young gaming prodigy, named Jimmy played by Luke Edwards, travels cross-country to compete in a high-stakes video game championship. It's a world where playing video games isn't just a hobby, but something that could be taken seriously. Could video games really be something more than just a pastime? It's not the best gaming movie out there by a long shot, and it wasn't even the first. Long before Hollywood had been playing up video games with titles like *Tron* in 1982 and *The Last Starfighter* in 1984. Stories were heroes played games and won the day and the girl. Fans watched as mastering a video game could be life-changing. Fast forward to today, and the answer is undeniable. What once seemed like a Hollywood fantasy has become the billion-dollar Esports industry. What was once shared between friends over cold soda and chips is

now a global spectacle, filling arenas and streaming live.

Despite the money and the fans the rise of Esports meets questions of legitimacy. Esports still struggles to gain the same level of widespread acceptance as other emerging contests from the early 90s, like MMA and the X Games. At that time, Nintendo was hosting the Nintendo World Championships, a groundbreaking event that toured 29 U.S. cities. Later in 1991, Street Fighter II competitive play went from chasing high scores to head-to-head matches. The mid-1990s also saw the emergence of Local Area Network or LAN parties, where gamers would lug their entire PC system to network and compete. Titles like Quake became synonymous with communal gamer spirit and set the stage for large-scale competition. The 1997 Red Annihilation tournament for Quake was the first event resembling modern tournaments, with Dennis Fong, aka Throng beating out 2000 other competitors to take home game developer John D. Carmack's Ferrari. More games came, like: Counter-Strike, StarCraft, and Warcraft, offering more cash prizes for tournament wins.

If the movies were flashing high level competitive gaming on the silver screen and big checks were changing hands at tournaments in real life, were we closer in the new millennium to the dream of Esports

being taken as seriously as "real" sports?



Esports' financial success is unquestionable, yet skepticism remains. While traditional sports legends are household names, many top gamers remain unknown outside their communities. Most people could tell you who LeBron James or Patrick Mahomes is, but ask them about Kyle Giersdorf, aka Bugha. Blank stares are returned despite Giersdorf being one the United States' top Esports players. Who are these gamers? The stereotypical idea of some pock-faced teen, who has too long kept themselves away from the warm embrace of sunlight, isn't holding up against the giants of sports.

Gen Z Making a Difference

Fixated on games and withdrawn, a seemingly troubled child possesses uncanny natural

talent. for video games. Rescued by his older brother, the boy is California-bound, aiming at video game greatness, and all the while adults view video games with a mix of skepticism, frustration, and outright dismissal. In *The Wizard*, gaming is seen as little more than a distraction or a meaningless pastime to all but the youngest. It's strange to think this dismissive attitude toward gaming still prevails more than 30 years later, but maybe not for much longer. Gaming was seen as a distraction, but for Gen Z, it's a career path, a spectator sport, and a cultural movement all in one. Platforms like Twitch and YouTube aren't just entertainment hubs; they're reshaping how people engage with competition



Market research firm Newzoo has dedicated its existence to reading the tea leaves of the PC and console industry and their research and surveys from over 73,000 participants have formed the backbone of a lot of Esports research. According to their findings, Millennials and Gen Zers are bucking the trends of the past three several decades, with Gen Z leading the way. Unlike Gen X and the Baby Boomers, Millennials and Gen Z are far more likely to watch gaming content on platforms like Twitch and YouTube and opt out of tuning into traditional broadcasts.

In the past professional gaming lacked the same traditional infrastructure enjoyed by the likes

of MMA and X Games. In the days before the rise of Internet media, professional gaming wasn't really televised, except for a few shows like GameMaster out of the United Kingdom or Season of Champions in Canada. The first UFC championships were supported by major networks and enjoyed pay-per-view deals. In 1993, the LA Times reported these early fights garnered more than \$1.3 million in pay-per-view sales. Adjusted for inflation, that's about \$2.18 million. This cash and influx of new fans elevated this fresh and bloody event to mainstream status.

However as younger viewers abandon traditional media and turn to streaming outlets, there may be a reversing of the tides. According to Statista.com, online-streaming households outnumbered paid-TV households for the first time in 2023, and by 2026, there will be 80.7 million strictly streaming homes in the US.

The groundwork for an Esports surge in prominence is being laid. Most traditional sports have deeply rooted support systems, from youth leagues to high school teams and collegiate-level national programs. The same groundwork is being laid out for Esports as well, with high school and collegiate leagues popping up throughout the country with growing investments from major brands and sponsors. Possibly strengthening the ties between Gen Z and Esports.

Collegiate Esports

Very few athletes try to jump straight into large national level tournament play. To be truly great takes tons of time and dedication and many smaller game days. The same is true for Esports. Even Jimmy had to play his way up to the final stage at the "Video Armageddon." So where are those opportunities? Ten years ago, you would have been hard pressed to find anything, but things have

changed. Colleges and universities across the country have recognized the potential for competitive gaming to provide student engagement, foster school spirit, and create career development opportunities. Back in 2014, The Chicago Tribune reported Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania created the first official competitive Esports team with scholarship-awarded players and the University of California, Irvine was one of the first institutions to launch a dedicated Esports program in 2016. That was about a decade ago and Esports continues to create recruitment demand and more scholarship dollars.



Some of these scholarships are worth more than \$20,000. Most of the scholarships pale in comparison to those of athletes in traditional sports, like football or basketball, but the money is nothing to sneeze at. Enough money is being pumped into these to need their own conferences, not unlike the Big 12, Conference USA, Mountain West or the Big East Conferences. For Esports, meet Riot Games Collegiate League of Legends, Esports Collegiate Conference, and National Association of Collegiate Esports. According to the National Association of Collegiate Esports (NACE), more than 200 colleges now offer Esports programs with scholarships, full coaching staff trainers and complete dedicated facilities.

For any naysayers who may scoff at the idea of throwing millions of dollars at gamers, there is a lot of evidence to support it. More than 80 percent of today's teens and college-aged adults play video games, according to Newzoo. Also, unlike Millennials, and Gen Xers that came before, Gen Z is less likely to be as brand loyal and more likely to play across multiple platforms. Make no mistake, big business has noticed, and are shifting strategies. Microsoft recently released images of possible Xbox changes, and one of the biggest surprises was the possible inclusion of Steam games. If Microsoft follows through, the addition of Steam would equate to a huge team up across the PC and console landscape.

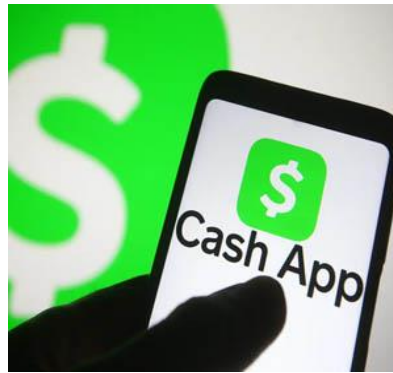
Esports has become a significant and rapidly growing phenomenon, particularly in the world of high school athletics. What was once considered a niche hobby has transformed into a legitimate competitive industry, gaining recognition and support across schools nationwide. High school Esports programs now offer students numerous benefits, ranging from enhanced teamwork and critical thinking skills to potential career opportunities in a thriving sector. As this new wave of competition spreads, it is clear that Esports is not just about gaming but also about preparing students for the future.

High School Esports

Public schools often mirror thriving college programs, preparing high school juniors and seniors to pursue college and university programs that fit their aspirations. It only makes sense for public school systems to also invest in Esports programs. The High School Esports League, an online high school Esports tournament league, counts 15,000 students

representing 800 schools nationwide in its ranks.

Most of these are clubs and not official programs like other athletic sports, however in-roads are being made in several states to have sanction state level Esports bodies. Vanta, a private high school and junior high school Esports league operator, is listed by the State of Texas as the official Esports platform and coaching sponsor of Texas' University Interscholastic League. For the uninitiated, the UIL is the same governing body that oversees all athletic, musical, and academic competition in Texas.



Currently though, Texas does not consider Esports an official sport and still allocates it to club status. Several reports list Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Illinois and Rhode Island as being the only states to have officially mandated Esports as sports. If Texas changes its stance then more than 8,000 public schools with over 5 million students would be added and nearly double the rising number of official school-aged competitors in the US.

In 2021, the National Federation of State High School Associations, said participation in high school Esports helps students' problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills in a similar way as traditional sports, as those involved must collaborate, communicate, and strategize together as a team. Moreover, the official inclusion of Esports in high school provides

students with opportunities to compete for millions of dollars in scholarships. More than \$16 million in scholarships were awarded in 2020 alone, according to the National Education Association.

Video Armageddon

Finally, we get to the main stage, the big time. The rapid rise in Esports prominence at the collegiate and public school levels likely points to big boons in the coming years. According to market research company Fortune Business Insights, Esports accounted for about \$1.45 billion in 2022 worldwide, and estimated the industry could increase to \$6.75 billion by 2030. To put that into perspective, in 2023 the NBA earned just over \$11 billion, according to Statista.com.

Professional Esports seems to be at the precipice of widespread acknowledgement. The buy-in from young players and schools seems set and over the past two decades, professional gaming has transformed from niche LAN events in dimly lit rooms to sold-out arenas and massive online broadcasts. As of 2021, prize pools for international competition ballooned above \$40 million Dota 2 and PUBG and Fortnite championships also awarding 10s of millions of dollars to players, according to Esportsearnings.com.



With so much cash funneling to players, there's no doubt organizers are also raking it in. Just like the NFL and MLB the real money is in the broadcasts and sponsorship deals. Tournaments attract millions

of viewers. The 2023 League of Legends World Championship saw viewership peak at 6.4 million people alone.

Of course, that doesn't include all the casual streaming that has sprung up. Newzoo said about 1.4 billion people will tune in and watch gamers play this year. Twitch and Youtube have become stalwarts in video game entertainment, and Twitch alone boasts almost 20 billion watch hours for live gaming. Not bad for a company whose 2014 acquisition by Amazon was met with a lot of. Amazon let its nearly \$1 billion purchase to its own devices, letting it grow to now offer viewers more than 11 million gaming channels to choose from .



In the vast sea of streamers, people can find storylines, player interviews, behind-the-scenes content, and even drama between rival teams. As of 2023, the number of streamers who list video game streaming as their primary vocation has reached new heights. According to data from TwitchTracker, nearly 70,000 streamers on Twitch earn substantial income from their channels, with a large number of them dedicating themselves full-time to streaming. The content ranges from live tournaments to casual gameplay broadcasts, where the focus is on entertainment.

Streaming has become one of the main sources of revenue for some professional gamers. Instead of grinding the competitive scene and earning prize money, some are building communities and earning money through merchandise and direct contributions from fans.

Pro Fortnite gamer and Michigan native, Richard Tyler Blevins, aka Ninja has cultivated a massive following on Twitch, with 19 million acolytes in the fold in 2024, according to <https://twitchtracker.com>. Those followers offer him a steady flow of cash from branded apparel and accessories at his store. It's not unreasonable to see someone walking down the street wearing a Chiefs jersey and then see another person sporting the \$50 "Ninja Football Jersey." At his peak, Blevins purportedly earned as much as \$6.7 million in a single month from streaming.



As demand continues to evolve, Esports may be poised to grow beyond subculture status. In the early 2010s, streaming platforms were considered largely experimental, as was the concept of watching others play video games. Seeing the success currently inherent in the industry was far fetched. Most would agree a movie about an emotionally troubled kid hitchhiking across the US in what was basically a 90 minute Nintendo commercial is also far-fetched. However, the movie got made and Esports is generating billions of dollars.



The conversation around its legitimacy continues, not just in mainstream media but within the gaming community itself. What was once a niche pastime has transformed into a structured, competitive industry with professional leagues, collegiate programs, and multimillion-dollar tournaments. Stadiums are no longer the sole measure of a sport's impact; online viewership, engagement, and cultural influence carry just as much weight. If the definition of competition is evolving, Esports no longer needs to prove itself by old standards. The way people engage with competition has changed, and gaming is at the forefront of that shift. We are far past the days of the recording official high scores from the arcade era like Walter Day did in the early 80's through Twin Galaxies. It was the first database and publication that tracked high scores and saw gamers like Billy Mitchell become the "King of Kong" by becoming the record holder in Donkey Kong and later Pac Man. But more important newer games are being developed for Esports and multiplayer modes of fan favorites like Star Wars Battlefront 2 and even For Honor can easily be turned into Esports competition games. Careers can be made. New industry developers can be forged. Over forty years ago Esports was simple concept of just keeping track of high scores and now we have a billion-dollar industry. What will the next forty years bring in the world of Esports?

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Marvel Unveils ‘Avengers: Doomsday’ Cast with MCU Mainstays and ‘X-Men,’ ‘Fantastic Four’ Stars



Robert Downey Jr. returns to the MCU with other confirmed actors including stars Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston, ‘X-Men’ stars like Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen, and a good chunk from the studio’s ‘Thunderbolts.’ Six years after *Avengers: Endgame* became one of the biggest movies of all time, [the Avengers are finally assembling again](#).

During a nearly five-and-a-half hour [livestream](#), Marvel Studios unveiled its cast for *Avengers: Doomsday*, revealing a mix of Marvel Cinematic Universe mainstays as well as actors from 20th Century Fox’s now-defunct *X-Men* universe and upcoming stars of *Fantastic Four: First Steps*. Notable names missing from the roll call included Tom Holland (Spider-Man) and Chris Evans (Captain America), the latter of whom is [expected to appear](#) at least one of the two-part movies.

The cast announced included Chris Hemsworth (Thor), Tom Hiddleston (Loki), Anthony Mackie (Captain America), Paul Rudd (Ant-Man), Letitia Wright (Black Panther), Simu Liu (Shang-

Chi), Danny Ramirez (The Falcon) and Winston Duke (M’Baku).

The cast of Marvel’s upcoming May release antihero team movie *Thunderbolts** was also represented, with Sebastian Stan (The Winter Soldier), Florence Pugh (Yelena Belova), Wyatt Russell (U.S. Agent), David Harbour (Red Guardian), Hannah John-Kamen (Ghost), and Lewis Pullman (a character at this time simply known as Bob) also getting chairs in the soundstage, as the livestream showed

They will be joined by *X2: X-Men United*’s Alan Cumming (Nightcrawler) and Kelsey Grammer (Beast), who starred in *X-Men: The Last Stand* for 20th Century Fox and had a cameo in *The Marvels*. Channing Tatum, who once was attached to a *Gambit* movie that never happened, will also appear in *Doomsday* after making his debut in *Deadpool & Wolverine*.

Members of the Fantastic Four are also in the cast, including Pedro Pascal (Mr. Fantastic), Vanessa Kirby (The Invisible Woman), Ebon Moss-Bachrach (The Thing) and Joseph Quinn (The Human Torch).

Tenoch Huerta Mejía, who played Namor in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, was the first true surprise of the casting event. There were questions over his return to Marvel after he was accused of sexual misconduct in June 2023, claims he [denied](#) as “false and completely unsubstantiated.” He [dropped out](#) of a Netflix movie amid the media storm, and later appeared as a guest at

Marvel’s *Echo* premiere event, suggesting he and the studio were on good terms.

Sources say that even with 26 actors announced, Marvel wasn’t done with revealing the entire cast, although when and how another unveiling will occur was unclear.

The event was simple. It included a shot of a director’s chair with a star’s name on the back. Every 12 minutes or so, music from the next actor’s movie would play, and the camera would shift to a new chair and name. It ended with the swell of a new take on composer Alan Silvestri’s *Avengers* theme, revealing Robert Downey Jr. (Doctor Doom) in a suit and tie, giving a “shhh” to the camera.

Marvel first announced *Avengers: Doomsday* to fanfare at San Diego Comic-Con in July, with the surprise reveal that Downey would be returning to the MCU after retiring the role of Iron Man with *Endgame*. The move reunited Downey, Marvel’s most bankable star, with the Russo brothers, Marvel’s most bankable directors, who likewise had departed the MCU after *Endgame*.

“Now they have magnets on them so we can put ‘em on a board and look at ‘em. It’s the only way to keep track of the amount of characters that we’re working with,” said Joe Russo. Added Anthony Russo: “And as far as how do we look at who’s in the movies, it’s just a long creative process of exploring where we want to take the story. What is the most surprising and exciting area for us to push into, and which characters help us in that effort?” from [Hollywoodreporter.com](#)

‘Spider-Man: Brand New Day’ and ‘Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse’ Unveiled at CinemaCon 2025



[Peter Parker](#) launches into his next cinematic adventure in *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*! The title of the highly-anticipated *Spider-Man: No Way Home* sequel was revealed Monday night at CinemaCon to much fan fervor.

Director Destin Daniel Cretton, who previously worked on Marvel Studios’ *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, appeared on stage to provide fans with their first insight into *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*. “I’m spending my time exploring the next stage of this amazing character with a team of the most

incredible artists in the world,” teased Cretton. “We’re all, just daily, nerding out over the suit, how to swing, how to create an event, an emotional story, and a ride that we haven’t really seen before.” Spider-Man himself made a little appearance at the presentation too, with leading man Tom Holland addressing the audience via video to share his excitement about the upcoming project. *Starring Tom Holland, Spider-Man: Brand New Day will be directed by Destin Daniel Cretton and will release in theatres on July 31, 2026.*



SPIDER-MAN: BEYOND THE SPIDER-VERSE

It all ends here! [Miles Morales](#) returns to the big screen in the highly-anticipated conclusion to the Oscar®-winning *Spider-Verse* trilogy, *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse*. Filmmakers Phil Lord, Bob Persichetti, and Justin K. Thompson took to the stage to give audiences an exclusive glimpse into the upcoming film. Fans can catch a first look at the Multiverse-spanning adventure featuring Miles, [Gwen](#), and the Prowler below.

The filmmaking trio also announced the movie’s new theatrical release date; *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse* swings into theatres on June 4, 2027. *Directed by Bob Persichetti and Justin K. Thompson. Produced by Phil Lord, Chris Miller, Amy Pascal, Avi Arad, and Jinko Gotoh. Aditya Sood and Christina Steinberg are executive producing. Screenplay by Phil Lord, Christopher Miller and David Callahan. From Deadline.com*

‘John Wick’ Getting Animated Prequel From Lionsgate; Keanu Reeves Expected To Voice Renowned Assassin – CinemaCon



As part of its expansion of the [John Wick](#) universe, [Lionsgate](#) is prepping an animated action film featuring the renowned assassin. Franchise star [Keanu Reeves](#) is expected to voice his signature character, with [Shannon Tindle](#) set to direct. Vanessa Taylor is writing the script. The announcement was made Tuesday at [CinemaCon](#) by Adam Fogelson, chair of Lionsgate Motion Picture Group.

The movie will go back in time to tell the story of John Wick before the first film, as he completes the Impossible Task

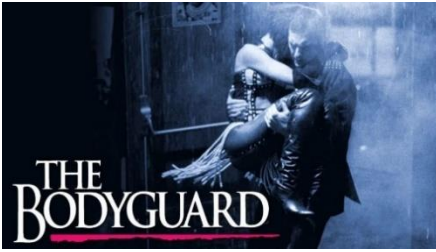
— killing all of his rivals in one night — in order to free himself from his obligation to the High Table and earn the right to be with the love of his life, Helen. The animated feature will be produced by the *John Wick* team of Thunder Road’s Basil Iwanyk and Erica Lee, 87Eleven Entertainment’s Stahelski, and Reeves. 87Eleven Entertainment’s Alex Young and Jason Spitz will executive produce. Tindle most recently co-wrote and directed the Annie-nominated Netflix film *Ultraman: Rising*. He also created the double Oscar nominee *Kubo and the Two Strings* and served as executive producer/showrunner on the Emmy-winning series *Lost Ollie*. Taylor is known as writer and co-executive producer of *Game of Thrones*, writer of *Divergent* and an Oscar nominee for her work with Guillermo del Toro on Best Picture winner *The Shape of Water*.

“In both animation and the world of John Wick, the possibilities are endless,”

Fogelson said. “And there is no John Wick story fans are clamoring for more than the Impossible Task. Shannon’s take on that story is an incredible one, and we are beyond excited to see what John Wick can do in animation.”

Stahelski added: “I’ve always been fascinated with anime. It has always been a huge influence on me, especially with the *John Wick* series. To have the opportunity to develop a *John Wick* anime seems to be the perfect progression for the *John Wick* world. I feel *John Wick* is the perfect property for this medium — anime holds the potential to expand our world, our characters and our action in ways unimaginable before.” Iwanyk and Lee said: “Shannon has a breathtaking vision for a film we’ve all long wanted to make. Alongside Vanessa’s story, we’re hugely excited to bring it to audiences.” From [Deadline.com](#)

'The Bodyguard' Remake With 'Taylor Swift: Eras Tour' Director Sam Wrench And 'Juror No. 2' Scribe In Works At Warner Bros



[Warner Bros](#) has just set plans to revamp *The Bodyguard*, the 1992 romantic drama thriller that teamed superstars Kevin Costner and Whitney Houston. The studio, which released the original, has set *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* director [Sam Wrench](#) to helm and script by *Juror No. 2* writer Jonathan A. Abrams, Deadline has learned.

The news was revealed Friday in an interview with [Warner Bros' co-film bosses Mike De Luca and Pam Abdy](#). No casting has been set, but after the first film's star duo and box office success (it made \$411 million worldwide box office and landed a pair of Oscar nominations) it certainly will be a casting process to watch. Beyond Swift, there are many singers who could play the singing star

that this should be a magnet for an exciting cast.

The original plot centered on Costner's former Secret Service agent Frank Farmer, who takes a job as bodyguard to famous R&B star Rachel Marron, played by Houston at the height of her pop-star fame. Drama, romance and a thriller plot ensue as Frank tries to sniff out a dangerous stalker, with the final act playing out as Rachel wins the Best Picture Academy Award.

Mick Jackson directed the pic, which was penned by *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* scribe Lawrence Kasdan. The pic was nominated for two Oscars for its songs, and its soundtrack became the best-selling of all time (and the best-selling album by a female artist of all time). Its hits included "I Will Always Love You," "I'm Every Woman," "Queen of the Night" and the Oscar-nommed "Run to You" and "I Have Nothing."

Wrench was the director behind Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour, the concert movie spawned from Swift's historic almost two-year-long global tour that obliterated the

record with more than \$2 billion in ticket sales across 149 shows. The movie grossed \$261.7 million worldwide. Jonathan A. Abrams made his [feature screenwriting debut with *Juror #2*](#), the Clint Eastwood-directed court thriller starring Nicholas Hoult. The pic bowed last fall to critical acclaim and grossed \$24.8 million in the U.S.

Warner Bros has been prioritizing finding directors who spark to the company's IP, with other revivals in the works for franchises like *The Matrix* (with Drew Goddard writing and directing), the recent *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, and past hits like *Practical Magic* reteaming Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock, and *Gremlins* and *Goonies* in development with Chris Columbus.

Other IP plays in the works include Margot Robbie, Ryan Gosling and Jay Roach with their *Oceans Eleven* prequel; Matt Reeves as producer, working with Marvel's *Werewolf By Night* director Michael Giacchino on a remake of the library title *Them*; Andy Serkis directing *Gollum*; and *Cat in the Hat* being co-directed by Jon M. Chu among others in the quiet stages. From Deadline.com

NETFLIX

Oscars 2025: Full Winners List

| “Anora” Wins Best Picture



Best Picture

Anora - Winner

The Brutalist
A Complete Unknown
Conclave
Dune: Part Two
Emilia Pérez
I'm Still Here
Nickel Boys
The Substance
Wicked

Best Director

Sean Baker — Anora - - Winner

Brady Corbet — The Brutalist
James Mangold — A Complete Unknown
Jacques Audiard — Emilia Pérez
Coralie Fargeat — The Substance

Best Actress

Cynthia Erivo — Wicked
Karla Sofía Gascón — Emilia Pérez
Mikey Madison — Anora - Winner
Demi Moore — The Substance
Fernanda Torres — I'm Still Here

Best Actor

Adrien Brody — The Brutalist - Winner
Timothée Chalamet — A

Complete Unknown
Colman Domingo — Sing Sing
Ralph Fiennes — Conclave
Sebastian Stan — The Apprentice

Best Supporting Actress

Monica Barbaro — A Complete Unknown
Ariana Grande-Butera — Wicked
Felicity Jones — The Brutalist
Isabella Rossellini — Conclave
Zoe Saldaña — Emilia Pérez - Winner

Best Supporting Actor

Yura Borisov — Anora
Kieran Culkin — A Real Pain - Winner
Edward Norton — A Complete Unknown
Guy Pearce — The Brutalist
Jeremy Strong — The Apprentice

Best Original Screenplay

Anora - Winner

The Brutalist
A Real Pain
September 5
The Substance

Best Adapted Screenplay

A Complete Unknown
Conclave - Winner
Emilia Pérez
Nickel Boys
Sing Sing

Best International Feature Film

I'm Still Here - Winner
The Girl With the Needle
Emilia Pérez
The Seed of the Sacred Fig
Flow

Best Animated Feature Film

Flow - Winner

Inside Out 2
Memoir of a Snail
Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl
The Wild Robot

Best Documentary Feature Film

Black Box Diaries
No Other Land - Winner
Porcelain War
Soundtrack to a Coup D'Etat
Sugarcane

Best Original Score

The Brutalist - Winner

Conclave
Emilia Pérez
Wicked
The Wild Robot

Best Original Song

“El Mal” — Emilia Pérez - Winner
“The Journey” — Six Triple Eight
“Like a Bird” — Sing Sing
“Mi Camino” — Emilia Pérez
“Never Too Late” — Elton John: Never Too Late

Best Cinematography

The Brutalist - Winner

Dune: Part Two
Emilia Pérez
Maria
Nosferatu

Best Production Design

The Brutalist
Conclave

Dune: Part Two
Nosferatu
Wicked - Winner

Best Costume Design

A Complete Unknown
Conclave
Gladiator II
Nosferatu
Wicked - Winner

Best Makeup and Hairstyling

A Different Man
Emilia Pérez
Nosferatu
The Substance - Winner
Wicked

Best Visual Effects

Alien: Romulus
Better Man

Dune: Part Two - Winner
Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes
Wicked

Best Sound

A Complete Unknown
Dune: Part Two - Winner
Emilia Pérez
Wicked
The Wild Robot

Best Film Editing

Anora - Winner
The Brutalist
Conclave
Emilia Pérez
Wicked

Best Live-Action Short Film

A Lien
Anuja

I'm Not a Robot - Winner
The Last Ranger
The Man Who Could Not Remain Silent

Best Animated Short Film

Beautiful Men
In the Shadow of the Cypress - Winner
Magic Candies
Wander to Wonder
Yuck!

Best Documentary Short Film

Death by Numbers
I Am Ready Warden
Incident
Instruments of a Beating Heart
The Only Girl in the Orchestra - Winner

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'Harry Potter' TV Series Officially Casts John Lithgow, Nick Frost, Janet McTeer & Paapa Essiedu Among 6



The franchise follows the life of a young wizard, the titular Harry Potter, whose parents died under mysterious circumstances when he was very young. He was forced to live a life of misery and servitude to his aunt and uncle and their awful son before he was freed when Hagrid extended an invitation that changed his life forever. The adventure begins as Harry and his magical friends Ron and Hermione become students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, who come of age in a time of extreme turmoil where the threat of war looms close.

The *Harry Potter* series comes from writer-showrunner [Francesca Gardiner](#), an executive producer alongside Mark Mylod, who will direct multiple episodes for HBO in association with Brontë Film and TV and Warner Bros Television.

The eight hit Warner Bros films were released between 2001 and 2011, with the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, split into two features. The two longest novels are *Deathly Hallows* and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the fifth and lengthiest book in the series. Potentially, more time could be devoted to these two titles with an extra season for each. However, Max has yet to reveal how much time they will focus on each novel per season. One thing that has been confirmed is that the prequel books under the "Fantastic Beasts" franchise will not be part of the series, unless they are casually introduced like in the films when the young Hogwarts students read them as part of their curriculum.

"We're delighted to have such extraordinary talent onboard, and we can't wait to see them bring these beloved characters to new life," said Gardiner and Mylod in a joint statement.

Casting is still underway for many major roles including that of the titular wizard, best known as the Boy That Lived, famously portrayed by Daniel Radcliffe on the big screen. Also up for grabs are the roles of his dearest friends Ron and Hermione, originally played by Rupert Grint and Emma Watson, respectively. A casting call revealed that prospective actors should be between 9 and 11 years old as of this month.

Production is set to begin this summer at Leavesden Studios, around 20 miles from London, and is the current home of the official Harry Potter Studio Tour and where the films were shot.

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The newly cast actors have received many awards and accolades for their contributions to film and television on both sides of the pond.

Lithgow is a six-time Emmy, two-time Tony Award and Olivier winner, and BAFTA and Oscar nominee who will follow in the footsteps of Richard Harris, who played the Hogwarts Headmaster in the first two films, and Michael Gambon, who took over the role following Harris' death. Jude Law played Dumbledore in his early years in *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore*.

McTeer is a Tony, Golden Globe and Olivier winner, and an Oscar and Emmy nominee who takes over the role of McGonagall, the transfiguration teacher made famous by Maggie Smith and Fiona Glascott in the *Fantastic Beasts* films.

Essiedu is an Olivier, Emmy and BAFTA nominee set to play the misunderstood Snape, played in the films by Alan Rickman. Essiedu began his career as part of the prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company before landing his breakout role in the BBC and HBO production *I May Destroy You*. He made his film debut in the mystery film *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017), directed by *Harry Potter* alum Kenneth Branagh. Additional credits include *Anne Boleyn*, *The Lazarus Project* and *Black Mirror* on TV.

Frost is a British Independent Film Award nominee who has starred in many fan-favorite films and is best known for his collaborations with Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright. His credits include the Three Flavours Cornetto trilogy (consisting of *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz*, and *The World's End*), *Attack the Block*, *Fighting with My Family* and *How to Train Your Dragon* for the big screen. He famously starred in *Spaced*, *Into the Badlands* and *Star Wars: Skeleton Crew* on the small screen. Hagrid, Hogwarts' groundskeeper, was previously played by Robbie Coltrane.

Thallon, a newcomer on the scene, will take over the role of Professor Quirrell, the Muggle Studies professor who pivoted to Defense Against the Dark Arts. Ian Hart played Quirrell in the films.

Whitehouse will recur as Filch, Hogwarts' caretaker and cat dad, originally played by David Bradley. Casting news for Mrs. Norris is also pending. Whitehouse has appeared in *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, *The Death of Stalin*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. From Deadline.com

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The streamer touts the series as "a faithful adaptation of the beloved *Harry Potter* book series" by J.K. Rowling, who also exec produces with Neil Blair, Ruth Kenley-Letts of Brontë Film and TV, and David Heyman of Heyday Films.

Casey Bloys, Chairman and CEO of HBO & Max Content, previously said the *Harry Potter* series would be a deep dive into each of Rowling's novels, of which seven were released. However, he emphasized that the TV series will [run for 10 consecutive years](#).

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'The Last of Us' Renewed for Season 3 at HBO Ahead of Season 2 Premiere



HBO has picked up *The Last of Us* for a third season. The announcement Wednesday comes ahead of the anticipated *Season 2 debut on Sunday*. Deadline understands that a decision has not been made whether Season 3 will be the series' last. Creators Neil Druckmann and Craig Mazin previously told Deadline that they were *contemplating up to four total seasons* to tell the story laid out across two video games. The upcoming Season 2 is seven episodes, and the duo sought early on to quell any worry from fans that they would try to wrap up the behemoth that is *The Last of Us Part II* game in such little time.

"It can't be overemphasized how proud HBO is for the outstanding achievement we believe the second season of *The Last of Us* is," Francesca Orsi, Executive Vice President, HBO Programming, Head of HBO Drama Series and Films, said in a statement. "Craig, Neil, Carolyn and the entire executive producer team, cast and crew have delivered a masterful follow-up and we're thrilled to carry the power of Craig and Neil's storytelling into what we know will be an equally moving and extraordinary third season."

The early renewal is a show of faith for the acclaimed series, though not entirely unexpected, given that the first

season *performed so well* for the network. By the time the Season 1 finale aired, HBO said the season's average audience had *surpassed 30 million viewers*, with the premiere well on its way to 40M. That's after the premiere episode brought in a same-day audience of 4.7M, which at the time was the largest debut after *House of the Dragon* since *Boardwalk Empire* launched in 2010. HBO also recently *renewed hit The White Lotus for Season 4* ahead of its Season 3 premiere.

"To see *The Last of Us* brought to life so beautifully and faithfully has been a career highlight for me, and I am grateful for the fans' enthusiastic and overwhelming support," Druckmann said in a statement today. "Much of that success is thanks to my partner in crime, Craig Mazin, our partnership with HBO, and our team at PlayStation Productions. On behalf of everyone at Naughty Dog, our cast, and crew, thank you so much for allowing us this opportunity. We're thrilled to bring you more of *The Last of Us*!"

Mazin added: "We approached season two with the goal of creating something we could be proud of. The end results have exceeded even our most ambitious goals, thanks to our continued collaboration with HBO and the impeccable work of our unparalleled cast and crew. We look forward to continuing the story of *The Last of Us* with Season 3."

Based on Naughty Dog's award-winning video game, *The Last of Us* takes place 20 years after modern civilization has been destroyed. Joel, played by *Pedro Pascal*, a hardened survivor, is hired to smuggle Ellie (Bella Ramsey), a 14-year-old girl, out of an oppressive quarantine zone. What starts as a small job soon becomes a brutal and heartbreaking journey as they both must traverse the U.S. and depend on each other for survival.

Season 2 picks up five years after the events of the first season, Joel and Ellie are drawn into conflict with each other and a world even more dangerous and unpredictable than the one they left behind.

In addition to Pascal and Ramsey, returning cast includes Gabriel Luna and Rutina Wesley. Joining Season 2 are Kaitlyn Dever, Isabela Merced, Young Mazino, Ariela Barer, Tati Gabrielle, Spencer Lord, Danny Ramirez and Jeffrey Wright. Catherine O'Hara also guest stars.

The Last of Us is written and executive produced by Mazin and Druckmann. The series is a co-production with Sony Pictures Television and is also executive produced by Carolyn Strauss, Jacqueline Lesko, Cecil O'Connor, Asad Qizilbash, Carter Swan and Evan Wells; with writer/co-executive producer Halley Gross. PlayStation Productions, Word Games, Mighty Mint and Naughty Dog produce. From Deadline.com

'Mythic Quest' Canceled By Apple After 4 Seasons; Final Episode To Be Updated "So We Could Say Goodbye, Instead Of Just Game Over," Creators Say



Apple TV+'s *Mythic Quest* has come to an end. The streamer has opted not to renew the gaming workplace comedy series for a fifth season. The decision comes days after the Season 4 finale dropped March 26. Since it had not been conceived as a series finale, the Season 4 finale will now get a new ending to give fans closure. The updated episode will be made available next week.

"Endings are hard. But after four incredible seasons, *Mythic Quest* is coming to a close. We're so proud of the show and the world we got to build — and deeply grateful to every cast and crew member who poured their heart into it," series creators/executive producers Megan Ganz, David Hornsby and [Rob McElhenney](#) said

in a statement Friday. "To all our fans, thank you for playing with us. To our partners at Apple, thank you for believing in the vision from the very beginning. Because endings are hard, with Apple's blessing we made one final update to our last episode — so we could say goodbye, instead of just game over."



The news is not entirely surprising. The well-reviewed comedy, which got off to a buzzy start in 2020, had a quiet Season 4 run. The latest season brings stars McElhenney, Charlotte Nicdao, Hornsby, Danny Pudi, Ashly Burch, Imani

Hakim, Jessie Ennis and Naomi Ekperigin back together under the same fluorescent office lights. The reunited team at *Mythic Quest* confronts new challenges amongst a changing video game landscape as stars rise, egos clash, relationships bloom and everyone tries to have a little more work-life balance. *Mythic Quest*, whose cast early on included F. Murray Abraham, was produced by Lionsgate, 3 Arts Entertainment and Ubisoft. It was executive produced by McElhenney and Charlie Day under their RCG banner, Michael Rotenberg and Nicholas Frenkel on behalf of 3 Arts, and Boykin, Austin Dill and Gérard Guillemot for Ubisoft Film & Television. Hornsby and Ganz also executive produce.

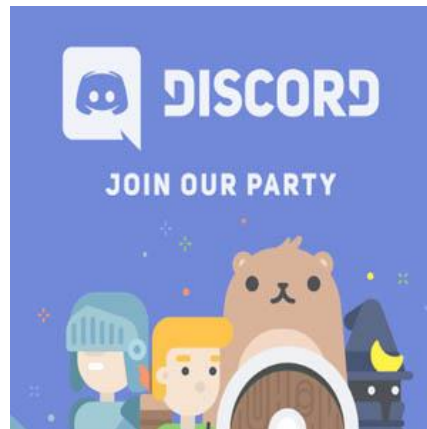
The series spawned offshoot *Side Quest*, which explores the lives of employees, player and fans who are impacted by the game in an anthology format. The four-episode series stars McElhenney, Anna Konkle, Derek Waters, William Stanford Davis, Bria Samoné Henderson, Rome Flynn, Leonard Robinson, Gary Kraus, Annamarie Kasper, Esai Morales, Shalita Grant and more. From [deadline.com](#)

'The Lincoln Lawyer' Season 4 Adds Kyle Richards, Jason Butler Harner & Scott Lawrence



Netflix's hit series *The Lincoln Lawyer* has added [Kyle Richards](#) (*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*), Jason Butler Harner (*Ozark*), and Scott Lawrence (*Paradise*) to its Season 4 guest cast. The storyline was teed up at the end of the Season 3 finale of the hit legal drama when Mickey Haller (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo) was pulled over and arrested when the body of a client was found in the trunk of his Lincoln. Next season will see Mickey defending himself as he goes on trial for murder. He will face off with the

prosecutor on the case, Dana Berg (Constance Zimmer), who has ties to his first ex-wife, Maggie (Neve Campbell).



Butler Harner will play Det. Drucker is a seasoned Robbery Homicide detective with many years of investigations under his belt. He proves to be an especially determined adversary for Mickey. Lawrence will play Judge Stone, a former prosecutor known for his prickly attitude and tough sentencing. He is intimidating and impatient, but ultimately, his rulings seek to treat both sides equally. In addition to all mentioned above, the cast is also led by Becki Newton and Angus Sampson. Marcus Henderson, Gigi Zumbado, and KTLA Reporter Kacey Montoya will also appear. The season is based on the sixth book in *The Lincoln Lawyer* book series by Michael Connelly, *The Law of Innocence*. *The Lincoln Lawyer*, from A&E Studios, was created for television by David E. Kelley and developed for television by Ted Humphrey. From [Deadline.com](#)



MONTHLY MOVIE

★★ REVIEWS ★★

“The Accountant 2” Review by Marcus Blake



Have you ever watched a movie where you feel like they didn't need a sequel? The first movie was so good that a sequel can only ruin it?! But then you're glad that they made the sequel because not only did it live up to expectations, but surpassed them. The Accountant with Ben Affleck is one of those movies. I was surprised by how much I liked it when it came out years ago and I thought a sequel would only ruin it because it couldn't be as good. Well, I'm wrong again... the last time I was this wrong was with Top Gun: Maverick. No, I won't say that The Accountant 2 is as good... It's not! However, I was completely surprised by how good this movie really is even if it's not a great

movie! It's a lot of fun despite using familiar tropes that we've seen in movies and despite the fact that it's really just a buddy cop film but with two mercenary brothers, and that's okay because familiar tropes can still make for entertaining movies. This sequel had everything I needed in a movie, plenty of action, plenty of laughter, some very emotional scenes especially when the main characters rescue innocent children, and great chemistry between its two lead actors, Ben Affleck and Jon Bernthal. They play characters that are easy to root for and leave you wanting more.

The story picks up 8 years after the first movie with former Deputy Director of the Treasury Department as a private investigator trying to find someone and ends up getting murdered and leaving an ominous note on his dead body, "find the accountant!" We pick up with his replacement, Agent Medina who does find Christian Wolf and gets his help solving the mystery of Raymond King's death and what he was looking for. That's where the mystery starts to unravel and then the characters are off to the races. It's a familiar trope, but it still works. She plays the straight-laced cop trying to do everything by the book while the two brothers have no problem breaking the law... it

doesn't matter if you see the plot coming a mile away because the results are still good. They teaming up together is what makes the movie. I'm not going to tell you that the mystery surrounding this movie is as entertaining as the first one, but it's interesting especially when you get to see Christian Wolf's crew so to speak who work like "Oracle" in DC comics help track people down. But the best part of this movie is not just the action, but it is the chemistry between Ben Affleck and Jon Bernthal. It would be easy to believe that they're actually brothers in real life. The way they work together, from how they get on each other's nerves, to the camaraderie that they have is what makes this movie a lot of fun to watch. In a lot of ways, it feels like watching an old school detective movie where everybody has a different personality but somehow ends up getting the job done. I could have very easily seen Shane Black write this movie who's known for using those same tropes perfectly in films as in the Nice Guys and Kiss Kiss Bang Bang. The overall story is simple and doesn't get too complicated even if it's hard to believe in the concept of imposter savant syndrome, but it makes for a fun movie as our main characters save the day.

Have fun as *The Accountant 2* might be it's not a perfect movie and it's definitely not the best action movie. Ben Affleck and Jon Bernthal are great, but one of my biggest complaints is there's not enough time to really catch up with the characters. One of the best things that the first movie did is gave us enough history about them through flashback scenes and you don't really get that. With movie is set 8 years after the original so what's been happening with these characters. We get a few that shows how Christian Wolf is using the Harbor Science Institute to basically run his own intelligence agency, yes he's expanding, but what has he been doing the last eight years except rigging a dating seminar. What has Braxton been doing? The only flash vaccines we get are about the people they're trying to find that explains what happened to the characters and that's all well and good, but we as an audience want to know more about the main character. The action is top-notch, but the best scenes are when everybody is working together. The rest of the movie is basically just one long action sequence except with funny moment in a honky-tonk bar. There's more to this story than what is seen in the movie and I feel like the first movie gave us more of a story. This movie is meant to be a better action flex and that's okay, but it feels like all we do is catch up with the characters instead of reconnecting with them. It was easier to connect to all the characters in the first movie than it is in the second movie. The second movie feels more like a revenge story that doesn't have as much emotional weight. The best emotional connections we get are rescuing the kids who are about to be murdered and then getting to know Christian Wolf's intelligence team at the institute which is cool by the way. Where is the first movie is a great introduction to the

past of the brothers and especially Christian wealth along with Agent Medina.... It would be a great pilot to set up a series, the sequel feels more like an episodic episode of TV like I'm watching an episode of *Reacher* and it just leaves you wanting more. I can easily see this being turned into a series. And the story if it were to continue might be better as a series or even just the limited series. For me as a critic I don't want just one big action film, I want to emotionally connect to the characters, and I just didn't do it as much in this movie despite "The odd Couple" relationship between the two brothers. I enjoyed the action, but that emotional connection is lacking.



Overall, *The Accountant 2* is a fun movie. It's a great body cop type of film with lots of good action but doesn't carry the same emotional weight as the first movie. Now that doesn't mean that you shouldn't see it because if you're a fan of the first movie then this is a must-see sequel. It's very enjoyable but I liken this sequel to *Die Hard 2* as compared to *Die Hard 1*... Not as good, but still a fun movie with characters that we like. It's highly enjoyable on the big screen and worth the price of a movie ticket. There's a lot of great moments that will keep you laughing and Ben Affleck and Jon Bernthal are good action stars. But I think the biggest tragedy of the sequel...it's going to leave you wanting more stories and we may just never get a third movie. But I

definitely enjoyed it and watching both films will be a great double feature one afternoon. Christian Wolf is one of Ben Affleck's best characters and I would love to see more. Gavin O'Connor is one of my favorite directors who not only brings a lot of emotional connection to his characters especially in action movies but knows how to flesh out a good story. Sadly, this is not one of his best movies but still good enough. It's not a great film, but still a film worth seeing. But perhaps the only thing that truly makes this movie great as it does serve a really great epilogue to the first film kind of like *Quantum of Solace* was to *Casino Royale*. And that's okay because even okay movies are still fun to watch. But at this point, we're going to need a third movie to give us a great trilogy. You already have a fantastic cast, give us another story!

FINAL GRADE: 7 / 10

"Sinners"

Review by Jimmy Alford



I'm not going to say there haven't been good movies released in 2025. I will say that after watching *Sinners*, I left my seat a little pissed off that it took nearly four months to see something this good. *Sinners* has skyrocketed not only to the top of my horror list,

but also to the top of my must-watch list for the year. There's still a lot of 2025 left, but this will be hard to beat.

Have you ever walked out of a theater with that buzzing feeling, like you just experienced something awesome? That's how I felt after watching *Sinners*.

Director Ryan Coogler's latest movie is bold and beautiful. It approaches the horror genre in ways that feel fresh. It is both scary and soulful. The film is set in 1930s Mississippi, and Coogler does not shy away from what that setting means. This is not just a backdrop. It is the beating heart of the story. You feel the weight of Jim Crow, of economic desperation, of lives shaped by racism and struggle. But more than that, you feel the resistance, the culture, the music and the spirit of the people. Every frame feels soaked in Southern sweat and sorrow.

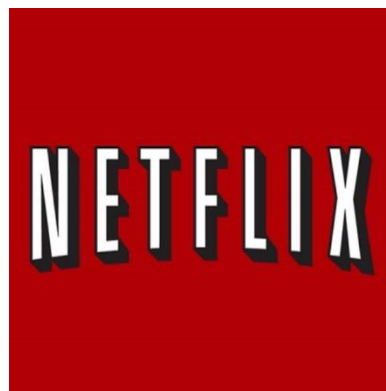
What stands out is how Coogler uses music to move the story forward and give depth to the characters. I often complain about lazy world-building in movies. Here, I have no complaints. The film blends blues, culture, religion, history and evil, both supernatural and real. Through stories passed down, through the rhythm of life, through the ghosts that live in the notes, you get a sense of how music became both a refuge and a record. The soundtrack blends old-school blues, ambient textures and a touch of country to create something that feels timeless.

It is in this rich, layered world that Coogler gives us a dual performance from Michael B. Jordan, who plays twin brothers Smoke and Stack. The brothers return to their hometown only to find both the evil they have always known and something even darker. Jordan is already well known for

his roles in *Creed* and *Black Panther*, but *Sinners* might be one of his finest performances yet. He fully commits to both roles.

Playing twins is not new, but Jordan does something truly impressive here. Smoke and Stack are two distinct individuals, with separate struggles, personalities and emotional arcs.

While Jordan's performance grounds the film, the rest of the cast is just as important. Miles Caton, making his film debut as Sammie, is a revelation. He brings charm, vulnerability and depth. His character becomes the emotional center of the film in many ways. Wunmi Mosaku, who plays Annie, delivers a commanding and graceful performance as a matriarchal figure. When she is on screen, she fully owns the moment. If you are not sure where you have seen her before, she plays Hunter B-15 in *Loki*.



Hailee Steinfeld also makes a strong impact in a more understated role. She brings warmth and grounded emotional intelligence to every scene. Her chemistry with Caton is especially compelling, with moments that feel sincere and layered.

One of the most remarkable things about *Sinners* is that while it is definitely a horror film, it is also just a really good movie. If you stripped away the supernatural elements, what remains would still

be worth watching. But don't do that. The horror elements are where the film comes alive.

The way the film shifts into horror reminded me of one of my long-time favorites, *From Dusk Till Dawn*. That movie starts off as a gritty crime drama with rich characters and sharp dialogue, and then veers into full-blown horror chaos. Coogler handles the shift with more subtlety. The early scenes carry a slow-burning sense of unease that builds beautifully and pays off.

That slow build shows in how the scares are delivered. Coogler avoids the all-too-common mistake of overusing jump scares. Yes, there are a few, but they are not the focus. The result is a more immersive experience. Coogler is not just trying to scare the audience. He is diving into themes like generational trauma, cultural memory, survival and identity. The horror in *Sinners* does not offer escape from reality. It digs into it. Once the shift happens, the film goes all in. The fear is symbolic, rooted in African American folklore and spiritual tradition. The scares land hard because they mean something. They are connected to real history, real pain and the burdens we carry, whether we want to or not. This is horror that stays with you. Not just because it is creepy, but because it feels personal.

Visually, *Sinners* is stunning. The scenes in the Mississippi cotton fields are particularly powerful. They are beautifully shot, full of texture and depth. But here is what matters most. The film does not linger on pretty imagery just for the sake of showing it off. Some movies hold a shot forever just because it looks good. *Sinners* does not fall into that trap. It keeps moving. Every frame has purpose, building the

story or shaping the mood. It is visual storytelling that stays focused on the bigger picture. At the end of the day, *Sinners* feels like a film made with deep love — for horror, for music, for history and for storytelling. It is the kind of movie you want to talk about the moment the credits roll. For me, it is a solid 9.5 out of 10.

FINAL GRADE: 10 / 10

“Bob Trevino Likes It” Review by Marcus Blake



Some movies will make you laugh to the end. Some will make you cry. But some will make you do both and those are the great movies. Invoking multiple feelings while watching a film easily makes it the best kind of film to watch, and we don't often get that anymore. I admit that as a critic, I'm not always one for tearjerkers and that's one of the reasons I don't really cover dog movies, but when I saw *Bob Trevino Likes It*, I'm glad I did and shed a few tears at the end made it worth it. So far it's my favorite indie movie of 2025 and most likely will end up being my favorite because it's this beautiful heartwarming story of connection between two human beings where you don't throw in some awkward love story, but you show the ultimate humanity in people by having

strangers find a connection. It's a movie that's filled with laughter and tears and shows us the best parts of connecting with people on social media while wading through the toxicity that comes through sites like Facebook. Writer and director Tracie Laymon took a personal story and crafted it into an inspiring story that we all need in a shitty world. As you can imagine, yes, this is a movie that you should definitely see because there's a reason that it racked up so many audience and narrative awards at film festivals starting with South X Southwest in 2024. And while the story is magical, it is only because of its cast who bring heart and vulnerability to the roles they play especially when you don't necessarily see them playing these kinds of roles which truly shows their range and we're going to get to that. So what makes this movie great and was watching?

The story is about a young girl alienated by a father who searches for him on Facebook and ends up friending someone with the same name. It's not a love story in the traditional sense, just a love of two lonely people who find a connection and become friends. And that's more real than your traditional Hallmark movie. I make that joke because some might want to compare this kind of film to a Hallmark movie and it's not as fake or ridiculous. The film stars John Leguizamo as Bob and Barbie Ferreira as Lily, the young girl looking for a connection. And of course, the wonderful French Stewart who probably plays the most awful character of his career. This movie is so good that it literally made me hate French Stewart and I didn't think that was possible! But let me be clear, not French Stewart the person because he's a wonderful human being, but his character. I've been a huge fan of John Leguizamo for over 30 years. He's a wonderful and gifted actor that shines whether he's playing a Navy SEAL and *Executive Decision* or the crazy coked-up friend, having an affair while searching his neighborhood for the son of Sam in Spike Lee's *Seminal* movie *Summer of Sam*. And this is a bit of a different role for Barbie who is great on the show *Euphoria*, if I bring so much heart to her role as Lily with a vulnerability towards the role that

only seems possible for Oscar winners. She demonstrates a beauty that we don't find every day and not in the form of physical looks, but of a human being wanting to be of service to others and be the best version of her stuff. And that's not a knock on her looks within the film, because she's absolutely stunning. I've watched the movie twice and I wonder if anybody better could have done these roles and I don't think so. Sometimes you find a wonderful accidental cast that makes everything work in the film and that's what they did. The movie has great pacing and wonderful performances and shows this very beautifully concise movie that doesn't feel too long or too short. Plus you get some truly awful characters that seem to represent people we know in our own lives whether it's a dipshit boss or an unloving parent that seems to ruin our life more than bring joy to it.



All of the characters are very real and if you're like me you know these people. They seem to be based on real people that you know which makes us as an audience easily connect to the story.

This is not one of those movies that I have any serious complaints about as a critic. It's one that I would certainly watch again and not because I've known the director for years, but because it's a wonderful story with a great cast. They always say right what you know and the best stories are the most personal stories. But I think what I like more about this film is it shows a good side of how we can connect the people via social media even today when it seems like social media is filled with propaganda and hate. It's not the main theme of the story but an underlying theme. However, as a

critic, I do have one minor complaint that really isn't a complaint, but something that just bothers me... So bear with me and please understand that I'm not just being critical for the sake of being critical. It annoys me when critics do that so I definitely try not to be too critical when it's not necessary. But the one thing I disliked about the film is I want to know more about the characters!!! If you watch it you'll see what I mean. It's easy to connect to these characters and want to know more. I even wanted to know more about French Stewart as the Dad and why he became so awful. There are lot of great movies where we we feel like we're one of the characters or they're us or we know them. That's the most beautiful part about Bob Trevino Likes it and that's what makes me want to no more of their stories. It's A beautiful film, but I could also see it as a series. I'm so connected to the story that I want to know what Lily does and how she takes everything that she learned from Bob because that's a character that's going to be a light in the world. Maybe she will become a filmmaker one day that will give the world great films. So my complaint about this film is not really a complaint only that I want to know more and I hope that this isn't the last time we visit the characters.

So what's the verdict, yes the hype is real. As I said there's a reason this film racked up so many narrative and audience awards at film festivals. Bob Trevino likes it is one of the must-see films of 2025. I'd even go as far as to say you'll walk out of the theater changed in a good way. This is a film that's definitely worth the price of a movie ticket. It's even a good date night movie. And maybe too early to talk about this film and awards season but I'm going to do it anyway. It should certainly be in the talks for best original screenplay if not best director. And, as for this unique and wonderful cast, John, Barbie, and French bring heart and a sensibility to their characters that makes you want to get to know them better or in French Stewart's case makes you want to punch his character. But that's what a brilliant and wonderful actor does. They make you like them one moment and then they make you hate them. Tracie Laymon as the writer and director knocks it out of the park with

her first feature film and only the future is bright for this talented and wonderful filmmaker. I expect great things from her career and I do not doubt that as a critic along with other fellow critics, we will be talking about her films for a long time. Go see Bob Trevino Likes It. You will not be disappointed!

FINAL GRADE: 9 / 10

“A Minecraft Movie” Review by Jimmy Alford



When it comes to video game adaptations, films trip over their own feet trying to either prove themselves to the title's fanbase, or choose to ignore them and stand apart. Most of the time, no one comes away happy. And when you're talking about a game like Minecraft, what kind of movie do you really think you're going to get? It's not steeped in lore like Fallout, or the Legend of Zelda. Minecraft's charm has always been about players getting the chance to make their own world with their own rules. Frankly, it's absurd in a fun and silly way, which is evident even in its graphics. While much of the gaming world was pushing boundaries in 3D rendering and motion-sensing capabilities,

Minecraft the game was sticking to blocky easy to render graphics.

Ultimately, how can the silly, absurd but approachable nature of Minecraft be projected onto the big screen? The answer seems pretty obvious now that I'm writing it all down. Step 1: hire Jack Black, Step 2: embrace the silliness and lean into the absurdity. Step 3: name it *A Minecraft Movie* and If there's space for a fourth-wall breaking joke, don't be shy. Director Jared Hess ultimately delivers a fun, lighthearted romp that never takes itself too seriously. And honestly? That's a good thing. From the very start, the film makes it clear that it knows exactly what it is: a goofy, action-packed kids' adventure that just happens to be based on one of the most popular video games of all time. The film oozes self-awareness and revels in its blocky ridiculousness. It's loud, it's fast, and it never really stops to catch its breath, and at the same time never pretends to be more than what it is. That's where the fun comes in.

The plot is refreshingly simple: A ragtag group of real-world people find themselves in the Overworld. They must quickly learn the rules of survival, meet quirky characters like Steve, played by Jack Black, and defeat the evil Piglin Malgosha, voiced by Rachel House... That's about it and it works because the movie isn't trying to be high art.

As usual Black is basically plays himself and fully commits to his role as a bearded, slightly unhinged Steve who has embraced the bizarre logic of this world. His performance is a delightful mix of enthusiasm and absurdity, and his scenes are easily some of the funniest. The only character as absurd as Black's would be Jason Mamoa's character Garrett. These two combine to form some of the cringiest, most eye-rolling takes

ever and they are completely delightful. Their wacky-stupid chemistry goes so hard, it smacks of 90s Adam Sandler, Rob Schneider, Chris Farley and David Spade.



It's a shame though that Mamoa's and Black's on screen performance completely overshadows the main characters, Henry and his sister Natalie, played by Sebastian Hansen and Emma Myers, respectively. Mobile petting zookeeper/real estate agent Dawn, played by Danielle Brooks is also lost in the mix for the most part. Focusing on anyone who is not Black or Mamoa is like going to a hibachi grill and trying to really focus on the salad while the chef is launching three-foot walls of fire inches from your face. Visually, 'A Minecraft Movie' does a solid job of translating the game's aesthetic into a live-action setting. The pixelated world feels immersive, the mobs are instantly recognizable, and there are plenty of nods to game mechanics that will have players grinning. From crafting to Redstone contraptions, it's all there—but never over-explained. To my personal favorite line from Black "First we mine, and then we craft! Let's minecraft!" So yes, they do say it out loud and it is super obvious.

Is the movie predictable? Absolutely. Is the humor sometimes a little too on-the-nose? Without a doubt. But does any of

that really matter when the film is so clearly having a blast? Not really. I can tell you my 9-year-old and 6-year-old daughters both loved it. I can say that was pretty much the standard when I left the theater, kids were all over the place completely over the moon about what they just saw. They didn't care if the story was one dimensional. This is the kind of movie where logic takes a backseat to fun, and while some critics may groan at the by-the-numbers storytelling, kids (and kids-at-heart) will be too busy laughing to care.

Frankly, I was relieved. Part of me knew Black would be fine, I'm not always sure about what Mamoa will deliver. Who can blame me for worrying a little bit that I was walking my kids into a snoozefest. Video game movies don't have a fantastic track record and are usually, at best, hit or miss.

One of the better examples in recent years is *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* (2023). It fully embraced the source material's colorful chaos and sense of fun. The film didn't try to be anything more than an entertaining ride packed with nostalgia, and it worked. And, funnily enough, Jack Black once again stole the show, this time as Bowser. His ridiculous, over-the-top performance (and that unforgettable "Peaches" song) cemented the film as a crowd-pleaser.

On the other hand, there are films like *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010). A movie that wasn't exactly bad but wasn't particularly good either. It was watchable, with decent action and an attempt at epic storytelling. Jake Gyllenhaal as a Persian prince? That was a choice. Then there's *Borderlands* (2024). A movie no one should have to sit through. It was drowned

in forced humor, poor pacing, and a script that seemed allergic to the actual appeal of the games.

At the end of the day, 'A Minecraft Movie' is a rollercoaster of pixelated chaos that knows exactly what it wants to be: a fun, dumb, and highly entertaining ride. It's not groundbreaking, it's not deep, and it's certainly not trying to redefine cinema. But it is a wildly enjoyable adventure that understands its audience and delivers exactly what it promises—a movie kids will love and parents won't mind sitting through. And sometimes, that's more than enough.

FINAL GRADE: 7 / 10

"O'DESSA"

Review by Chloe James



There are musicals. Then there are rock musicals. Specifically rock musicals that like to call themselves "rock operas." While I can't find the specific difference between the two, other than rock operas originally were meant as storytelling concept albums, only meant to be staged as an afterthought, it seems the definition has evolved past that. While I love musicals written in

the more traditional form, there's something about a rock opera, especially in film form that has always captured my attention. I mostly blame accidentally watching Rocky Horror Picture Show as a child on repeat (without my parents knowing!) For me a good rock opera film is everything captured in Rocky Horror: camp, melodrama, dark humor, avant-garde aesthetic, and most of all, great music.

I may not have seen all of them, but I definitely think it's a genre that's not overdone yet. So yeah, when I see a teaser for a film that literally calls itself a "rock opera", such as the just released O'Dessa, I'm going to get excited. Sadie Sink stars as the title character, a 19 year old farm girl living in a vaguely dystopian future where the world is poisoned by a mysterious fuel source called Miasma, and only one major city remains in civilization. When her mother dies, O'Dessa begins her journey as a "rambler" (their word for traveling bard), with full belief she will fulfill her prophesied destiny as the one who's song will bring hope to humanity. Along the way, she'll be inspired by true love, and hindered by a lot of bad guys.

One of the most important aspects of a musical is the music and this is one of the shining lights of this film. Jeremy Jasper and Jason Binnick really hit it out of the park with this one. The Southern rock/blues heavy soundtrack didn't have a single disappointing song. That being said, Jeremy Jasper might have bit off more than he could chew with everything else. As a co-composer, writer, and director, it seems like he cared more about making a banging soundtrack than making a fully cohesive story.

It's important to note that films like this; Rocky Horror Picture

Show, Repo The Genetic Opera and to a lesser extent, Hedwig and the Angry Inch had one thing in common that this film lacks; originating from the stage. These films were able to audit story during stage rehearsals, creating a plot line while retaining camp. O'Dessa seems to attempt to emulate this without doing the due diligence, causing the story to suffer, creating something more akin to The Apple, but less original. Something that was also distractingly missing was any form of comedy. For camp to exist, you need comedy. Not blatantly parody, but some comedic moments to lift the material out of the realm of pretension.

It's definitely not all bad. Every actor in this film blasted through the cringe and created amazing performances, especially Sadie Sink. O'Dessa successfully creates a tone that is fairly consistent. Every department of the film did a phenomenal job with what they had in the script. Unfortunately, said script was just a collection of decent-to-good ideas that was barely sewn together correctly like a patchwork quilt.

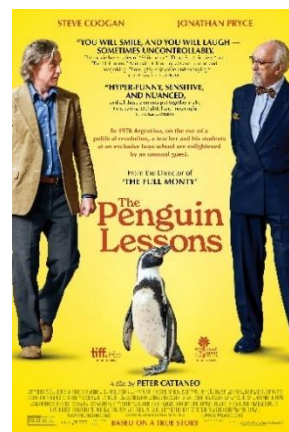


While O'Dessa definitely was a disappointment on a film level, I can't bring myself to say I disliked it. It was very entertaining from beginning to end, and dare I say enjoyable for the most part, despite its glaring flaws. I think only time will tell if fellow lovers of the rock

opera genre will judge it harshly, or see it as the next potential cult classic. While I don't personally think it has every ingredient to become one of these for this generation, it's difficult for me to know for sure. After all, most of the most beloved rock opera films weren't understood by critics either.

FINAL GRADE: 6 / 10

"The Penguin Lessons" Review by Marcus Blake



Gather your tissues because you may need them with this movie. The Penguin Lessons, starring Steve Coogan is one of those great movies that tugs at your emotional strings. It'll make you laugh, it'll make you cry, it will be the inspirational film you need. And I admit, any movie that deals with rescuing an animal tends to be slightly more emotional. I very much enjoyed this movie and am a massive fan of Steve Coogan, he never disappoints even when he takes on dramatic roles. But this is a movie definitely worth watching and you will be glad that you did.

Based on a true story, Steve Coogan plays disillusioned English teacher, Tom Mitchell who ends up teaching at a prep school in Argentina during the political

revolution of the 1970s. Like all disillusioned teachers, he's just biding his time until while on holiday he ends up rescuing a penguin from an oil spill and now the penguin follows him everywhere. Forced to take it back with him to school, he tries to hide it well grudgingly caring for the penguin and then it becomes an inspiration, not only to him, but to the students in his class and the faculty who aren't supposed to let him keep a penguin. Yes, the movie is a typical story of how a lost animal can open our hearts and make us love again. Steve Coogan does a wonderful job portraying the disillusioned teacher. He's a great comedic actor, but I think he does even better at drama...this role is a great example. But it's him and the Penguin that steals the movie. Easily the best performance is, but everybody does a wonderful job. There was serious unrest in Argentina during the 1970s as political opposition would up and disappear. So one of the underlining stories is how when the daughter of his housekeeper ends up disappearing for her political beliefs, the penguin becomes an inspiration to not only the people around it, but the headmaster of the school who takes a stand and gets the daughter released. The best parts of this movie and what makes it work are not only the performances from the cast but these great humorous moments with the penguin.

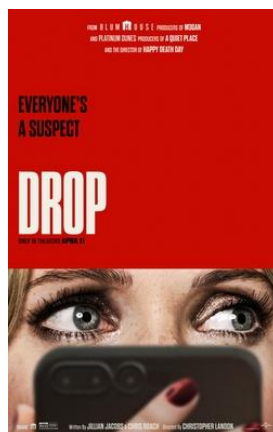
As I said this is a movie worth seeing, it may be predictable at times especially, as a movie based on a true story where you already know what may happen. The themes about the characters finding love and inspiration again, may also be predictable, but I don't think that's necessarily a complaint. Sometimes we need heartfelt movies where we know what's going to happen but we watch it anyway because it makes

us feel good in the end. That's what *The Penguin Lessons* does... It will bring warmth and joy to your life especially when you need it the most. But I also warn the audience, it is a bit of a tearjerker, however, that should not dissuade you from watching the movie. My only serious complaint is cramming the story into two hours. Obviously, there were more stories to tell about Tom Mitchell and the Penguin, and this story might have made for a great series on a streaming channel. However, it's still a wonderful movie with good pacing, beautiful cinematography, and most importantly, fantastic emotional and comedic performances. I love making comparisons to films so this is very much like Kevin Kline's movie, *The Emperor's Club*, but with a Penguin at the heart of the story. It's the kind of inspirational movie you may end up only watching once, but you're the better for it and you won't be disappointed. I certainly enjoyed this movie more than the latest Jason Statham action movie, in which he plays the same character. Absolutely, this movie is worth the price of a movie ticket.... It's even a good date movie!

FINAL GRADE: 8 / 10

“DROP”

Review by Jimmy Alford



It's not often I feel transported through time and space while watching a film. Seriously. As *Drop* unfolded before my eyes, I was a preteen again in rural East Texas. We had only a few channels and a bunch of VHS tapes full of movies. I don't mean the official ones with studio artwork on the dust covers—I'm talking about the long-play, taped-from-TV kind, three movies per cassette, neatly labeled in my mom's or grandmother's handwriting.

I really just wanted to watch *Ghostbusters* for the millionth time or *Return of the Jedi* for the million-and-first. But *Drop* is the kind of made-for-TV movie I had to fast-forward through every single time. I knew I shouldn't—it wears out the tape, and adjusting the tracking doesn't always help. But I had Ewoks to watch. And thank God for Legos. That was when I came to: no Ewoks, no Legos, and it was still the first act.

If you've made it through my fever dream, you've probably gathered this wasn't the highlight of my week. In all seriousness—if that's still possible at this point—*Drop* isn't the worst film I've ever seen, but it's yet another entry in a long line of thrillers that would be over in 10 minutes if the characters reacted like normal human beings. I wish I had pressed fast-forward.

The basic plot of *Drop* revolves around Violet, a widowed single mother played by Meghann Fahy, who's venturing out on her first date in years. Naturally, the evening spirals into a high-stakes nightmare. She finds herself ensnared in a tech-driven conspiracy that threatens the lives of her son and sister.

Things begin innocently enough, until Violet receives unsettling “drops” from a stranger. The drops

are supposedly like iPhone AirPods, but instead of files or photos, they're more like anonymous text messages—sort of? This major plot device arrives early, and I had to wonder if writers Jillian Jacobs and Chris Roach have ever owned a smartphone. I had so many questions. When Violet first gets the weird messages, why doesn't she block the sender? The app is on her phone—how does she not know what it is? She ignores multiple messages before it's revealed a gunman is inside her house. Any normal person would've uninstalled the app or muted it—anything other than passively reacting to a digital prankster with sinister intent. She won't turn off her phone because she's "clingy" with her son, who's with her sister. But she's on a date. Turn the phone off. Speaking of her date, if Henry (Brandon Sklenar) were a real person, he'd deserve a medal—or at least a psychological evaluation. Somehow, he tolerates Violet's increasingly flaky and erratic behavior long before she even knows there's a gunman involved. After the reveal, his continued patience stretches the limits of believability.

Those are just the issues with the tech. The film is barely held together from scene to scene by contrived plot devices, cringeworthy characters, and lackluster writing. The characters are baffling and dense, lacking depth or development. It's clear that director Christopher Landon was aiming for a smart thriller, but this simply isn't it. Known for genre-blending films like *Freaky* and *Happy Death Day*, Landon excels at horror-comedy, not Hitchcockian thrillers. The "twists" are telegraphed from a mile away. The result is less Hitchcock and more Hallmark. The visual style doesn't help. The

lighting and camerawork are jarring and distracting. Not "intriguing" distracting—just bad. Sudden shifts in tone, strange continuous shots, and forced eeriness pull viewers out of the experience instead of immersing them. Blumhouse Productions, one of the three studios behind the film, seems to have leaned heavily on aesthetics borrowed from its hits like *Sinister* and *Insidious*. Unfortunately, that style doesn't translate to a high-rise dinner thriller. Plenty of viewers will probably enjoy *Drop*. They'll excuse its flaws and empathize with its luddite protagonist. As for me? I say: do better. The movie fails on nearly every front. I'd rather watch *Joker: Folie à Deux* again.

FINAL GRADE: 1 / 10

"The Electric State" **Review by Chloe James**



Is it better to have read the book it was based on before watching a movie? An average nerd (often myself included) will usually answer yes. Whether it's so we can get that extra context for the world and characters, a deeper appreciation for the art direction, or simply that self-satisfied

smugness of being able to say "the book was better." You can tell from my reviews over the years, I love seeing what films can do with my favorite books (and video games on occasion.) But, as a busy adult with somehow worsening ADHD, I've had less and less opportunity to be able to say "I read the book first." I've had to rely on others to tell me if a movie adaptation has done a book justice.

In the case of *The Electric State*, Netflix's latest made-for-streaming film, I haven't had the privilege of reading the 2018 illustrated novel by Simon Stålenhag that it's based on. But unfortunately, I've read some of the reviews by other critics who were able to view the film before me. Let's just say I didn't go into this with much optimism. Set in an alternate timeline 1995 in which robots are much more advanced but lost a war against humans and banished to the desert wastelands, Michelle (Millie Bobby Brown) an orphaned teenager encounters a robot modeled after a children's cartoon she used to watch. She soon realizes that the robot is being controlled somehow by the mind of her brother whom she thought had died in a tragic accident. This leads her on an adventure across the southwestern U.S. to find the location of her brother's body. The truth she discovers, however, ends up going way deeper than she could have realized.

Directed by the Russo Brothers (*The Avengers* and even more importantly some of the best episodes of *Community*), armed with an over 300 million dollar budget, and stacked with an impressive cast including Chris Pratt, Stanley Tucci, Woody Harrelson, Ke Huy Quan, and Anthony Mackie just to name a few, this film certainly has a pretty good set up to be successful. And yet, *The Electric State* seems to be

a miss for quite a few viewers. And I'm left in a state of confusion here because to be honest? I quite enjoyed it.

From what I could gather, many of the criticisms of the film stem from it being a shallow adaptation of a deeper, nuanced source material. And yeah, as someone who has seen that happen with most book to film adaptations I've read, I get it. It's disappointing to see the important details left out, the tonal inaccuracies, the missing or miscast characters. But now, all of a sudden I feel like I'm at an advantage for once by not reading the book first. This film was just sheer fun for me. Not in the thought provoking science fiction art-house way, but in the I'm a kid watching an adventure movie about robots kind of way. There was something about this film that harkened back to that feeling of just watching a vhs of something you picked out at Blockbuster as a kid based off the cover, eating a lot of candy and pizza, and just having a good time. Like specifically for me, it gave me flashbacks of *Starship Troopers* and *Return To Oz*. I can't exactly tell you why those two.

Visually, I think they did an impressive job, crossing elements from the highly stylized visual novel it was based on, and a tiny bit of realism. In true *Avengers* fashion, the Russo brothers are great at throwing a lot on the screen at once, potentially triggering an overstimulation burnout, but great if you like a busy scene. The aging millennial in me found guilty pleasure in the mid 90's fashion, music, and even computers, despite being set in an alternate timeline with more advanced technology. As mentioned earlier, the cast is certainly impressive. Millie Bobby Brown is already well experienced at being a leading lady in a retro-sci-fi, but probably enjoyed playing a more normal rebellious teenager

for once. Similarly, Chris Pratt as the off grid re-seller "Keats" does what Chris Pratt does best, being a silly, kind of loser. Not much different from his as Star Lord, but hey, it works for this film too. And Stanley Tucci is the actor I can watch in anything and love no matter what. I do feel his performance in this one was surprisingly subtle compared to his normal characters, especially in a film so full of animated personalities I'll never say that *The Electric State* is high art or even a good adaptation. At least I can't say it is a good adaptation until I read the book. But that's the thing, I enjoyed this movie enough to where I really want to read the book. This may be controversial, but if a movie makes a viewer want to read its source material, isn't that some form of success? Either way, the film is a really fun watch with a lot of heart. I definitely recommend giving it a watch if that's all you're looking for.

FINAL GRADE: 7 / 10

"Novocaine"

Review by Marcus Blake



Movies whose sole purpose is just to entertain us tend to be the best movies. Why, because they're pure escapism and don't require us to

really think or reflect on some deep allegory that changes our perspective. I'm not saying those kinds of movies aren't good or even necessary, but sometimes we just want to escape from reality and be entertained. That's why *Novocaine* starring Jack Quaid is the purest form of escapism. I love this movie more than I should. It's not going to win any awards and maybe compared to other films it's not a great film, but it's a lot of fun and I will definitely watch it again. It's a movie filled with non-stop action and plenty of moments that will make you cringe, but also makes you laugh all the way to the end.



Jack Quaid plays a bank manager who suffers from CIPA, he can't feel pain and doesn't register when he's actually hurt and because of this, inherited the nickname "Novocaine." He finally meets the girl of his dreams and then she's taken hostage during a bank robbery. He can't help but play the hero and go after her while getting beat up, stabbed, and even shot. So imagine the character who doesn't feel pain taking on criminals who can beat him to a pulp and is probably almost dead, but still keeps "trucking" in an attempt to rescue her. That's when the action starts. Like I said there are plenty of cringe-worthy moments, but also a lot of hilarious moments as Jack Quaid's character plays the hapless hero who can't be hurt. There's nothing special about the

plot, but you root for this character despite getting himself into all sorts of situations and that's what makes this movie fun to watch.

The movie is also good because you get really good performances. I've never thought of Jack Quaid as leading man material. He is much more of a sidekick as he demonstrates that perfectly in the show *The Boys* on Amazon Prime, but he is the hero in this movie that is easy to root for. Now, I won't spoil the movie because you should experience everything that happens to the character without any spoilers. The movie isn't too long and the pacing is great so you won't get bored unlike movies that suffer from pacing problems. The only problems with this movie in my opinion, you don't get enough backstory with the characters. While it's easy to root for the main character, there isn't any real connection to the characters because we don't get a chance to get to know that. This movie relies solely on comedic action to entertain us and that's not a bad thing it doesn't make the film as good as it could be. However, this movie isn't a drama, it's an action-comedy movie that relies on the best parts of the movie to make it worth watching. My complaints about the movie are minor because even though there's not much of the plot and we as an audience may want to know more all these characters backstory, it isn't necessary to keep us entertained.

Novocaine is a pure popcorn flick and worth the price of a movie ticket. This movie doesn't disappoint when it comes to pure entertainment and Jack Quaid proves that he can be a likable leading man just like his dad Dennis Quaid. Honestly, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the film because there are so many films that come out where we

don't really think about it and therefore no anticipation when it comes to that movie, we solely just go in and hope to be entertained. However, this will be one of the surprise hits of 2025.

FINAL GRADE: 8 / 10

"Black Bag"

Review by Jimmy Alford



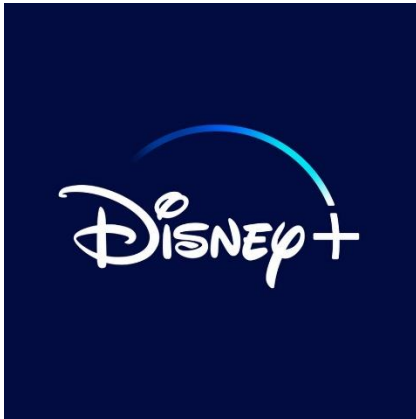
"Soderbergh proves spy movies can still be made for adults!" Cool, suave, and smart is the second-best way to describe the newly released espionage film *Black Bag*. The best way? "Thank God, they made a spy movie for actual adults." I can't stress this enough—this is NOT a spy thriller that will find *The Bourne Identity*, *Casino Royale*, or *True Lies* to be satisfying bedfellows. This isn't an action film designed to thrill angsty, ADHD-addled teens or bong-ripping college students. At the same time, it doesn't swing entirely to the other end of the spectrum like *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. In fact, I enjoyed *Black Bag* much more than *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. While *Black Bag* may be the lesser film in a direct comparison, it's a much easier watch, offering flashes of humor to balance the serious tone throughout.

The storyline gets pretty intense, so the humor is much appreciated. Cate Blanchett and Michael Fassbender play husband-and-wife spies Kathryn and George Woodhouse, a sleek and intelligent couple whose undying commitment to each other is something most marriages can only dream of. George is meticulous—changing his shirt at the sight of a single stain from a dinner he prepares—while Kathryn is more free-spirited yet authoritative.



Their devotion is a constant point of contention among their fellow spooks, who doubt that such a high level of honesty, trust, and monogamy could coexist with the clandestine nature of their profession. All of this is put to the test when George is asked to investigate Kathryn, who is one of several suspects in a major government-toppling plot. At first blush, I described this movie as *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* meets *The Thomas Crown Affair*. In all honesty, the *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* comparison is thin at best, working only in the most superficial sense. Yes, they're spies. Yes, they're married. But Blanchett and Fassbender deliver far stronger on-screen chemistry, despite the film's restraint in physical intimacy. *Black Bag* is undeniably sensual, with nuances of the couple's passion, but it never crosses into gratuitous. I'd

have no problem watching this with my kids in the room. Fassbender and Blanchett are superb, but this movie owes its charm and sophistication to writer David Koepp and director Steven Soderbergh. *Black Bag* is filled with smart decisions and beautifully shot. Every line of dialogue serves a purpose—there are no throwaway lines or exposition dumps that insult the audience’s intelligence.



The writing keeps you entertained, though I have to admit the conspiracy plot is fairly predictable. Pierce Brosnan’s character, in particular, feels underdeveloped. He could have been played by any aging British actor, and his role in the main plot is never fully explained or fleshed out. While the audience can piece things together by the end, his character feels somewhat forgotten and rushed compared to the rest of the movie’s careful storytelling. The pacing is tight but never cramped. I often complain about dead air and useless scenes where actors stare into space, but every second of *Black Bag*’s 93-minute runtime is used effectively. Soderbergh avoids the common director’s trap of turning this into a bloated think piece bogged down by frustratingly long pauses. Instead, he delivers solid, engaging storytelling. Is this movie perfect? No. But it’s good—and made for actual adults. There’s nothing wrong with mindless action.

Believe me, I love it. But after years of superhero movies, I’m ready for something different. *Black Bag* delivers. It’s a solid 8 out of 10 for me.

FINAL GRADE: 8 / 10

“Magazine Dreams” Review by Marcus Blake



Magazine Dreams has finally been released. It was almost completely shelved after its star, Jonathan Majors, was accused of domestic violence and put on trial. But after being acquitted, Roadside Pictures decided to release the film and I for one am glad they did because this may be the best performance of Jonathan Major’s career. It’s Oscar-worthy and I do not doubt that we will be talking about this performance during award season. While the film is not an easy movie to watch, it’s gut-wrenching and emotional, and the story is marked by an even better performance by Jonathan Majors. I remember two years ago when the movie was originally set to be released, critics were already giving it Oscar buzz, and I hope that despite any real-life controversy surrounding its star,

there’s buzz surrounding his performance this year. Needless to say, I was intrigued by the film when it was going to be released in 2023, but sometimes Hollywood has a fickle memory especially when there’s real controversy surrounding the film. However, I hope other critics like myself can get past that and recognize the greatness within this film and why we need to be talking about Jonathan Majors’ performance.

The film center is around a troubled young man whose life’s ambition is to be a bodybuilder and Grace the covers of magazines, hence the name, *Magazine Dreams*. The character doesn’t have an easy life while also serving as a caregiver for his grandfather. We delve into his past with the tragic death of his parents, but he has one singular goal and that is to be the best bodybuilder in the world, to be Mr Olympian, and grace the covers of magazines. Immediately you feel for the character... It’s easy to sympathize with him even when he’s awkward and violent. Well, it is never explicitly explained whether the character is on the spectrum of Asperger’s or autism, you get a sense that he might be. But if the story does anything it sheds light on one’s mental health especially when dealing with the tragic death of a parent or both. Jonathan Majors is what drives this story. There’s a vulnerability to his character beyond anything we’ve ever seen in other characters he’s played. I very much enjoyed his character in *Creed 3* and sympathized with the ex-boxer and best friend of Adonis Creed who in a strange twist of fate ends up going to prison and sees the life he could have had and *Creed*’s boxing career. While he may be the villain of that story, he doesn’t necessarily feel like a villain, just somebody who’s trying to survive. The same could be said of his character in

Magazine Dreams even when he does some f@#ked up shit. I don't make excuses for the character's actions, but he's also easily taken advantage of by judges and his bodybuilding hero. The film is a great movie even if you only watch it once because each scene is a chance to see all these tiny wonderful performances by Jonathan Majors as he shows a very vulnerable and broken character that you want to succeed, but know that he will not!

However, the film is not without its problems. Elijah Bynum, the writer and director has crafted a fabulous story but my biggest issue is the editing. Its about 20 minutes too long. This is a movie about a character self-destructing and making wrong choices while achieving his dreams, but it shouldn't take 2 hours to get to the point where he will make the ultimate choice. While good films that deal with the self-destruction of a main character as always built upon little scenes that show that self-destruction. Leaving Las Vegas with Nicolas Cage is a good example, films shouldn't have overkill when it comes to that story. We as an audience can only take so much. I use Leaving Las Vegas is a great example because it didn't take 2 hours to see the complete self-destruction of the main character. But my criticism is not so much the story itself and delving into the character's past because Elijah Bynum has written and directed a wonderful story. The real issue is editing and if you read my reviews I've complained about over and under-editing before. Setting a concise and straightforward pace that doesn't make a movie feel too long especially when you're dealing with emotional wreckage is the key to keeping the audience's attention. I admit that I got to about 90 minutes and I was already ready for the movie to come to its final conclusion.

However, the ending is amazing and delivers without fail, the idea that we are always one wrong choice from completely ruining our lives. Or in this case, one right choice that ends up saving us.

I won't spoil the ending, but the journey that the audience will take is worth it when getting to the end. And Jonathan Majors does a fantastic job making us care and be sympathetic towards his character. He makes us connect with the character of Killian Maddox. Not every actor can truly do that. I've always believed that Jonathan Majors is a wonderful actor even if his performances are sometimes overshadowed by other cast members, but his performance in Magazine Dreams proves that when an actor can put their raw unfiltered emotions into a performance, something spectacular will come out of it. There's a lot of movies where actors have won an Oscar for their performance, but we don't always revisit that performance because it's so emotionally gut-wrenching and this is certainly that kind of performance. It's too early to tell whether Jonathan Majors will win any major awards for his performance or even be nominated, but he should because despite any flaws in his personal life, his art magnifies on the big screen and that's what we should remember him for because nobody in real life is perfect, but actors can give a perfect performance. That's what Jonathan Majors did in this emotionally charged film that makes his character easily sympathetic despite his flaws. YES, Magazine Dreams is worth watching if nothing else per Jonathan Majors' brilliant, award-winning performance!

FINAL GRADE: 8 / 10



SOUTH OF MIDNIGHT



SOUTH OF MIDNIGHT: A SOUTHERN TREAT?

Game Review By Omri Ui Neill

It is that time again Gamers and I, your amazing Squad Leader of the Shores of Yor MumsHous is bring you the word of an amazing game brought to us by Compulsion Games and you guessed it in one. I'm being nice so that means I liked the game and that is correct, so lets stop eyeing up the old hump football and get this show on the road.



South of Midnight is an amazing minty fresh take on southern folklore and fables such as Brier Rabbit minus the Slurs, anyone with even a twinkle of that "Old South" way of thinking is the devil in this game and that the closest to s spoiler you are going to get out of me. Now from the start I was blown away by the polished stop motion animation crafted for premium screens, If that was the original plan for the game, that would have been a hard sell for gameplay. However, the in game

cutscenes and gameplay style are very much of a story book look and feel. While still displaying the character's facial expressions smoothly and not having sharp lines that look less refined, the color schemes where amazingly well done for the game and I didn't feel as if I needed a sun filter for lens flares that has become painfully common.

This is not a "Storytime" bedtime story, this storyline has some openly deep dark narratives that tastily touch on the tragic norms of growing up in "Old South" communities. South of Midnight gives the Gamer a much-needed uplifting tale of a Hero's journey and finding themselves through the discovery of their true destiny. I know it's pretty sprinkles and rainbows in thought, but its fangs and evilness at its core. Now, I'm not going to even give you a rundown of the story. I know, I know, JERK!, that's because this game deserves your full attention and the time it takes to play it. It is a quick play through, simple combat, and very little world exploring, that's because it's all about that story. Which is worth every bit of time it took to make it, as I just said three lines ago. But some great take aways of this game is that, yes, it is a simple straight forward in concept of mechanics and I had very little issues, if any with control responses. The game only crashed once while transitioning from cut scene to a load screen, lost no time or effort to just restart, there are some very on the rails moments that do happen in the game that is

repetitive and could have been slightly changed up, but overall, nothing to raid a village over.

I even enjoyed the fact that this game is not super gory, overly violent, or run afoul with unneeded sex. There is some course use of the word Fuck, but other than that this a dark rooted story of tragedy and heartache that younger Gamers shouldn't be able to relate too. There is even a touch of religion in there and only because the concepts of Faith, Family, and Religion are the cornerstone of much of Southern culture being displayed in the game. The best thing I love about this game is how the developers left beautiful little story crumbs for later use and the ending itself is done in such a way that as long as Compulsion Games doesn't get bullied by Microsoft to change the way they are doing things, I don't see why this same formula can give us easily a little DLC and two more games to tie off this character arch nicely.

Now lastly Gang comes my closing words on South of Midnight, if anyone leaves a review or tells you that this game is woke or DEI, they lack the ability to form thoughts of their own and probably have a reading level a smidge higher than a 2nd grader or have some racist tendencies they don't like to talk about. Play South of Midnight Gamers, play deeply, passionately, and SWEEEEETTTTTLLLYYY!

FINAL GRADE: 9 / 10



GAMING NEWS

Oblivion Remaster Surprise-Launches NOW On Xbox Game Pass, Also Available On PS5



The long-rumored Elder Scrolls remaster was announced today, and it's out now.

The long-rumored remake of [The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion](#) is indeed real, and fans don't have to wait another minute to play it. Bethesda has officially announced the remaster and it's out now on Game Pass for Xbox and PC, and it's also available for purchase on those platforms, starting at \$50 for the standard edition and scaling to \$60 for the deluxe edition. A PS5 version is available, too. The game is developed by Virtuos in partnership with Bethesda, running on Unreal Engine 5 and sporting

better visuals. The Remastered version includes the base game and story expansions Shivering Isles and Knights of the Nine. Beyond an updated look, the game features a new leveling system.

There are also new lines of dialogue, sprinting support, blood splatter effects where previously there were none, and better lighting effects, Bethesda said. You can get a closer look at the game in the announcement trailer below. "Alongside 4K resolution, 60 frames per second performance, all-new textures, lighting effects, and landscape improvements, the game also updates everything from character, spell, and weapon animations, to dynamic time of day and weather effects," Microsoft said.

Here are some of the quality-of-life updates in Oblivion Remastered, as written by Microsoft:

- HUD, menu and map reworks
- Improved UI for systems like Persuasion, Clairvoyance, and more

- Modifications to levelling, encumbrance, non-combat perks, and other mechanics
- Improved enemy scaling
- Enhanced accessibility features
- Additional autosaves
- Revised first-person and third-person camera

A digital deluxe edition (\$60) is available as well. This includes, you guessed it, horse armor sets, along with special armors and weapons. Players also get a digital artbook and a soundtrack app, along with the Fighter's Stronghold expansion, Spell Tome Treasures, Vile Lair, Mehrune's Razor, The Thieves Den, Wizard's Tower, Orrery, and Horse Pack Armor. A remaster of Oblivion has been rumored for years, dating back to when it was first mentioned in the court documents that came out of the Microsoft vs. FTC case. The surprise-launch is not shocking, either, as that's exactly what reports said would happen with this title. *From GameSpot.com*

KING ARTHUR: LEGION IX Launches MAY 6 on PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X|S



NeocoreGames is happy to announce that [King: Arthur: Legion IX](#) launches on May 6 for PlayStation 5 and [Xbox Series X|S](#). King Arthur: Legion IX is a turn-based, character-centric, stand-alone tactical RPG in the King Arthur: Knight's Tale universe – a dark fantasy version of the Arthurian myth. King Arthur: Legion IX welcomes new players to the mythical land of Avalon with an all-new story and heroes, also offering tough challenges to returning veterans.


Console specific features:


- Quality mode: Higher resolution (4K – /3840 x 2160/) on XSX & PS5
- Performance mode: Lower resolution (QHD, 1440p – /2560 x 1440/) and higher frame rate on XSX & PS5
- XSS: QHD (2560 x 1440) resolution
- DualSense: Haptic feedback on PS5
- Supported languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Polish, Chinese (Simplified), Russian, Portuguese (Brazilian), Hungarian

A new threat looms over Avalon as the long-lost, infamous Ninth

Legion of Rome has set foot on the mythical island. Their commander, the fallen hero, Gaius Julius Mento was granted a demonic legion by their dead emperor, Septimus Sulla to find a way out of Tartarus. But when they accidentally arrive to the magical realm of the Lady of the Lake, Gaius Julius Mento decides to subjugate the island and establish Eternal Rome there. First, however, he must gather his lost legion...


MAIN FEATURES


 **A Role-playing Tactical Adventure**
Experience a unique hybrid between turn-based tactical games and traditional, character-centric RPGs. Manage and control a party of 5-6 heroes to explore and conquer the land of Avalon. Engage in deep tactical combat, tough moral choices, hero management, and the rebuilding of Nova Roma.


 **Prove Your Worth as a Tactician**
Every little move and every decision matters. Use covers, traps, flanking and an in-depth overwatch and opportunity system and turn the entire battlefield to your advantage like a master tactician. Sometimes meticulous planning, sometimes charging simply to combat will be the key to victory. The only difference between a successful or a failed quest may depend on the composition of your party only!

 **Heroes Straight from the Abyss**

Legion IX introduces six unique heroes who have risen from the Abyss to conquer the mythical land of Avalon. Level up, gain skill points and unlock unique skill trees. Loot, equip and craft hundreds of artefacts and create the deadliest fighting force that has ever set foot on Avalon.

 **Wide Variety of Abilities**
Use unique skills, Ultimate Skills and World Abilities to overcome the toughest challenges during your quests in Avalon. Take risks and explore various tactical options as heroes don't face permanent death at the end of the missions. Test your skills in different difficulty modes, from laid-back storytelling to brutal, unforgiving battles.

 **Not Built in a Day**
Build up and expand the city of Nova Roma. Make sure that your stronghold has the right facilities for your heroes that prepare them for different quests. But beware! Resources are scarce and you have to manage Nova Roma thoughtfully to keep it afloat.

 **Regain Your Humanity**
Your decisions have far-reaching consequences, influencing both gameplay and narrative. Through your actions, Gaius will either restore his humanity, or forever be transformed into a demon.

Nintendo Switch 2 Launches June 5 at \$449.99, Bringing New Forms of Game Communication to Life



System Provides Powerful New Hardware, Reimagined Online Capabilities and a Broad Range of Games

All Together, Anytime, Anywhere. With new ways to play and new ways to connect players, the Nintendo Switch 2 system arrives June 5 for a suggested retail price of \$449.99 in the United States. Discover reimagined Joy-Con 2 controllers, each of which can now be used as a mouse in compatible games and that snap to the system with magnetic connectors. Experience the system's powerful processing speeds delivering visuals via a bigger screen showcasing vibrant color and clarity. From Nintendo Switch 2 games to compatible games in existing Nintendo Switch libraries – connect and play with friends and family in surprising new ways!

“Nintendo Switch 2 is the next step in at-home gaming that can be taken on the go based on eight years of play and discovery that began with Nintendo Switch,” said Nintendo President Shuntaro Furukawa. “With its new features that expand the possibilities of gaming experiences, I truly believe that Nintendo Switch 2 is a leap forward in our journey of putting smiles on the faces of everyone that Nintendo touches.”

Nintendo Switch 2 comes with the following:

- Nintendo Switch 2 console
- Joy-Con 2 controllers (L+R)
- Joy-Con 2 Grip
- Joy-Con 2 Straps
- Nintendo Switch 2 Dock
- Ultra High-Speed HDMI Cable
- Nintendo Switch 2 AC Adapter
- USB-C Charging Cable

Race into Nintendo Switch 2 with the Nintendo Switch 2 + *Mario Kart World* Bundle* for a suggested retail price of \$499.99 in the United States, which includes a system and a download code for the *Mario Kart World* game, available from Nintendo Switch 2 launch day on June 5.

Today's Nintendo Direct presentation featured a broad variety of hardware details, system features, and games coming to the Nintendo Switch 2 system both from Nintendo and its publishing partners. To view the Nintendo Direct presentation in its entirety, visit <https://www.youtube.com/live/DXUmjX7DsP8>.

GameChat Enables New Ways to Play Socially, All Together

With the new online feature GameChat**, people can play games and talk like everyone is in the same room, even if they are miles apart. Whether sharing a victory or just waving hello, GameChat makes it feel like online friends around the world are on the same couch. Once GameChat is up, players can start a chat with friends anytime by pressing the C Button on the right Joy-Con 2 controller. The system's built-in mic can be used to voice chat while playing games with up to 12 people in different locations. Up to four friends can share their screen,

and if they connect a compatible USB-C camera, such as the Nintendo Switch 2 camera (sold separately), they can also video chat, seeing each other's faces as they cheer, shout, or laugh while playing. Additional friends can join the chat via audio only. Until the end of March 2026, GameChat can be used without the need to have a Nintendo Switch Online membership. Afterwards, a Nintendo Switch Online membership will be required.

When initiating a GameChat session, the user invites people from their friend list. Safety features are in place to help players have a safe and secure chat experience, such as the ability to report a person while in a chat session. In addition, Nintendo recognizes the important role parents and guardians play in their children's online experiences, so children under the age of sixteen will need their parent or guardian to approve their use of GameChat with an updated version of the Nintendo Switch Parental Controls App.



A Multitude of New Features and Experiences

A large, vivid screen that allows smooth motion expression
Nintendo Switch 2 has a large 7.9-

inch built-in LCD screen that displays in full HD at 1080p while maintaining the same thickness of Nintendo Switch. Even while on the go, Nintendo Switch 2 offers vivid, detailed game experiences, as well as smooth graphics showcasing character movements and their rich facial expressions.

Joy-Con 2 controllers attach to the system with a “snap”

Joy-Con 2, the newly designed Nintendo Switch 2 controllers, magnetically attach to the Nintendo Switch 2 console. In addition, either Joy-Con 2 controller can be operated like a mouse by sliding it on a surface like a table or on a pair of pants. They can be used in multiple ways, including for games that require aiming.

A new freely adjustable stand and a new USB-C port

The angle of the new stable stand on the back of the Nintendo Switch 2 system can be adjusted freely so that players can find their preferred viewing angle. While Nintendo Switch has one USB-C port on the bottom of the system, Nintendo Switch 2 has a port on the top of the system as well, which makes it possible for players to use the included AC adapter to charge the system while playing in tabletop mode. It is also possible to connect a compatible USB-C camera, like the Nintendo Switch 2 camera accessory to enjoy video chat on GameChat.

Powerful processing speed and graphical performance

Nintendo Switch 2 has significantly improved CPU and GPU performance over Nintendo Switch, resulting in faster processing speed and enabling new visually advanced gameplay. It also makes it possible to achieve more detailed graphics and faster

loading times.

Crisp audio quality and spatial 3D sound

On Nintendo Switch 2, the sound quality is more natural and clearer with an even more balanced sound range. When playing in handheld mode or tabletop mode, players will be able to experience games with even more immersive, three-dimensional sound.

Internal storage of 256 GB

The internal storage of Nintendo Switch 2, where digital games and save data are stored, is 256 GB, which is 8 times the storage capacity of Nintendo Switch. For additional storage, Nintendo Switch 2 only uses microSD Express cards, which have faster data reading speeds than previous microSD models.



Nintendo Switch games are also playable on Nintendo Switch 2

In addition to Nintendo Switch 2 games, Nintendo Switch 2 can play compatible physical and digital games released on Nintendo Switch. Some Nintendo Switch games may not be supported on or fully compatible with Nintendo Switch 2. Nintendo Switch Joy-Con controllers and peripherals, such as the Nintendo Switch Pro Controller, will also be usable on Nintendo Switch 2 by connecting them wirelessly to the system. For

more information on the compatibility with Nintendo Switch games and accessories, please visit the [Nintendo website](https://www.nintendo.com/switch2).

The new Nintendo Switch 2 Dock

By connecting the Nintendo Switch 2 Dock to a TV, users can output video at up to 4K resolution and play games at up to 120 fps, via compatible games and TVs.

Multiple people can play one title with GameShare

With GameShare, a new Nintendo Switch 2 feature, players can share and play the same game with others who do not have the game. If one person has a Nintendo Switch 2 system and a game compatible with GameShare, that person can invite others to temporarily play the same game together via local play with their Nintendo Switch 2 or Nintendo Switch system. Between Nintendo Switch 2 systems, GameShare can also be used along with GameChat for online play, so that players can chat with others while all of them play the same game.

Virtual game cards add benefits to digital games

With virtual game cards, players can easily manage all their purchased digital games, play games on two different systems, or even lend or borrow games. The virtual game card menu shows all of the digital games purchased with a user's Nintendo Account, making it easy to access the games and load them on the system. Once a virtual game card is loaded onto a system, it can be played even if the system is not connected to the internet, and other users who are on that system can also play the game. Additionally, digital games can be lent and borrowed among members of the same Nintendo Account family group in the form of virtual game cards via local wireless communication.

Nintendo Switch Online

Nintendo Switch Online** will be available on Nintendo Switch 2. On Nintendo Switch 2, players with a Nintendo Switch Online membership will be able to use features like GameChat along with existing online features. For a limited time, all Nintendo Switch 2 owners can access GameChat without a Nintendo Switch Online membership through the GameChat Open-Access period, which lasts until the end of March 2026. After that time, a Nintendo Switch Online membership will be required to use GameChat. In addition, for Nintendo Switch 2 owners, Nintendo GameCube – Nintendo Classics will be released right at the system’s launch. Players with a Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pack membership and a Nintendo Switch 2 system will be able to access a growing collection of Nintendo GameCube games with clearer image quality and higher resolution than the original releases. The classic game lineup available at release will be *F-Zero GX*, *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* and *SOULCALIBUR II*. Along with the classic games, a dedicated wireless controller designed after the original GameCube controller will be available for purchase*** by paid Nintendo Switch Online members.

Variety of accessibility features

In addition to existing accessibility features on Nintendo Switch, to support players’ wide range of gameplay styles, Nintendo Switch 2 offers a variety of new accessibility options including the ability to adjust font size, enable screen reader, and speech-to-text features within GameChat.

Safe and secure game experience on Nintendo Switch 2

With the Nintendo Switch Parental Control app, parents can easily

support their children’s gameplay by using their smart device to check what kind of games their children play or set limits on how long the system can be used daily. As for GameChat, children under the age of 16 will need the parent’s or guardian’s approval on the Nintendo Switch Parental Control app to start a chat, which makes it possible for parents and guardians to manage their children’s chat experience securely.

Nintendo Switch 2 will be available for pre-order in North America from participating retailers beginning on April 9, 2025.

New Games for a New System

Nintendo Switch 2 will launch with games that highlight its new capabilities while bringing everyone along for the ride. From brand new titles and system exclusives, like *Mario Kart World* and *Donkey Kong Bananza*, to exhilarating experiences like *EA SPORTS Madden NFL* and *Cyberpunk 2077: Ultimate Edition*, to upgraded versions of Nintendo Switch games like *Super Mario Party Jamboree – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition + Jamboree TV* and *Sid Meier’s Civilization® VII – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition*, there is much to share and play.



Put the pedal to the metal in **Mario Kart World**, a brand-new experience set in a vast interconnected environment. Race seamlessly across connected courses that deliver *Mario Kart* racing like never before. Twenty-four drivers can compete in a race. Participate in the new Knockout Tour mode, where you’ll barrel through back-to-back courses and checkpoints, with no pit stops along the way. If a player doesn’t make it to each checkpoint at a high-enough placement, they will be eliminated. And in Free Roam, it’s possible to go off the racetrack and drive in any direction you wish, explore areas that pique your interest and take some photos at scenic spots with a group of friends. *Mario Kart World* races onto Nintendo Switch 2 on June 5. More details will be revealed in a *Mario Kart World* Direct presentation on April 17 at 06:00 PST / 09:00 EST.

Get ready for **Donkey Kong Bananza**, a brand-new 3D platforming action adventure – available exclusively on Nintendo Switch 2. Crash, bash, and climb through nearly everything in DK’s path and tear off chunks of terrain to swing around and throw in groundbreaking exploration. The more that is demolished with powerful punches, the more areas

open up to discover. Break on through this adventure full of mayhem, surprises and bananas when ***Donkey Kong Bananza*** crashes onto Nintendo Switch 2 July 17.

The new capabilities of Nintendo Switch 2 allow for compatible physical and digital games released on Nintendo Switch to receive paid **Nintendo Switch 2 Edition upgrade packs** featuring enhanced graphics, exclusive content offerings, and new gameplay experiences.

Star in ***Super Mario Party Jamboree – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition + Jamboree TV***, featuring unique new modes and minigames that showcase mouse controls, the system's built-in mic, and Nintendo Switch 2 camera (sold separately). Invite friends**** to join Bowser Live, a game show-themed experience with 2v2 team battles and physical challenges! But beware: Losing teams may have to answer to Bowser himself! Get ready to see what's new in this party when it launches July 24.

See the Kingdom of Hyrule in a whole new way with ***The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition*** and ***The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition***, available with performance upgrades on Nintendo Switch 2. Smoother frame rates, faster load times, and better graphics will make for a fresh experience when revisiting these adventures, and now players will also have a little extra help. Also on the way is an update to the Nintendo Switch App***** (previously known as the Nintendo Switch Online App), called **ZELDA NOTES**. This game-specific service is exclusive to the Nintendo Switch 2 Editions of the games and helps players navigate to various locations, like

that difficult-to-find shrine or hidden Korok, and will even feature commentary from Princess Zelda herself that was not part of the original games. Both upgraded titles will be available from Nintendo Switch 2 launch day, June 5.

Kirby's 3D platforming adventure gets an extra Nintendo Switch 2 boost in ***Kirby and the Forgotten Land – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition + Star-Crossed World***. A mysterious meteor crashes in the world of Kirby and the Forgotten Land, revealing a new story for Kirby. He must use his abilities, including new Mouthful Modes, to clear a trail through uncharted territory. The upgrade pack will include this new content which can be played in single-player and local co-op, as well as improved performance for the entire game. Jump into Kirby's star-crossed world when it launches August 28.



The galaxy's greatest bounty hunter Samus Aran returns in ***Metroid Prime 4: Beyond***. This title will release on both Nintendo Switch and Nintendo Switch 2, with the latter allowing for both standard controls and Joy-Con 2 mouse controls as players wield Samus's arm cannon with more precision, plus enhanced visuals and performance. Choose between Quality Mode and Performance Mode, both of which support HDR, based on your preference and playstyle. Explore the

immersive world in 4K at 60 fps or enjoy smoother action in full HD at 120 fps on compatible displays when the game launches in 2025.

In ***Pokémon Legends: Z-A – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition***, you can enjoy your adventure in Lumiose City on Nintendo Switch 2 with enhanced resolution and frame rates, coming late 2025.

Kirby Air Riders, a brand-new title originated from the Nintendo GameCube classic racing-action game *Kirby Air Ride*, and Masahiro Sakurai, the director of the *Super Smash Bros.* series, was announced for release this year. The trailer revealed a dramatic introduction of Kirby on his Warp Star machine and other Kirby air riders on a variety of unique machines, as they joined together on a racetrack. *Kirby Air Riders* will glide onto Nintendo Switch 2 in 2025.

Use the Joy-Con 2 mouse controls and enjoy a new experience by strapping into ***Drag x Drive***. A new online 3v3 game experience, *Drag x Drive* (pronounced "Drag and Drive") challenges players to use the mouse controls with both Joy-Con 2 at the same time to intuitively steer, speed up, perform tricks and make plays such as dunks. Get ready to gear up when *Drag x Drive* launches on Nintendo Switch 2 this summer.

While it's understandable that players will want to hit the ground running (or racing) with Nintendo Switch 2, they can also explore a variety of features and details the new system has to offer. Players can enter a virtual exhibition with ***Nintendo Switch 2 Welcome Tour*** and gain insights into what makes Nintendo Switch 2 such a unique gaming experience. Through tech demos, minigames and other interactions, players will

get to know the new system inside and out in ways they may never have known about otherwise. *Nintendo Switch 2 Welcome Tour* will be available to buy from Nintendo eShop from Nintendo Switch 2 launch day, June 5.

Exciting Games from Global Developers and Publishers

From acclaimed hits like *SPLIT FICTION* and *ELDEN RING* to sports phenoms like *EA SPORTS Madden NFL* and *NBA 2K*, and highly anticipated games like *Hades II* and *Borderlands 4*, Nintendo Switch 2 is the place where players can find the full range of gaming experiences. Here are some of the games coming to Nintendo Switch 2 from development and publishing partners.

***The Duskbloods*:** The moontears will flow for one and one alone in *The Duskbloods*, a brand-new multiplayer** title from the creators of *DARK SOULS* and *ELDEN RING*, FromSoftware. Available exclusively for Nintendo Switch 2, *The Duskbloods* launches next year. Read more in our upcoming developer diary series, **Creator's Voice**, with the game's director Hidetaka Miyazaki, coming on April 4th.

***Hades II*:** Battle beyond the Underworld to vanquish the Titan of Time as the Princess of the Dead in this bewitching sequel to the original rogue-like dungeon crawler. *Hades II* lets players explore a bigger, deeper mythic world with the full might of Olympus at their call in a story that reacts to their every setback and accomplishment. The game is coming first on console to both Nintendo Switch and Nintendo Switch 2, taking advantage of the new system's higher-definition

display with responsive action at a target of 60 frames per second. Look out for more information about *Hades II* later this year.

***EA SPORTS Madden NFL* and *EA SPORTS FC*:** EA SPORTS is bringing fans together from across the world** – both on the pitch and on the gridiron. *EA SPORTS Madden NFL* and *EA SPORTS FC* will be coming to Nintendo Switch 2.

***NBA 2K* and *WWE 2K*:** Dominate on the court and in the ring — *NBA 2K* and *WWE 2K* are coming to Nintendo Switch 2.

Hyrule Warriors: Age of Imprisonment is the newest title in the Hyrule Warriors series and is developed by Koei-Tecmo Games with support from Nintendo. The game features epic battles against hordes of enemies as it tells the untold story from Hyrule's distant past of the Imprisoning War that ultimately led to the events of *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. Fans of the Legend of Zelda series and players of both *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* can experience the thrill of battle and this canonical tale featuring Princess Zelda, King Rauru, and other familiar characters. Fight for Hyrule's future when *Hyrule Warriors: Age of Imprisonment* comes to Nintendo Switch 2 this winter.

***SPLIT FICTION*:** Jump between sci-fi and fantasy worlds in this co-op action adventure**, where contrasting writers Mio and Zoe have become trapped in a simulation of their own stories. *SPLIT FICTION* keeps you on the edge of your couch with weird and unexpected moments as players have to coordinate and work together to overcome challenges. Players can also invite

a friend to play with for free via cross-play on Nintendo Switch 2 with Friend's Pass****. Jump into the action when *SPLIT FICTION* releases the same day as Nintendo Switch 2.

***Cyberpunk 2077: Ultimate Edition*:** For the first time, Nintendo players can step into the shoes of V — a mercenary determined to become a legendary cyberpunk in Night City. With the powerful processing speed and graphical performance of Nintendo Switch 2, every neon-lit street and firefight feels more immersive than ever. With this edition, players can enjoy the full *Cyberpunk 2077* experience, featuring the base game and the critically acclaimed Phantom Liberty spy-thriller expansion. Climb the ranks when *Cyberpunk 2077: Ultimate Edition* releases the same day as Nintendo Switch 2.

***FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE*:** Experience a modern reimagining of one of the most iconic games of all time on Nintendo Switch 2. Set in Midgar, players will immerse themselves in a standalone gaming experience designed for RPG players that crave unforgettable characters, a powerful story, and a strategic battle system that merges real-time action with command-based combat. Including *FF7R EPISODE INTERmission*, an additional story arc happening during the events of the game, players can fight for the future of the planet when *FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE* comes to Nintendo Switch 2.

***Street Fighter 6*:** Experience the next evolution of Street Fighter in *Street Fighter 6* with three distinct game modes, new gameplay features, and enhanced visuals. Fight your way to the top with new game modes exclusive to

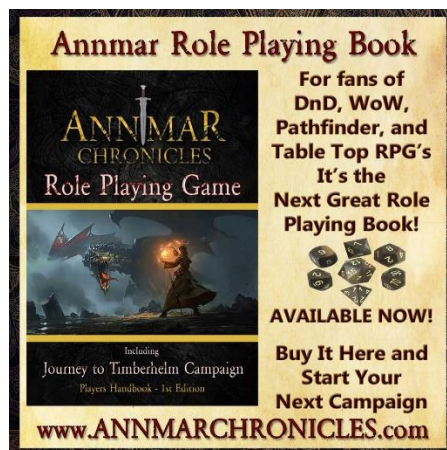
Nintendo Switch 2 like Local Wireless One on One and Avatar Matches****. Enjoy new party modes utilizing Joy-Con 2 controllers like Gyro Battle and Calorie Contest. Plus, players can check out three new amiibo figures and 22 amiibo cards at launch. Choose from *Street Fighter 6 Years 1-2 Fighter Edition*, or the digital version of *Street Fighter 6*, for Nintendo Switch 2 on launch day.

Sid Meier's Civilization® VII – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition: Steer the course of history in *Sid Meier's Civilization® VII – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition*. Featuring new mouse controls that offer a more intuitive experience, players' decisions will shape the cultural lineage of their empire. Construct cities and architectural wonders, improve your civilization with technological breakthroughs, and conquer or cooperate with rival civilizations as you explore the world. Whether you choose to follow history or forge your own path, create a legacy that echoes through the Ages when *Sid Meier's Civilization® VII – Nintendo Switch 2 Edition* comes to Nintendo Switch 2 on launch day.

Hogwarts Legacy: Experience Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry like never before in *Hogwarts Legacy*, which has been updated with Joy-Con 2 mouse support, improved graphics and audio, seamless map load times, and controls for Nintendo Switch 2. Players can become the center of their own adventure with this open-world, action role-playing game as they discover magical beasts, customize their character, master spell casting, and become the witch or wizard they want to be. Rediscover the magic when *Hogwarts Legacy* arrives on the same day as Nintendo Switch 2.

BRAVELY DEFAULT FLYING FAIRY HD Remaster: Follow four Warriors of Light on a journey to restore the elemental crystals in the HD remaster of the Nintendo 3DS RPG masterpiece, *BRAVELY DEFAULT*. Experience an RPG that brings new depth to classic, turn-based battles with the introduction of the “Brave & Default” system – featuring an array of options to customize your characters with over 20 unique jobs. The game also includes quality of life updates and two new minigames that leverage the dual mouse controls of Nintendo Switch 2. *BRAVELY DEFAULT FLYING FAIRY HD Remaster* comes to Nintendo Switch 2 on launch day.

Borderlands 4: Experience outrageous enemies and killer loot on the dangerous new planet of Kairos in *Borderlands 4*. Become an unstoppable force blasting through enemies with an arsenal of weaponry. Deftly defy death from every direction as players flex their skill expression with glide, dodge, fixed-point grapple, and more. Hop into the action when *Borderlands 4* launches on Nintendo Switch 2 in 2025.



More adventure awaits in new and updated titles including...

- ***Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 + 4:*** Two legendary Activision games return with new skaters, gnarlier

tricks, a sicker soundtrack, and, for the first time in over a decade – new parks! Drop into cross-platform online multiplayer** and relive the classic fun. *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 + 4* launches on Nintendo Switch 2 this summer.

- ***ELDEN RING Tarnished Edition:*** With over 28 million copies sold worldwide, *ELDEN RING* is an award-winning action RPG set in an authentic dark fantasy world. Explore treacherous dungeons and face epic boss battles. Including the base game, the *SHADOW OF THE ERDTREE* expansion, and new weapons, armor, a new Torrent appearance customization, and more, *ELDEN RING Tarnished Edition* arrives on Nintendo Switch 2 in 2025.
- ***Yakuza 0 Director's Cut:*** Discover the decadence and danger of 1988 Japan in *Yakuza 0 Director's Cut*. The definitive edition of the acclaimed origin story is coming first to Nintendo Switch 2. Players will have to fight through Tokyo and Osaka's entertainment districts as Kazuma Kiryu and Goro Majima in an epic crime drama. With the Director's Cut, players will find deeper insights into character backstories and incidents with never-before-seen cutscenes, plus, the new Red Light Raid online multiplayer mode**. *Yakuza 0 Director's Cut* launches on

Nintendo Switch 2 on launch day.

- **Fortnite:** Whether you want to be the last player standing in Battle Royale, Zero Build, Reload, and Fortnite OG, or you want to explore *LEGO Fortnite* experiences, blast to the finish with *Rocket Racing* or headline a concert with *Fortnite Festival* – the choice is yours. Find it all in *Fortnite* on Nintendo Switch 2 on launch day.
- **Enter the Gungeon 2:** Experience the reloaded sequel to the iconic bullet dungeon crawler with *Enter the Gungeon 2*. Featuring a new 3D art style, weapons, and new gameplay tricks, players can load in on Nintendo Switch 2 next year.
- **HITMAN World of Assassination – Signature Edition:** Enter the world of the ultimate assassin in *HITMAN World of Assassination – Signature Edition*. Explore intricate environments as you use disguises and stealth to execute missions. Experience the best of *HITMAN*, *HITMAN 2* and *HITMAN 3* including the main campaign, contracts mode, escalations, and

more. *HITMAN World of Assassination – Signature Edition* releases the same day as Nintendo Switch 2.

- **Project 007:** Step into the shoes of James Bond and earn your 00 status. Featuring a wholly original Bond story, *Project 007* will come to Nintendo Switch 2.

And that's not all, as Nintendo Switch 2 welcomes **STARSEEKER: Astroneer Expeditions, Daemon X Machina: Titanic Scion, DELTARUNE, Survival Kids, Star Wars Outlaws, Hollow Knight: Silksong**, and more!



Make all the right money moves.

For more information on Nintendo Switch 2, please visit the Nintendo website at [Nintendo.com](https://www.nintendo.com). Also, look for continuing Nintendo Switch 2 content in the free Nintendo Today! smart device app***** for iOS and Android. <https://www.nintendo.com/us/store/products/nintendo-today-mobile/>

* Limited time production through Fall 2025 (available while supplies last)

** Internet, Nintendo Switch Online membership and Nintendo Account required for online features, including GameChat. Compatible USB camera required for video features. Not available in all countries. Terms and GameChat requirements apply. support.nintendo.com Games, systems, memberships and some accessories sold separately.

*** Limit one purchase per Nintendo Account with paid Nintendo Switch Online membership. Controller ships to U.S. and Canada only. Offer not available in all countries or for free trial memberships. Nintendo Switch Online + Expansion Pack membership required to access Nintendo GameCube – Nintendo Classics collection of games. This controller is optional and not required to play the Nintendo GameCube - Nintendo Classics collection of games. System update required.

**** Additional games, systems and/or accessories may be required for multiplayer mode. Games, systems and some accessories sold separately.

***** Nintendo Account, persistent internet and compatible smart device required. Data charges may apply.

***** Friend's Pass requires installation of the Friend's Pass and applicable platform account.

Xbox Games Showcase Followed by The Outer Worlds 2 Direct Aired June 8



Make some space on your calendar – the **Xbox Games Showcase 2025** will be livestreamed on Sunday, June 8, starting at 10am Pacific / 1pm Eastern / 6pm UK time. Following in the footsteps of the 2023 *Starfield* Direct and 2024 *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6* Direct, this year we will again have a double feature, with the Xbox Games Showcase immediately followed by *The Outer Worlds 2 Direct*.

It all begins with our annual Xbox Games Showcase, bringing you a look at upcoming titles from across

our first-party studios, in addition to incredible new titles from our third-party partners across the globe. This year, the show will be digital-only – our livestream will bring you everything you'll need to know about what's next for Xbox, no matter where in the world you're watching.

Immediately following Showcase, *The Outer Worlds 2 Direct* will bring you inside the walls of Obsidian Entertainment, revealing new gameplay, details, and developer insights, straight from the people making the sequel to the award-winning, first-person sci-fi RPG.

You'll be able to enjoy our June 8 double feature through a variety of outlets, in over 40 languages, as well as American Sign Language, British Sign Language and English Audio Descriptions. These include (but won't be limited to):

- [YouTube.com/Xbox](https://www.youtube.com/Xbox)

- [Twitch.tv/Xbox](https://www.twitch.tv/Xbox)
- [Twitch.tv/XboxASL](https://www.twitch.tv/XboxASL)
- [Facebook.com/Xbox](https://www.facebook.com/Xbox)

Airtime for the Xbox Games Showcase followed by *The Outer Worlds 2 Direct* in local time zones:

- **PDT:** June 8, 10am
- **EDT:** June 8, 1pm
- **BST:** June 8, 6pm
- **CEST:** June 8, 7pm
- **JST:** June 9, 2am
- **AEST:** June 9, 3am

The double-feature broadcast also kicks off a week's worth of coverage here on Xbox Wire, The Official Xbox Podcast, and the Xbox YouTube channel, featuring updates, exclusive extra details, and deep-dives on many of the games you'll see in the show.

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Path of Exile 2: Dawn of the Hunt launches today with a new Huntress Character Class and Free Cosmetics Through Twitch Drops



Unleash mayhem today in [Path of Exile 2: Dawn of the Hunt](#), which introduces the Huntress - a powerful hybrid melee and ranged spear wielder, new changes to the endgame, and three free cosmetics which can be gained through Twitch Drops! Key highlights of the first major content update include:

- **Huntress Class:** Agile combat blending melee and ranged attacks with spear techniques and beast companions.
- **Five Ascendancies:** Customize your playstyle with new paths like the Ritualist's blood sacrifices and the Lich's chaotic powers.
- **Expanded Endgame:** Revamped mechanics, new Unique Maps, and enhanced Towers for more rewarding late-game content.
- **Over 100 New Support Gems:** Build diversity expands with innovative skill modifiers like Haemocystals, Caltrops, and Enormity.
- **Unique Items & Crafting:** Over 100 Mid and Endgame Unique items, our first Unique Charms, crafting updates, and powerful runes.
- **Rogue Exiles:** Experience PVP-like combat in dynamic duels and battle against Rogue Exiles, who have Dodge Roll capabilities with smart pathfinding, targeting, and action-packed gameplay. Gain their loot upon defeating them!

Players can acquire the following cosmetics for free by spending three hours of watch time in the [Path of Exile 2 Twitch category](#) during the specific times:

- **Azmeri Noble Deer Pet** from 4 April, 12PM PDT, to 12 April, 5AM PDT.
- **Hunter's Trophy Back Attachment and Honour Guard Rhoo Mount** from April 13, 5AM PDT to April 19, 5AM PDT

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PlayStation Plus Monthly Games for April: RoboCop: Rogue City, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Hacker's Memory



Protect the streets of Detroit, survive a family of horror icons, and turn digital detective with April's PlayStation Plus Monthly Games lineup. RoboCop: Rogue City, The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Hacker's Memory will be available to PlayStation Plus members from April 1.

RoboCop: Rogue City | PS5

Become the legendary part man, part machine, all cop hero and bring justice to the dangerous, crime-ridden streets of Old Detroit. With your powerful Auto-9 or one of a range of weapons available, eradicate criminals throughout this explosive first-person adventure. Your cyborg strength and cybernetic abilities can be upgraded as you progress, to make you an even more formidable law enforcement officer.

Explore open areas and complete your objectives according to your own sense of justice. Finding evidence, interrogating

suspects and maintaining public order are just some of your daily tasks as a police officer. But don't take decisions lightly: your choices can determine the fate of citizens and the result of your mission. Your investigation leads you right into the heart of a shadowy conspiracy in an original story that takes place between RoboCop 2 and 3, with striking locations to explore and familiar faces to meet. Peter Weller, the original RoboCop actor, is even back on duty to voice the cybercop.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre | PS4, PS5

Take on the role of one of the notorious Slaughter family, or their victims, in The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, a third-person asymmetrical horror experience based on the groundbreaking and iconic 1974 horror film. As a victim you must use your wits and stealth to stay out of the Family's reach and find the tools you need to lead to your eventual freedom. Slaughter Family

players must seek out, track down, and stop their guests from escaping. Players of The Texas Chain Saw Massacre can finally find out if they have what it takes to survive.

Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth – Hacker's Memory | PS4

After being accused of a crime he didn't commit, Keisuke Amazawa has no choice but to dive into the Digital World and investigate to prove his innocence. Even if that means joining a group of hackers and helping them to solve the troubles threatening this mysterious universe. Discover the mysterious backstory to the events that happened in Digimon Story: Cyber Sleuth as you dive into a deeper and darker adventure, at crossroads between real and digital and experience the perfect mix between Adventure, Raising and Battle with over 320 Digimon to discover.



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SQUAD LEADER!

By K. Scott Cooper

“Avowed: The Game of Little Understanding”

by Omri UI Neill



Greetings Gamers! It is time again for your squad leader to save you some time and money with his wonderful words of wisdom, for the breath taking and beautiful world of Avowed. Now you know me and my love for the silly turns of phrase, but Gamers this one just leaves me stone cold and having to use my Educator voice for this one. Firstly I'm going to be honest and tell you about the few things of the game that I enjoyed and then for the most part is all like Avowed itself, it goes downhill from there. Now don't get me wrong I'm always trying to give Obsidian the benefit of the doubt, *The Outer Worlds* is a great game, but its clear this game is not a finished product. So here it is Gamers the only thing I remotely enjoy was making my Godlike appear as if they were a Human/Greenman hybrid, yeah that's what I thought too.

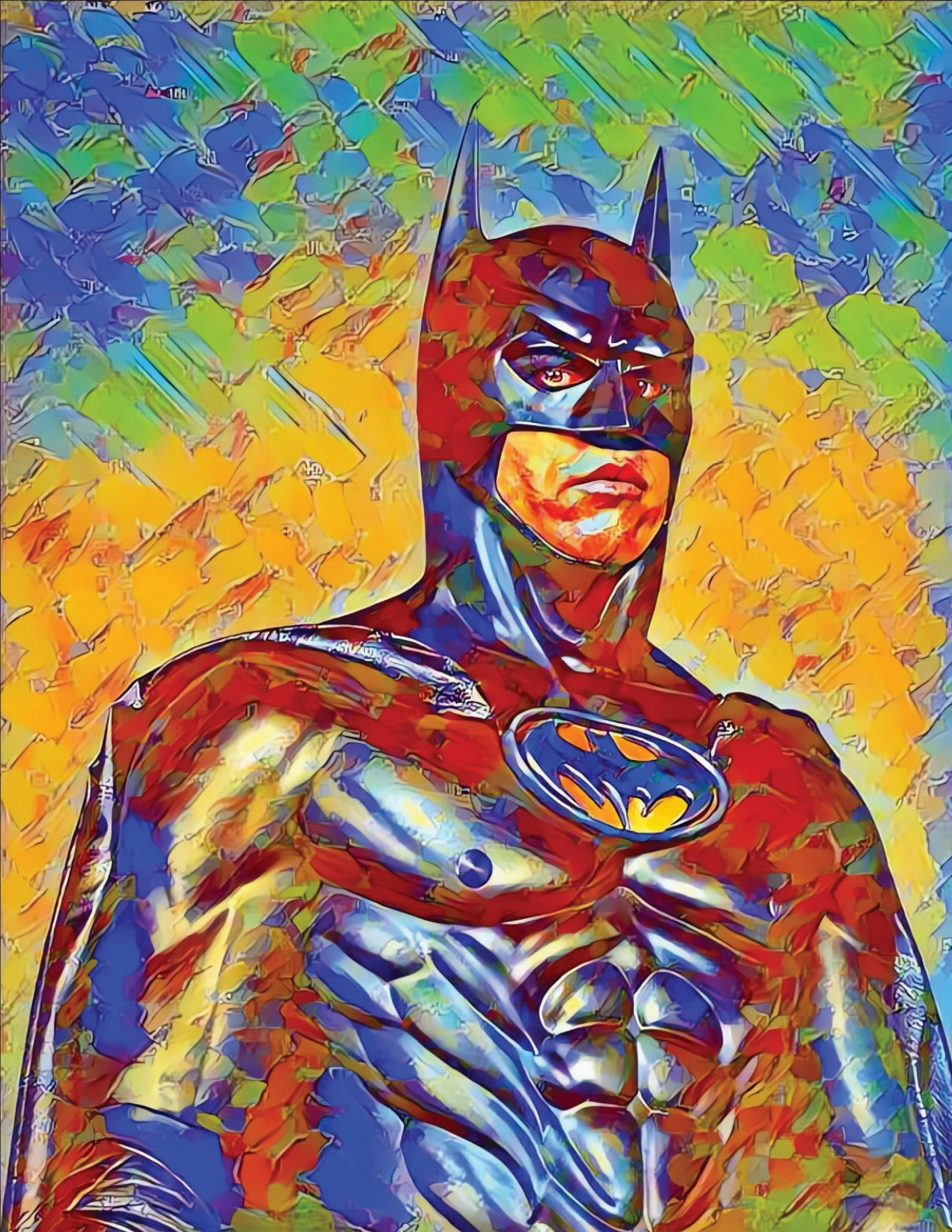
So here is where the rest of the game completely falls short of anything remotely promised by the original Dev team (they did not finish the game.) and the concept that Avowed is supposed to break *Skyrim* or *Oblivion* because it comes from another fantasy series called *Pillars of Eternity* that was designed for play on PC and has seen little love from Xbox since its add to Xbox Game Pass well over 4 years ago. Obsidian wanted to bring this fantasy world on par with the world of the *Elder Scrolls*, but fails in completely because of the “hamfisted” attempt of explain the world as a toddler trying to explain the overarching plot inception. Its a lot of point and shouting in a very general way, while constantly feeling as if this information is going to be put on a geography test written on paper laced in LSD. I had fundamentally no understanding of the world *Avowed* was set in and the developers knew this would be the case with

a bulk of Gamers approaching this game, but yet they do nothing to educate the player other than chunks of conversation you are forced to have, that overwhelm you with information. Now I know you are asking me why that would even bother me at all, the answer is because the storyline is equally confusing because when you aren't babysitting “Treebeard's methhead” infant God. You are constantly being lectured or complained at by every NPC you meet, to the point that I actively would have wholesale slaughtered an entire town because of the never unending ungrateful nature of everyone you are surrounded by. This is something you cannot do, because the game lacks any of the game functions that would allow the Gamer to play anything but a “Disney Milk Toast Hero.”

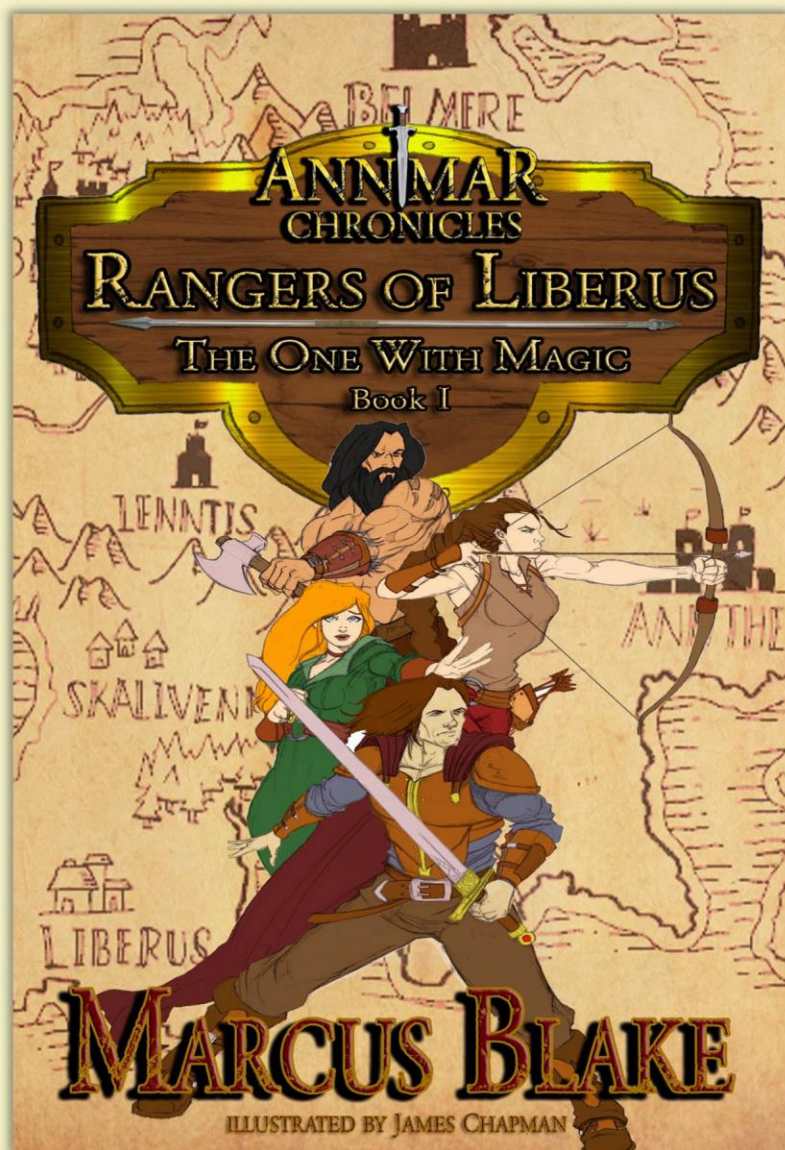
Missions in the game are an easy bake method of doing things. You speak to someone, run across the map, more talking, and go back to the person you originally spoke too. Then you get maybe a touch of fighting here and there depending on if you explored the area before taking any missions as all monsters, bandits, and wildlife do not re-spawn after you kill them. There are very little fast travel points on any of the maps and I hope you enjoy aimless walking as the game currently does not offer any kind of mounts for players. Which makes exploring for loot extremely lack luster as all the loot in the game is crap that would only excite you if you don't understand how percentages work, because most gear stats are worthless like the experience of playing anything other than a magic user (which isn't very fun either.) as its skill tree is the largest of the Three player classes you can take. Finally the biggest glaring issue with this game is the lack of understanding this developer team had for the audience they wanted to reach, is it clear that the writers of Obsidian had a politically motivated agenda with the major storytelling points of this game, which is not uncommon as most works of entertainment either known outright or not, are motivated by the historical and political agendas the writers live in during their day to day. Now the issue I take with the game is the way the agenda is presented that not only robs the player of

agency in the storyline of the game, but also force feeds you the never ending lectures of what about this point of view or that point of view. Regardless of your motivations, you cannot belittle and insult someone all the time, then expecting them to see your point of view. This is what this developer team is trying to mask poorly behind a possibly good fantasy story, aggressive writing such as this belongs in film festivals and art stages pieces. Gamers are escapist and the last thing we want is a soapbox narrative of accept me or else paired with companions dialogue that honestly feels like a huge cry for help and mental health medication because of this flip flop story writing. To make my point, Obsidian you just drop kicked that barista for misspelling your name, thats not going to make the coffee taste any less like shit. There may be some fun moments in the game and the combat can be fun sometimes, but there's just not enough to make this game good.

So all in all gamers, just don't play or buy Avowed, as this game is about two deluxe package purchases away from being a full on lawsuit with how empty and lifeless this game feels. If you are looking for the next *Elder Scrolls* game or *The Witcher*, or even a *Dragon Age* game, this is not it. *Elder Scrolls 6* can't get here soon enough!!! Now to be fair Avowed was originally supposed to be a MMORPG before the original developer was replaced and they changed direction with the game. It feels like the single player RPG was rushed after the direction was changed and there's a lot of story that's missing from the original concept just so they could get the game out without any more delays. However, I wish all my complaints were made up, and that I was just drunk, with all of this being malty induced electric mushroom nightmare of gods awful writing and presentation by a seasoned and experienced studio such as Obsidian, this game ranks 5 out of 10. But it could be easily 4 because the writers kill Marynna, they know what they did and they know it was shitty, so they must pay the price Gamers! Hopefully, the *The Outer Worlds 2* will redeem the gaming studio!



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COMIC BOOK NEWS

WHEEL OF TIME FANS WILL ENJOY THE SWASHBUCKLING FANTASY CLASSIC TELLOS SAGA

THE TELLOS SAGA



TODD DEZAGO & MIKE WIERINGO

Dungeons & Dragons enthusiasts and *Wheel of Time* devotees in search of untapped, fantasy nostalgia can find much to love in the fan-favorite fantasy classic, *Tellos*, written by Todd Dezago and illustrated by the legendary Mike "Ringo" Wieringo. Longtime fans and new readers alike will instantly fall for the gorgeous hardcover edition, *Tellos Saga*, which is available on shelves now.

This beloved epic tale first launched independently in 1999 before finding a new publishing home at Image Comics. The epic *Tellos* adventure is back and collected in this beautiful hardcover edition to enchant a new

generation of fantasy lovers! The late Wieringo leaves an indelible mark on comics history with this story, and many others, and his memory is honored with the annual [Ringo Awards](#) held every year at [Baltimore Comic Con](#).

Tellos Saga (ISBN: 9781534397989, Lunar Code 0823IM350) can be found at local [comic book shops](#), [independent bookstores](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#).

Tellos Saga is also available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, Google Play, and Omnibus.

FARMHAND KICKS OFF FINAL SHOWDOWN IN UPCOMING STORY ARC SPROUTING NEXT MONTH



Popular horror/satire series *Farmhand*—by *Chew* co-creator/artist extraordinaire, Rob Guillory—will kick off its highly anticipated finale story arc next month in *Farmhand* #21 from Image Comics.

This pulse-pounding denouement will see Monica Thorne in complete control of Freetown as the surviving Jenkins family members prepare for their last stand.

“*Farmhand*’s been a labor of love from its inception. And I’ve been hard at work making sure this final arc gives readers the most satisfying payoff to this long-running story possible. These are by far the bloodiest, most intense six issues I’ve ever done, and I can’t wait for folks to see how it ends.”

The *Farmhand* series follows Jedidiah Jenkins, a simple farmer. But his cash crop isn’t corn or soy. He grows fast-healing, highly-customizable human organs. For years, Jed’s organic transplants have brought healing to

many, but deep in the soil of the Jenkins Family Farm something sinister has taken root. Today this dark seed will begin to sprout, and the Jenkins family will be the first to taste its bitter fruit.

Farmhand #21 (Lunar Code 0325IM269) will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, May 7.

The collected trade paperback editions of the series so far are available now, for fans in need of catching up on this bestselling series:

- *Farmhand, Vol. 1* trade paperback (ISBN: 9781534309852, Lunar Code 0119IM190) collects issues #1-5 of the series and is available at local [comic book shops](#), independent bookstores, [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#).
- *Farmhand, Vol. 2* trade paperback (ISBN: 9781534313323, Lunar Code 0919IM178) collects issues #6-10 of the series and is available at local [comic book shops](#), [independent bookstores](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#).
- *Farmhand, Vol. 3* trade paperback (ISBN: 9781534315907, Lunar Code 0320IM804) collects issues #11-15 of the series and is available at local [comic book shops](#), [independent bookstores](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#).
- *Farmhand, Vol. 4* trade paperback (ISBN: 9781534323353, Lunar Code 0822IM399) collects issues #16-20 of the series and is available at local [comic book](#)

[shops](#), [independent bookstores](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#).

Farmhand is also available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

Select praise for the *Farmhand* series:

“Tells a multi-generation story about the horrors of science meeting agriculture. While there are nods to *Chew*, Rob Guillory proves that he can tell a fresh and weird story that is intriguing, creepy, and funny.” — **ComicsVerse**

“Beyond creepy corporate espionage, the heart of the story lies with the family caught in his web of secrecy. The story is kooky and fun, and so is the artwork.” — **BookRiot**

“A quirky yet unsettling comic. It’s filled with little gags and fun that will bring a smile to your face...before sending a shiver up your spine with horrific imagery. I’m going to pretend it’s set in the same world as *Chew*, the series Guillory co-created and illustrated, as the two work well together. It’s safe to say if you liked *Chew*, you’ll love *Farmhand*.” — **HorrorDNA**

“Equal parts fascinating, repulsive and terrifying, with just enough secrets to make things interesting.” — **MajorSpoilers**

“For readers of comics this is something that can’t be recommended enough. It delivers on all fronts and is guaranteed to grab attention.” — **AIPT**

RAZOR-SHARP CRIME THRILLER DARK HONOR COMING THIS MAY



The city is in lockdown. The streets are empty. And the underworld is up for grabs! This razor-sharp, crime thriller is set in New York City at the dawn of the pandemic—where the COVID-19 virus isn't the only unseen threat—and will launch in May from the Syzygy line at Image Comics.

Written by Ethan Sacks (*Star Wars: Bounty Hunters*, *Old Man Hawkeye*), K.S. Bruce, and Brian DeCubellis, this five-issue series marks Bruce and DeCubellis' first foray into comics after a successful run in film—most notably their work on *Trust* (2021), a top-10 Netflix hit in 20 countries, and *Manhattan Night* (2016), starring two-time Academy Award winner Adrien Brody. The series is brought to life by the “*Ocean's Eleven* of artists”, featuring interior art and covers from the

powerhouse creators of Fico Ossio (*Black Lightning*, *No One Left To Fight*), David Messina (*Ultimate Spiderman*, *3 Keys*), Gabriel Guzman (*Lady Earth*, *Predator*), Jamal Igle (*Molly Danger*, *The Wrong Earth*); featuring colors by colorist Raciél Avila, and letterer JAME.

Brian DeCubellis, co-creator and writer, spoke of the project's origin: “*Dark Honor* was born in the earliest days of COVID-19 in New York. As we wrapped filming *Trust* in March of 2020, the city was shutting down, and we wanted to capture that surreal moment. Inspired by neo-noir crime films, we created Rain, a street-savvy hero, and the Hundred Warriors, with Grigor embodying COVID—a relentless, unexpected killer.”

K.S. Bruce added, “*Dark Honor* may be fiction, but its backdrop is real—the empty streets, released prisoners, and desperate scrambles for survival, as an unknown disaster hits New York. Initially written as a screenplay, it felt too raw for film. But with Ethan Sacks’ adaptation, Chris Ryall’s expertise, and an incredible creative team, we’re honored to bring this story to comics.”

“Once I heard K.S. and Brian's incredible pitch, I knew I wanted to be a part of bringing *Dark Honor* to comics readers,” said co-writer Ethan Sacks. “They had me at ‘Hello’—or more accurately, at a modern crime story set in New

York City during the earliest and deadliest weeks of the COVID-19 epidemic. Having covered the damage COVID-19 did to my city in 2020 as a journalist for NBC News, it's been a creative boon to now tackle that place and time as a comic book writer. And with a murderers' row of talented artists—Fico Ossio, Dave Messina, Jamal Igle, and Gabriel Guzman—it's only fitting for a book about a row between murderers.”

The Hundred have protected New York's crime families for a century—now the city belongs to a new killer. *Dark Honor* brings a gritty, neo-noir twist to New York's criminal underworld, where the real plague isn't the virus but the power struggle left in its wake.

Dark Honor #1 will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, May 28th:

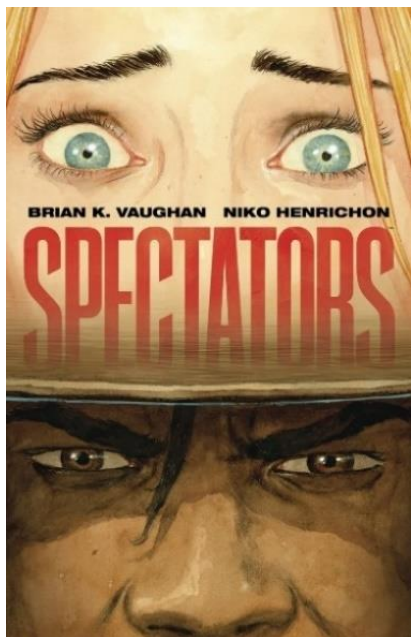
- Cover A by Fico Ossio - Lunar Code 0325IM258
- Cover B (1:10 B&W incentive) by Fico Ossio - Lunar Code 0325IM259

Dark Honor #2 will be available at [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, June 25:

- Cover A by Fico Ossio - Lunar Code 0425IM321
- Cover B (1:10 B&W incentive) by Fico Ossio - Lunar Code 0425IM322

Dark Honor will also be available across many digital platforms, including Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, and Google Play.

**SAGA, PAPER GIRLS CO-CREATOR/WRITER BRIAN K. VAUGHAN
TEAMS WITH CRITICALLY-ACCLAIMED ARTIST NIKO
HENRICHON FOR GRAPHIC NOVEL SHOWSTOPPER—
SPECTATORS—HITTING SHELVES THIS SEPTEMBER**



New York Times bestselling, award winning creative team Brian K. Vaughan (*Saga*, *We Stand on Guard*, *Paper Girls*) and Niko Henrichon (*Pride of Baghdad*) are back with a provocative, hard hitting new graphic novel titled, *Spectators*. First serialized in [Vaughan's Substack newsletter](#), this jaw-dropping, lavishly hand-painted epic will be collected in its entirety at last and available in a

stunning hardcover edition this September.

Spectators sees Vaughan and Henrichon together again—for the first time in nearly two decades since their award winning, contemporary classic *Pride of Baghdad* took the industry by storm—this time for their most ambitious project yet.

Now, *Spectators* promises to put the “graphic” back in graphic novel and will feature an unconventional supernatural romance, a critical exploration of sex and violence, and a deep dive into the very different ways we obsessively watch both.

Set hundreds of years in the future, New York City is haunted by many ghosts, including a voyeuristic woman who died in our present day and a mysterious gun-toting man from the distant past. Normally solo travelers, these two specters meet each other just in time to observe what might be the end of the (living) world.

“*Spectators* is a story I’ve wanted to tell my whole career, and after more than three years of meticulous hand-painting by genius co-creator Niko Henrichon, we’re excited to finally share our epic standalone graphic novel with all of you mature readers out there,” said Vaughan. “This is a spicy one, so thanks for supporting the retailers who bravely support comics for adults!”

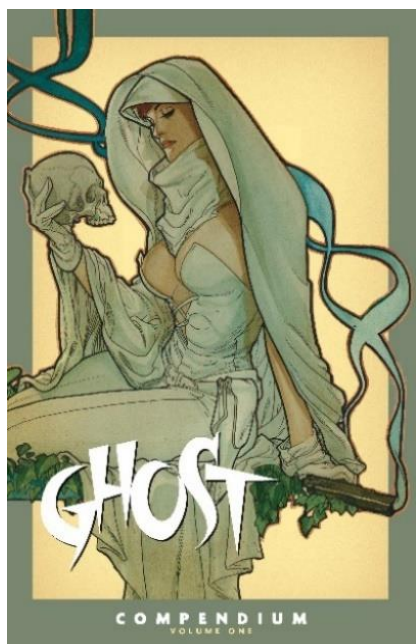
Henrichon added: “The bold and unconventional script of this comic book challenged my artistic boundaries like never before. It was an exhilarating experience and a true honor to create artwork for such a distinctive story.”

Spectators hardcover (ISBN: 9781534331211, Lunar Code 0425IM287) will be available at local [comic book shops](#) on Wednesday, September 10 and [independent bookstores](#), [Amazon](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Books-a-Million](#), [Indigo](#), and [Waterstones](#) on Tuesday, September 23.

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DARK HORSE PRESENTS THE COMPLETE SAGA OF "GHOST" IN TWO OVERSIZED PAPERBACK COLLECTIONS



Dark Horse Comics introduced the supernatural vigilante Ghost in 1993. Now, collected in two volumes, collectors and avid readers can take home the entire tale of murder and the paranormal in a new paperback edition. Ghost Compendium Volume 1 gathers a powerhouse roster of creative talent, including Eric Luke (*Wonder Woman*), Martin Lodewyk (*Immortal Coil*), Tom Sniegoski (*Scary Monsters: Mayfly*), artists Adam Hughes (*Black Widow*), Terry Dodson

(*Adventureman*), Ivan Reis (*Hyde Street*), Jason Pearson (*Deadpool*), John Cassaday (*Star Wars*), Randy Emberlin (*The Amazing Spider-Man*), Tony Harris (*Starman*), Matt Haley (*Batman: Batgirl*), colorists Matt Hollingsworth (*Hawkeye*), Digital Chameleon (*Looney Tunes*), letterers Steve Haynie (*Aliens: Once in a Lifetime*), Steve Dutro (*Shonen Jump*), and many more.

In Ghost Compendium Volume 1:

Elisa Cameron is dead—murdered in cold blood. One intrepid reporter will not stop until she finds the perpetrator, even if it means crawling through the depths of hell to do it. That reporter is Elisa Cameron herself, risen from the grave as the spectral avenger Ghost! She won't rest in peace until she delivers a double dose of .45 caliber retribution to the wicked criminals who killed her. Ghost's journey to the truth follows a dark, twisted path through the mean streets and corrupt towers of Arcadia, and the revelations she unearths may not lead to redemption, but damnation.

This massive tome

includes *Comics Greatest World: Arcadia Week 3: Ghost*, *Ghost Special #1*, *Ghost* (series one) #1 - #12, *A Decade of Dark Horse* #2, *Ghost* (series one) #13 - #36, *Ghost Special* #2 and #3, and *Dark Horse Presents* #145 - #147. More Ghost arrives in a future volume 2, including *Ghost* (series two) #1-22 with additional details to come.

Ghost Compendium Volume

1 collects the origins of this gritty supernatural noir. The 1,088-page (6.625"x10.1875") paperback arrives in bookstores and comic shops on October 21 and 22, 2025 for \$59.99. Pre-order now from [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#), or your local [bookstore](#) or visit [Comic Shop Locator](#) for more details and stores near you.

Get the entire *Ghost* compendium with **Ghost Compendium Volume 2** which completes the series. More details on **Ghost Compendium Volume 2** to come.

Be sure to follow [DarkHorseComics](#) on social media and check our website, www.darkhorse.com for more news, announcements, and updates.



DARK HORSE

THE RIVERDALE TEENS COLLIDE WITH THE SUPER CRIMINALS OF TWILIGHT CITY IN ARCHIE VS. MINOR THREATS



Archie Comics meets Minor Threats in a new crossover miniseries

Dark Horse Comics presents *Archie vs. Minor Threats*, a new crossover comic miniseries featuring Twilight City's favorite villains and Riverdale's favorite teenagers. Timmy Heague (*Archie Comics' Fear the Funhouse: Toybox of Terror, Black, White, & Bloodshot*) joins Patton Oswalt (*Minor Threats, DC Horror Presents*) and Jordan Blum (*Minor Threats, DC Horror Presents*) on writing duties, and artist Scott Koblish (*Deadpool, Superman: Legion of Three Worlds*), colorist Hi-Fi (*Usagi Yojimbo: The Crow*), and letterer Nate Piekos (*Black Hammer: Spiral City, The Umbrella Academy: Hotel Oblivion*) round out the talented creative team. Issue #1 will be available with six different covers illustrated by the all-star lineup of Scott Hepburn, Scott Koblish, Joe Quinones, Patrick Horvath, Dan Parent, and Mike Allred.

About Archie vs. Minor Threats:

It's your favorite high schoolers forced to fight your favorite costumed villains in a story that will have lasting ramifications for all involved! Archie, Betty, Veronica, Jughead, and friends are on their way to Twilight City for a field trip when the magical meddling of Sabrina the Teenage Witch lands them in the seedy underbelly of Redport, the most villainous part of town, which is controlled by Frankie Follis, aka Playtime, and her gang of Minor Threats. Archie and the others suddenly find themselves drafted into both sides of the war Playtime is waging against magic users on her turf. One thing is for sure: blood and milkshakes will be spilled!

Here's what the creative team had to say about *Archie vs. Minor Threats*:

Jordan Blum: "Some of my favorite comic crossovers have been the ones where you go 'how the hell is that gonna work?'" Which, by the way, is the appropriate response to pitting the all-American teenagers of Archie against the down on their luck supervillains of Minor Threats. What was born out of this unlikely pairing was a story that dramatically affects the events of Frankie's journey and super crime for years to come, while also exploring unique character dynamics that challenge the Riverdale gang's status quo like we've never seen. This is one of the funniest, most action-packed, most violently unhinged stories we've ever done and one that can only exist in the medium of comics. Put on your domino masks and raise your milkshakes... this one is gonna be a barn burner!"

Patton Oswalt: "Not since Alan Moore's *WATCHMEN* crossed over with Bazooka Joe has there been a comics match-up as made in heaven as this one! Prepare to be TRANSPORTED."

Timmy Heague: "When I write comics set in the town of Riverdale, it's like hanging with my friends. Now I'm writing the adventures of my favorite fictional friends with my best friends Jordan and Patton, where their comic book creations get to crossover with some of my all-time favorite characters in all of comic book history. For my first four issue mini-series, I couldn't ask for anything more. Also, Scott Koblish on art?! Riverdale and Twilight City are not ready for the mind-blowing awesomeness that he is cooking on these pages! Archie and the gang are NOT ready. Anyway, someone got a milkshake and a burger? All this comic stuff makes a guy hungry!" Scott Koblish: "This is one of the most challenging and rewarding projects I've ever attempted! I'm really excited to be working with Patton, Jordan, Timmy, Hi-Fi and all the incredibly supportive folks at Dark Horse and Archie who are encouraging me to take my art to the next level on something truly unique!! Strap in, the thrusters are set to reach the stars on this one!!!"

The gang gets together on August 6, 2025 when *Archie vs. Minor Threats* #1 (of 4) will be available in comic shops. It is now available for pre-order from your local comic shop for \$4.99.

Be sure to follow [DarkHorseComics](https://www.darkhorse.com) on social media and check our website, www.darkhorse.com for more news, announcements, and updates. Praise for *Minor Threats* and *From the World of Minor Threats*:

"There hasn't been a bad title from the Dark Horse Comics *Minor Threats* universe yet. And great news, *From the World of Minor Threats: Welcome to Twilight* #1 doesn't break that trend, thanks to an expertly crafted issue by Matt Fraction and Mike Allred."—Comic Book Club Live for *From the World of Minor Threats: Welcome to Twilight*

"*Barfly* #1 is a delightful addition to the world of *Minor Threats*. With its outstanding writing, stunning visuals, and memorable characters, this comic is a true work of art. If the next three issues are anything like the premiere issue, we are in for one hell of a ride and is in serious contention for our comic book of the year!"—Capes & Tights

"If you love comics filled with humor, action, toxic parents, and a lovable little giant fly man with no wings, then this is the comic for you."—Nerd Initiative for *From the World of Minor Threats: Barfly*

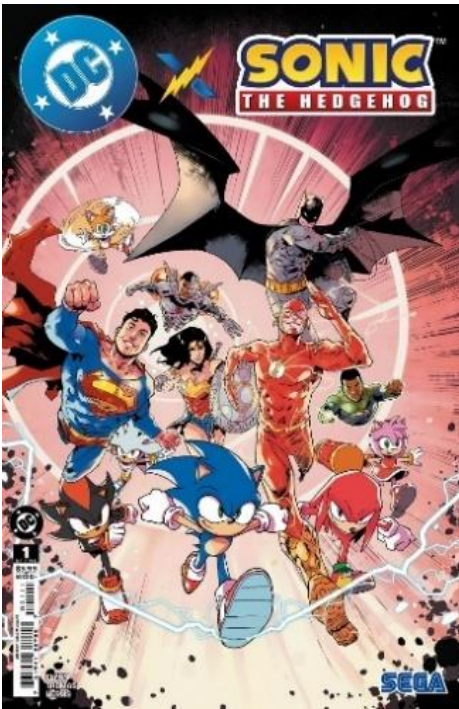
"This bizarre character study is a great entry point for readers who are new to '*Minor Threats*.' One of the most wonderfully strange universes in comics just got even more interesting."—AIPT Comics for *From the World of Minor Threats: Welcome to Twilight*

"A giddy romp through the filthy back alleys of superhero town. Patton and Jordan lovingly subvert the capes genre."—Rick Remender (*The Sacrificers, Deadly Class*) for *Minor Threats*

"The world of *Minor Threats* never ceases to amaze me. This past summer, they made me fall in love with a giant fly man, and now I'm rooting for a Miami Vice who has been with giant nonfunctioning wings who's up against someone who is literally two-faced (and not in the way you would expect). If you still haven't encountered the world that is *Minor Threats*, it's time to dive head first into the fun and chaos with *Welcome to Twilight* #1."—Nerd Initiative for *From the World of Minor Threats: Welcome to Twilight*

DC x Sonic the Hedgehog Issue #2 Hits Stores April 16

Issue #1 Second Printing Arrives in Stores April 30 with
New Variant Cover Featuring Sonic as The Flash



DC x Sonic the Hedgehog #2 arrives at local comic book shops and online retailers today, April 16! This next chapter in the exciting DC x Sonic the Hedgehog crossover event hits shelves after the first issue, fittingly, quickly sold out at the distributor level when it published on March 19. Following high praise and to meet overwhelming fan demand for this new comic book series, DC is also headed back to press for a second printing of *DC x Sonic the Hedgehog* #1, arriving in stores April 30!

DC x Sonic the Hedgehog #1's second printing will arrive with a recolored version of Pablo M. Collar's main cover

for issue #1, and an open-to-order variant cover featuring Sonic as The Flash!

DC x Sonic the Hedgehog #1 is by the veteran Sonic comic book team of writer Ian Flynn and artist Adam Bryce Thomas. In this debut issue, the monstrous Darkseid crosses dimensions to invade the world of Sonic the Hedgehog, seeking the ultimate power.

"*DC x Sonic Hedgehog* #1 has plenty of action and even more fun while staying true to the core of these iconic characters," wrote [Graphic Policy](#) in their review of the issue.



"Batman: Dark Age" Offers a Pop Art View of the Dark Knight



Bruce Wayne, this is your life!!!

[*Batman: Dark Age*](#) is now available as a graphic novel collection, making this the perfect time to read the limited series in one sitting. But there are other reasons why this is the ideal time for this story. *Batman: Dark Age* presents an alternate version of Batman's life, putting the hero against the backdrop of America's turbulent '60s—a decade with parallels to our current moment. Don't worry if you're not familiar with Batman lore or have never read a Batman comic, because this is a perfect standalone story.

Batman: Dark Age is written by Mark Russell with art by Mike and Laura Allred, the team behind the conceptually similar [*Superman: Space Age*](#). Their work on *Space Age* earned them multiple Eisner nominations, and while *Dark Age* isn't set in the same universe as *Space Age*, the two stories are tonally alike, telling an emotionally grounded story about a superhero set against the backdrop of American history.

Russell's script has a lot of heart. We see the emotional toll the Vietnam War has on Bruce, and the even

greater toll the war on crime in Gotham has on him. The framing sequence with an elderly Bruce struggling to hold on to his slipping mind is heartbreaking, but the conclusion has a great bit of emotional catharsis. Russell does a phenomenal job of recontextualizing eight decades of Batman's career into one satisfying limited series.

The Allreds continue to be some of the best artists in modern comics, and that's not hyperbole. The husband and wife illustrating team capture the essence of the 1960s, while still managing to feel modern. Each page reads like a blend of Andy Warhol and the Adam West *Batman* TV series, but grounded and realistic. For example, take a look at Barbara Gordon and the Mad Hatter's flower power outfits. They're just beautiful.

- Unlike mainstream Batman comics, *Batman: Dark Age* progresses in time, showing Bruce age and react to the changing world around him. We see a young Bruce Wayne drafted into the Vietnam War, as Gotham reacts to the peace and love movement of the era.

- If you're a fan of Walt Disney and his original vision for his Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT), you'll love Thomas Wayne's vision for Gotham. As a theme park nerd, I could see the influences, and it had me grinning ear to ear.

- *Batman: Dark Age* has a twist ending that you'll never see coming. The framing device with an elderly Bruce fighting memory loss might seem bleak, but there's more to it than we initially realize. I won't give everything away, but it's an emotionally satisfying ending for Batman and

Gotham.

- I know we've already covered this in the creator section, but let's be real, the team of Mark Russell, Mike Allred and Laura Allred is probably this comic's biggest draw. They're all acclaimed for a reason, and they're in absolute peak form here. I hope this trio continues producing DC Comics forever.

Have you ever finished reading a story and realized that it had unexpectedly warmed your heart? Once again, I won't spoil how *Dark Age* ends, but it's an emotionally satisfying conclusion that makes the reading experience worth it.

There are tons of great Batman stories out there, but *Batman: Dark Age* does something those stories don't. The limited series gives us a complete biography of Bruce Wayne's life, from childhood to old age. There are plenty of fun surprises, great redesigns of classic characters, high stakes and a big emotional payoff. In short, *Batman: Dark Age* is a wonderful reading experience, whether you're a new comic book reader, or a longtime Dark Knight fan. It's a visually dynamic story, and worthy of being your next weekend escape.

[*Batman: Dark Age*](#) by Mark Russell, Michael Allred and Laura Allred is available as a hardcover graphic novel collection in bookstores, comic shops, libraries and digital retailers. It can also be read in full [on DC UNIVERSE INFINITE](#).

Joshua Lapin-Bertone writes about TV, movies and comics for DC.com, is a regular contributor to the Couch Club and writes our monthly Batman column, "[Gotham Gazette](#)." Follow him on Bluesky at [@joshualapinbertone](#) and on X at [@TBUJosh](#).

A JAMES GUNN FILM



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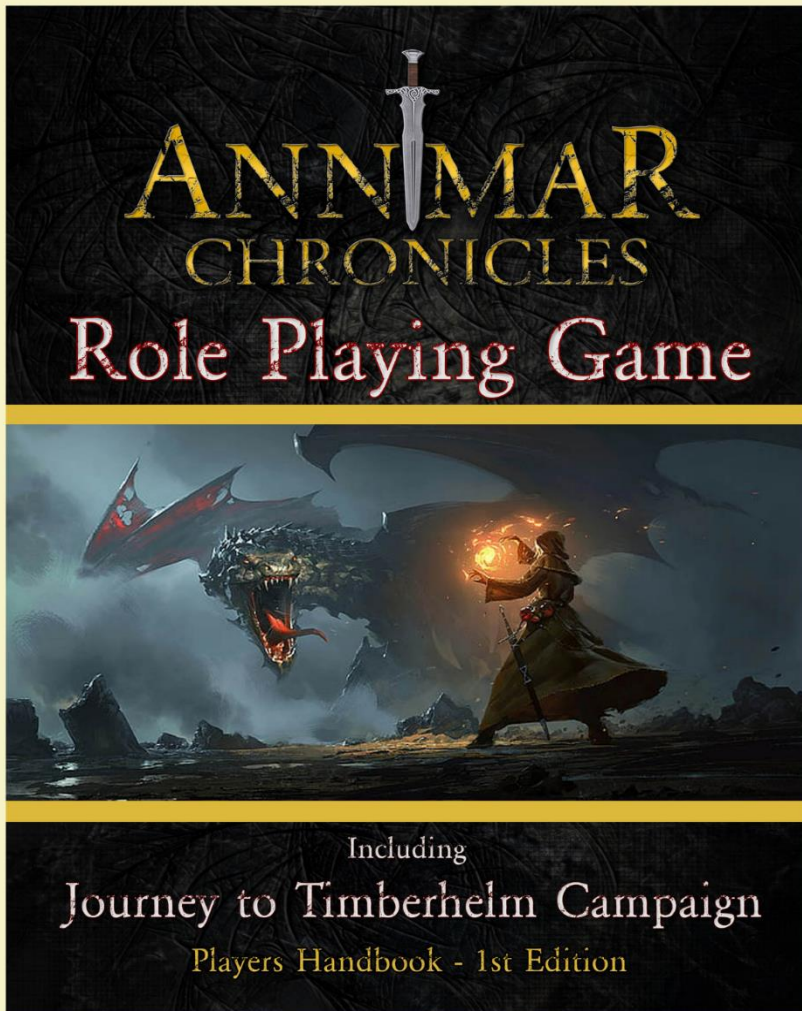


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Conclave Should Have Been “Best Picture” of the Year!

By Marcus Blake



It's no secret that my favorite movie of 2024 was Conclave. It was actually my pick for Best Picture of the year. Beyond some of the fun films like Deadpool and Wolverine, I thought this movie was the better option for Best Picture for many reasons. From the performances to the subject matter, it's just an amazing film and it wasn't a movie that was too preachy or even to Catholic. It didn't have a hidden agenda with its themes unlike every religious film you see coming from Angel studios. And it certainly didn't

promote trans rights like some conservative pundits pointed out. It was a mystery seller wrapped up in one of the most prominent religious processes in the world, how do you pick a new pope and what do you look for in the head of the Catholic Church. But this week with Pope Francis passing away in a new Conclave about to happen, I think this movie is more relevant than ever especially when some who are more conservative are calling for the pope not to be too woke.... I still don't even know what that means. But one of my main reasons why I thought it should have been best picture in 2024 was because it is more relevant than a story about a young naive hooker who thinks she's found true love in the son of a Russian billionaire believing that there is such a thing as a Cinderella story for prostitutes. In fact I think that story is more fake than anything that you would find on the Hallmark channel. Here's why I really loved Conclave.

My Review

Conclave is one of the best movies of 2024! I can confidently say that. Marked by The great performances of Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci, John Lithgow, and Isabel Rossellini, this film is a deliciously entertaining

thriller that doesn't shy away from the politics and corruption within the Catholic Church. But at the same time, offers hope about what religion should be in the modern world. Picking the new Pope is intriguing, to say the least, and I feel like there's still a lot behind the scenes that people don't know so of course it makes for a great story. But, I think, this is the best story about the Catholic Church since Angels and Demons with Tom Hanks. And just be warned, it will shock You at your very core how it all plays out in picking the new Pope.

You immediately dive into the sadness and the corrupted ambitions within the Catholic church when the Pope has died. As one of the Cardinals points out, it is a war. It's not a peaceful transition. It's control on how the biggest faith in the world will be steered. And it's not hard to imagine that Cardinals will politic, bribe, and heavily influence the voting for the new Pope. And this film immediately shows you that it is no different than campaigning for political office, whether it's in America or someplace else in the world. But I praise this film for keeping the audience guessing until the very end who the new pope will be and why. If you have not read the book, which the movie is based on then you will be shocked. The ending is not obvious and that is one of the

most brilliant parts of this film. But what makes it truly worth watching is just the great performances of the four main actors especially of Ralph Fiennes Who turns in an Oscar-worthy performance that I predict will win him an Oscar for Best Actor. John Lithgow, Stanley Tucci, and Isabel Rosellini also give Oscar-worthy performances too.

The pacing in this film is brilliant and there is not a wasted scene that leaves you bored. My hat's off to the editors for crafting together a well-timed thriller that doesn't make you feel like you've been sitting in a theater for 2 hours. Every scene is meticulous and with purpose helping shape a fantastic film and that's a rare achievement, especially with most films that are either too short or too long where the director couldn't figure out what to cut so he left everything in an overbloated mess. Conclave certainly doesn't suffer from That kind of insufferable filmmaking. But I feel what makes this movie unique is whether it's true or not it does give the audience a peek through the looking glass of what the Cardinals go through in picking a new pope while also maintaining great character development especially that of the main character who is having a crisis of faith but also might end up being the Pope.

This is one of those rare films for me where I do not have any serious complaints. Conclave is filmmaking at its best. It is a masterful film with great character development and a surprise ending that will change your outlook for the better. And it is the performance of these great actors that really make the movie, but I have two small complaints. There isn't enough story. We do get to know the characters, but I don't always feel like we get to know them well enough and see the reasons for their motivations beyond wanting to be the Pope. There's a great mystery within the story and at times I feel like we don't get enough information about what's really going on behind the scenes and that's an editing problem. That has nothing to do with the director or the performances. Sometimes is necessary to make a film 2 hours or more to fill in the little bits and pieces that make a

film fantastic. And the only other complaint is we don't have enough time to get to know all of the characters. We get to know the important ones, but these two complaints go hand in hand with the fact that there could have been more time added to this movie to make it a full story. It will be interesting to see what deleted scenes were kept out that could have made this movie perfect.

However, don't let that take away from the fact that this is a movie we're seeing. It is a great commentary on religion and the purpose of the church in the modern age, but it is also a stark reminder that even men of God are still fallible. Men of God will still bribe and scheme and ignore their own morals to get what they want. It's a great story that examines humanity and it's very core. This has been one of my favorite films of 2024. It is definitely worth the price of a movie ticket and a film that will add to the great discussion of religion and morality. I do not see this film being forgotten for a long time. And The film is beautifully shot proving that they made the right choice to actually shoot in Vatican City and throughout Italy. Conclave Just might be the Best picture of the year, marked by great performances and a thrill ride of a story. If this movie doesn't win an Oscar for something, it will be a real shame.

Final Thoughts

This may be a heavenly fictionalized version of what the conclave process is really like, but I think the themes are very true. Do we look more for a conservative Pope who wants to take the church back to the dark ages where homosexuals were persecuted, contraception is frowned upon and there should be no abortions under any circumstances. Or do we look for a pope who is overly ambitious and political who cares nothing for the people, but the power they can wield over the largest church in the world while ignoring the true teachings of Jesus. The themes within this movie play out more realistically than any other movie from last year. Conclave is more relevant as a film

the same way that Oppenheimer did when it comes to global affairs after the invention of the Atom bomb while portraying a brilliant, but very flawed scientist in Oppenheimer. I believe that great films should invoke an emotional connection whether it's happiness or disgust that makes us change our perspective. Films like Schindler's List and *12 Years A Slave* are those kinds of films and worthy of best picture. We are about to see why the movie Conclave is important especially when it comes to electing the Pope who must present love and grace over a society that grows further and further from religion while also presiding over numerous controversies that have popped up with the Catholic Church.

Just like a presidential election, this is one of the most important things in our society that can truly make a difference and we see that within the movie Conclave. You don't have to be Catholic to understand the true relevance of this story. And whether your religious at all electing and putting the head of your religious organization is extremely important because we are asking what kind of man of God do we want leading the flock and in an ever changing society. This isn't about what kind of Pope that I would like although I admired Pope Francis greatly especially with how he became Pope after a very turbulent period in the Catholic Church. Conclave makes us ask more relevant and important questions than all the best picture nominations from last year ever did. Oppenheimer is a great movie and a great history lesson, but we can't live through a process that happened 80 years ago, we do live through the process of Conclave today and especially for Catholics examining what kind of man of God we seek to lead a church will always be more relevant than the story of a naive hooker looking for a Cinderella story. If you haven't seen Conclave, this is a good time to watch it not only for fantastic performances, but the themes within this movie that play out in the real world. Also it's just a beautiful well-crafted film that will leave you shocked in the end, but in a good way!



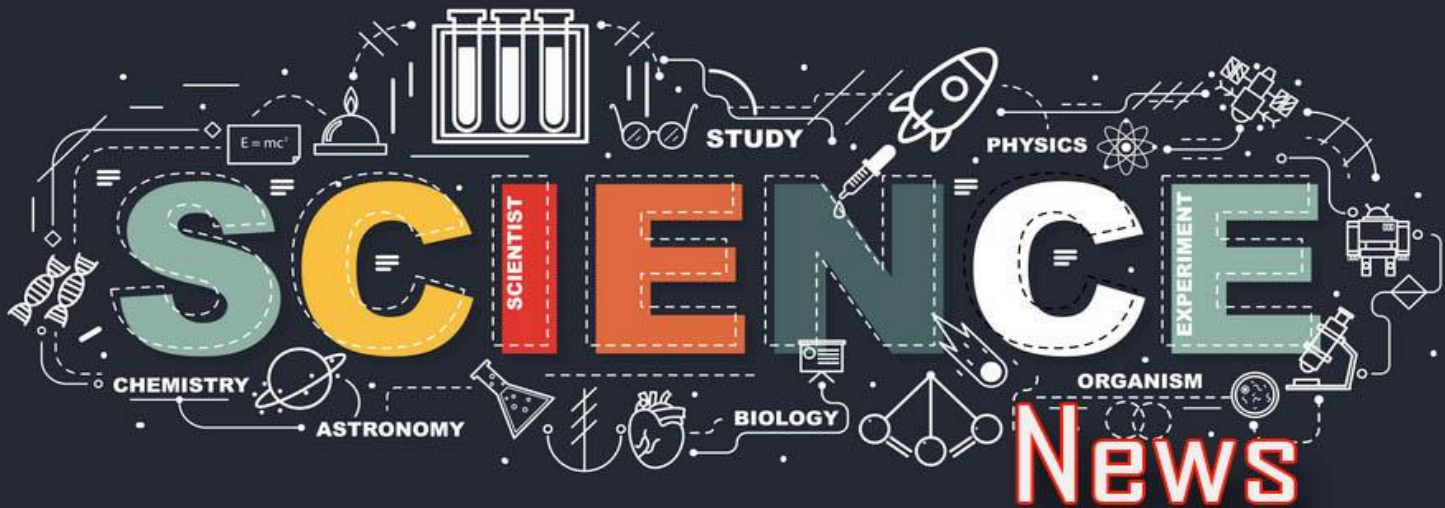


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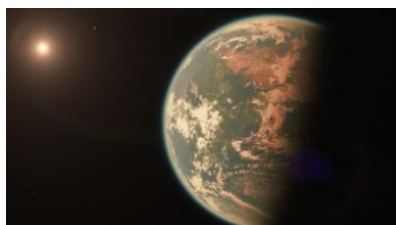
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Astronomers Find Earth-like Exoplanets Common Across the Cosmos



Using the Korea Microlensing Telescope Network (KMTNet), an international team of researchers has discovered that super-Earth exoplanets are more common across the universe than previously thought, according to a new study.

By studying light anomalies made by the newly found planet's host star and combining their results with a larger sample from a KMTNet microlensing survey, the team found that super-Earths can exist as far from their host star as our gas giants are from the sun, said Andrew Gould, co-author of the study and professor emeritus of astronomy at The Ohio State University.

"Scientists knew there were more small planets than big planets, but in this study, we were able to show that within this overall pattern, there are excesses and deficits," he said. "It's very interesting."

While it can be relatively easy to locate worlds that orbit close to their star, planets with wider paths can be difficult to detect. Still, researchers further estimated that for every three stars, there should be at least one super-Earth present with a Jupiter-like orbital period, suggesting these massive worlds are extremely prevalent across the universe, said Gould, whose early theoretical research helped develop the field of planetary microlensing.

The findings in this study were made via microlensing, an observational effect that occurs when the presence of mass warps the fabric of space-time to a detectable degree. When a foreground object, such as a star or planet, passes between an observer and a more distant star, light is curved from the source, causing an apparent increase in the object's brightness that can last anywhere from a few hours to several months.

Astronomers can use these fluctuations, or bumps, in brightness to help locate alien worlds unlike our own. In this case, microlensing signals were used to locate OGLE-2016-BLG-0007, a super-Earth with a mass ratio roughly double that of Earth's and an orbit wider than Saturn's.

These observations allowed the team to divide exoplanets into two groups, one that consists of super-Earths and Neptune-like planets and the other comprising gas giants like Jupiter or Saturn. This discovery opens new doors for planetary system science: Having a better understanding of exoplanet distribution can reveal new insights about the processes by which they form and evolve.

The study, led by researchers in China, Korea and at Harvard University and the Smithsonian Institution in the United States, was recently published in the journal *Science*.

To explain their results, researchers also compared their findings to predictions made from theoretical simulations of planet formation. Their results showed that while exoplanets can be separated into groups by mass and makeup, the mechanisms that may produce them can vary.

"The dominant theory of gas-giant formation is through runaway gas accretion, but other people have said that it could be both accretion and gravitational instability," said Gould. "We're saying we can't distinguish between those two yet."

Doing so will likely require greater swaths of long-term data from specialized systems such as KMTNet and other microlensing instruments like it, said Richard Pogge, another co-author of the study and a professor of astronomy at Ohio State.

"Finding a microlensing star event is hard. Finding a microlensing star with a planet is hard-squared," he said. "We have to look at hundreds of millions of stars to find even a hundred of these things."

These alignments are so rare that only 237 out of the more than 5,000 exoplanets ever discovered have been identified using the microlensing method. Now, with the help of three powerful custom-built telescopes located in South Africa, Chile and Australia, the KMTNet system routinely allows scientists to scour the

cosmos for these amazing events, said Pogge.

Most notably, it was scientists in Ohio State's Imaging Sciences Laboratory who designed and built the Korean Microlensing Telescope Network Cameras (KMTCam) that the system relies on to identify exoplanets. And as technology continues to evolve, having dedicated, global collaborations like this one will turn visions of scientific theory into real discoveries, said Pogge.

"We're like paleontologists reconstructing not only the history of the universe we live in but the processes that govern it," he said. "So helping to bring both of those pieces together into one picture has been enormously satisfying."

Other members of Ohio State's ISL team include Bruce Atwood, Tom O'Brien, Mark Johnson, Mark Derwent, Chris Colarosa, Jerry Mason, Daniel Pappalardo and Skip Shaller. This work was supported by the National Science Foundation, Tsinghua University, the National Natural Science Foundation of China, the Harvard-Smithsonian

Center for Astrophysics, the China Manned Space Project, Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange and the National Research Foundation of Korea.

[Materials](#) provided by [Ohio State University](#). Original written by Tatyana Woodall. *Note: Content may be edited for style and length.*

Why Our Waistlines Expand in Middle Age: Stem cells



It's no secret that our waistlines often expand in middle-age, but the problem isn't strictly cosmetic. Belly fat accelerates aging and slows down metabolism, increasing our risk for developing diabetes, heart problems and other chronic diseases. Exactly how age transforms a six pack into a softer stomach, however, is murky.

Now preclinical research by City of Hope®, one of the largest and most advanced cancer research and treatment organizations in the United States and a leading research center for diabetes and other life-threatening illnesses, has uncovered the cellular culprit behind age-related abdominal fat, providing new insights into why our midsections widen with middle age. Published today in *Science*, the findings suggest a novel target for future therapies to prevent belly flab and extend our healthy lifespans.

"People often lose muscle and gain body fat as they age -- even when their body weight remains the same," said Qiong (Annabel) Wang, Ph.D., the study's co-corresponding author and an associate professor of molecular and cellular endocrinology at City of Hope's Arthur Riggs Diabetes & Metabolism Research Institute, one of the world's foremost scientific organizations dedicated to investigating the biology and treatment of diabetes. "We discovered aging triggers the arrival of a new type of adult stem cell and enhances the body's massive production of new fat cells, especially around the belly."

In collaboration with the UCLA laboratory co-corresponding author Xia Yang, Ph.D., the scientists conducted a series of mouse experiments later validated on human cells. Wang and her colleagues focused on white adipose tissue (WAT), the fatty tissue responsible for age-related weight gain.

While it's well-known that fat cells grow larger with age, the scientists suspected that WAT also expanded by producing new fat cells, meaning it may have an unlimited potential to grow.

To test their hypothesis, the researchers focused on adipocyte progenitor cells (APCs), a group of stem cells in WAT that evolve into fat cells.

The City of Hope team first transplanted APCs from young and older mice into a second group of young mice. The APCs from the older animals rapidly generated a colossal amount of fat cells.

When the team transplanted APCs from young mice into the older mice, however, the stem cells did not manufacture many new fat cells. The results confirmed that older APCs are equipped to independently make new fat cells, regardless of their host's age.

Using single-cell RNA sequencing, the scientists next compared APC gene activity in young and older mice. While barely active in young mice, APCs woke up with a vengeance in middle-aged mice and began pumping out new fat cells.



"While most adult stem cells' capacity to grow wanes with age, the opposite holds true with APCs -- aging unlocks these cells' power to evolve and spread," said Adolfo Garcia-Ocana, Ph.D., the Ruth B. & Robert K. Lanman Endowed Chair in Gene Regulation & Drug Discovery Research and chair of the Department of Molecular & Cellular Endocrinology at City of Hope. "This is the first evidence that our bellies expand with age due to the APCs' high output of new fat cells."

Aging also transformed the APCs into a new type of stem cell called committed preadipocytes, age-specific (CP-As). Arising in middle age, CP-A cells actively churn out new fat cells, explaining why older mice gain more weight. A signaling pathway called leukemia inhibitory factor receptor (LIFR) proved critical for promoting these CP-A cells to multiply and evolve into fat cells.

"We discovered that the body's fat-making process is driven by LIFR. While young mice don't require this

signal to make fat, older mice do," explained Wang. "Our research indicates that LIFR plays a crucial role in triggering CP-As to create new fat cells and expand belly fat in older mice." Using single-cell RNA sequencing on samples from people of various ages, Wang and her colleagues next studied APCs from human tissue in the lab. Again, the team also identified similar CP-A cells that had an increased number in middle-aged people's tissue. Their discovery also illustrates that CP-As in humans have high capacity in creating new fat cells.

"Our findings highlight the importance of controlling new fat-cell formation to address age-related obesity," said Wang. "Understanding the role of CP-As in metabolic disorders and how these cells emerge during aging could lead to new medical solutions for reducing belly fat and improving health and longevity." Future research will focus on tracking CP-A cells in animal models, observing CP-A cells in humans and developing new strategies that eliminate or block the cells to prevent age-related fat gain.

[Materials](#) provided by [City of Hope](#). Note: Content may be edited for style and length.

The Oldest Ant Ever Discovered Found Fossilized in Brazil



A 113-million-year-old hell ant that once lived in northeastern Brazil is now the oldest ant specimen known to science, finds a report publishing in the Cell Press journal *Current Biology* on April 24. The hell ant, which was preserved in limestone, is a member of Haidomyrmecinae -- an extinct subfamily that only lived during the Cretaceous period. These ants had highly specialized, scythe-like jaws that they likely used to pin or impale prey.

"Our team has discovered a new fossil ant species representing the earliest undisputable geological record of ants," said author Anderson Lepeco of Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil. "What makes this discovery particularly interesting is that it belongs to the extinct 'hell ant,' known for their bizarre predatory adaptations. Despite being part of an ancient lineage, this species already displayed highly specialized anatomical features, suggesting unique hunting behaviors."

The ant fossil's discovery challenges our understanding of ant evolution and biogeography through time, according to the researchers. The previous oldest ants were found in France and Burma and were preserved in amber instead of limestone. The existence of a hell ant in Brazil shows that ants were already widely distributed and diversified early in their evolution, says the team.

"Even though there have been hell ants described from amber, this was the first time we could visualize this in a rock fossil," said Lepeco.

Lepeco and his team discovered the "remarkably well-preserved" ant specimen while systematically examining one of the world's largest collections of fossil insects from the Crato Formation, a deposit renowned for its exceptional fossil preservation. The collection is housed at the Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo.

"When I encountered this extraordinary specimen, we immediately recognized its significance, not only as a new species but as potentially the definitive evidence of ants in the Crato

Formation," said Lepeco. "This finding highlights the importance of thorough examination of existing collections -- private or in museums -- and brings a spotlight to Brazilian paleontology and the underexplored fossil insect fauna of the country."

Micro-computed tomography imaging -- a 3D imaging technique that uses X-rays to view the inside of an object, or ant in this case -- showed that the newly discovered ant was closely related to hell ants previously known only from specimens preserved in Burmese amber -- a type of amber found in Myanmar. The finding shows that the ants were widely distributed across the globe and must have crossed Cretaceous landmasses repeatedly, say the authors. But what astonished them most was the hell ant's specialized features.

"While we expected to find hell ant features, we were shocked by the characteristics of its feeding apparatus," said Lepeco. Unlike modern ants with laterally moving mandibles, this species possessed mandibles that ran forward parallel to the head and facial projection anterior to the eyes, the researchers noted.

"Finding such an anatomically specialized ant from 113 million years ago challenges our assumptions about how quickly these insects developed complex adaptations. The intricate morphology suggests that even these earliest ants had already evolved sophisticated predatory strategies significantly different from their modern counterparts."

The discovery of this new ant specimen raises broader questions about the evolutionary pressures that led to the hell ant's unique adaptations, say the researchers. With advanced imaging tools, it's now possible to examine such fossil specimens in much greater detail than ever before.

Journal Reference: Anderson Lepeco, Odair M. Meira, Diego M. Matielo, Carlos R.F. Brandão, Gabriela P. Camacho. **A hell ant from the Lower Cretaceous of Brazil.** *Current Biology*, 2025; DOI: [10.1016/j.cub.2025.03.023](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2025.03.023)

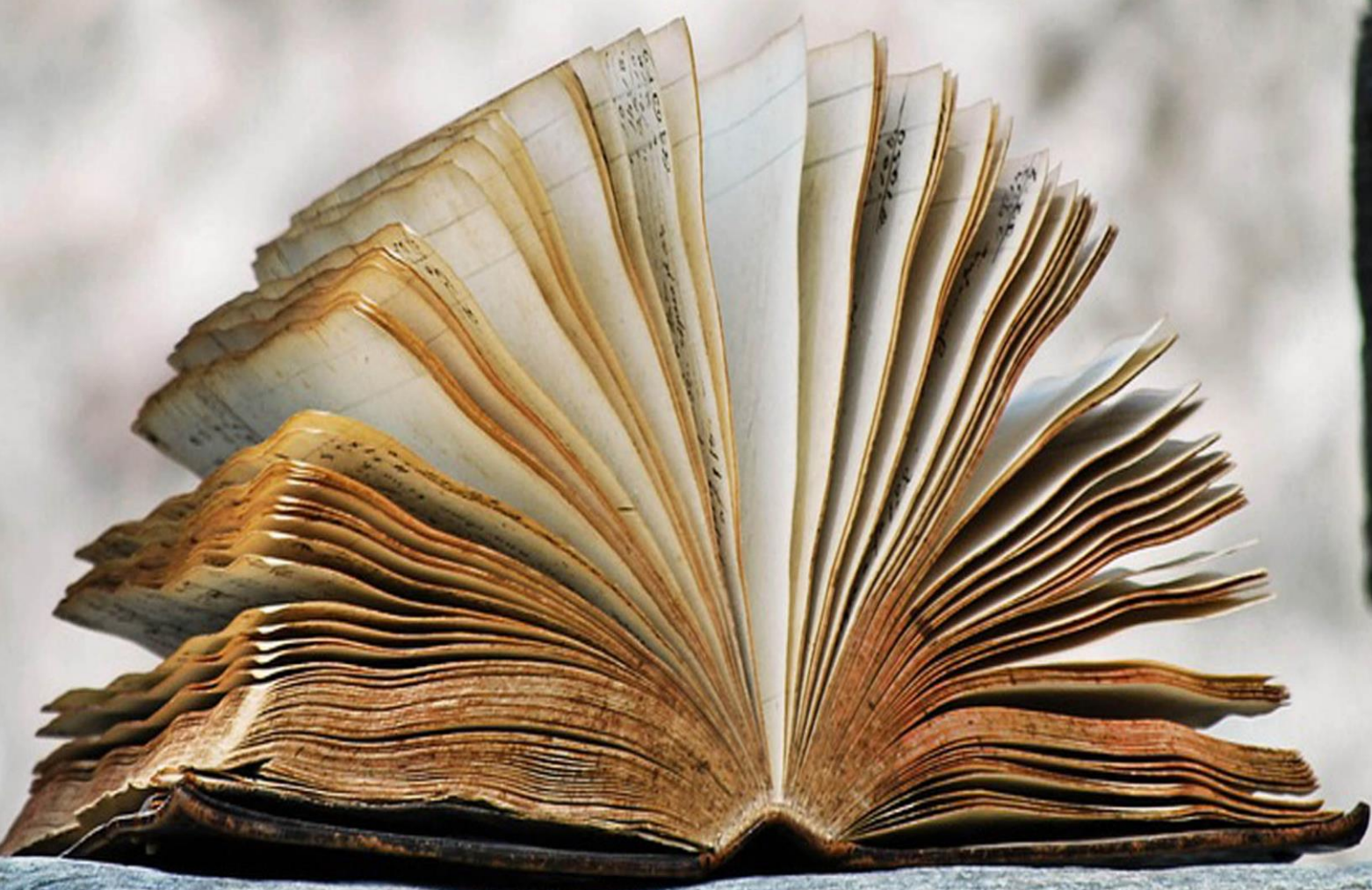
Your Place To Talk!



DISCORD



Storytellers





Part 1

By Sydney Costa

“Tales From a Warped Teenage Brain”

“**Welcome** to the Cosmic Crust Pizza Palace, where our food is out of this world! What can I get for you today?” I recited in my Customer Service Voice.

“Uhhh...let’s see....”

Oh, great. One of those people. I glanced at my phone while I waited for the customer to decide what he wanted. Another text from Mike asking when my shift ended—we were going to hang out when I got home, but if everyone kept going at this guy’s pace, I might as well just call it quits. Mike still didn’t know I worked at an intergalactic establishment; he still thought I’d been hired at the joint down the street. Unfortunately, I worked five million lightyears away, not five minutes.

I looked back up at the customer, who was still scratching his chin—well, the approximate area of where a chin would be—and sighed. *Only a few more minutes.* The customer cleared his throat.

“I think I’ll just take four planet-sized anchovy pizzas. Er, one with pickles. And stardust on all four, with a side of molten cheesy bread,” he burred. His voice was deep, but bubbly, and everything he said sounded slightly muffled. “Oh, and don’t forget the fish marinara, please. Just a bit on the side, if you don’t mind.”

“You’ve got good taste,” I remarked, scribbling down the order. *I hate anchovies, but it’s not like I’m gonna tell him that.* “Any special occasion?”

His eyes lit up. “It’s my daughter’s birthday today,” the squid-like alien said cheerily, his mouth (at least, that’s what I thought it was) scrunching into a well-worn grin. It filled his whole face, crinkling the smile lines by his eyes and pushing the fins in place of his ears up. “She loves pizza from here. And between you and me,” he added in a conspiratorial whisper, “I do too.” He patted his stomach and chuckled.

His happiness was infectious, and I smiled too. “That’s fun! How old is she turning?”

“Seven hundred. She’s still little.”

Right, not all species have human-adjacent lifespans. “I bet she’s a real sweetheart,” I told the father. “What’s the name for the order?”

He rubbed the tentacles on his face for a moment. “Gleuri.”

After writing that on the top of the slip of paper, I handed the order to the four-armed chef in the back. She grumbled something about ‘stupid messy human writing,’ sprinkling in a few words I didn’t recognize but sounded like swearing in a different language. I ignored her and turned back to the customer. “Okay, If you’ll just take a seat over there, your pizza should be ready in a few moments.”

He smiled again. “Thanks. It’s much appreciated, though I do have one question.”

“Go for it.”

“How’d a human like you get to work here?”

“Uh...” I thought back to when I’d first put up an ad for myself because I needed money to get a game. I was about 12, and it was a hand-written flyer that I recalled as being very unspecific. Apparently, aliens check the community pool cork board

too, because the next thing I knew, they'd kidnapped me to work at the Cosmic Crust Pizza Place. Good thing they weren't murderous.

"The owners wanted a less intimidating being behind the counter to be a friendly face, and, well, humans aren't exactly scary. So, they got me to work for them. And hey, what can I say, a job in space is just cool."

"Oh, that's wonderful! Sorry if I'm being intrusive with all these questions, but do you have a way home? Earth is quite a ways from here, and you look rather young." His tone turned slightly concerned.

"Yeah, totally. Don't worry about it," I reassured him.

"Alright, don't want to keep you," the squid-like creature said. "Thanks again!" he added as he walked over to the pick-up section of the restaurant.

"No problem; it's my pleasure," I called back. *Huh, what a nice guy.*

I remembered the time and glanced at the melting pizza clock. I'd spent an extra few minutes talking to the customer and hadn't even realized my shift was up.

"Gotta go!" I said to a bird-like alien that was walking over to switch with me, grabbing my phone and hurriedly tossing him my hat. He caught it and stared at me in confusion.

I changed out of my uniform and sprinted to the wormhole generator out back. *Oh, thank goodness it's still open.* I stepped inside the chamber and typed in the settings for a spot just outside the pizza place, preparing for the feeling of interdimensional warping. *I've been doing this for like three years. Maybe I'll be used to it this ti...*

The wormhole opened and my stomach lurched as the floor disappeared beneath me, the fabric of reality distorting and stretching around me. My molecules got pulled in every direction and every fiber of my being felt like it was being torn apart. I squeezed my eyes shut, trying to block out the kaleidoscopic whirls of color that seemed to attack me from every angle. Another wave of nausea washed over me and despite my best instincts, I managed to uncurl from the ball I'd hunched into and (sort of) stuck the landing on the pavement of the back parking lot on my hands and knees.

The breath rushed out of me as I collapsed, rolling over onto my back. I repressed the urge to vomit again. *Nope, still not used to it.*

I heard a quiet, drawn-out gasp to the side of me and looked towards the sound in alarm. My best friend, Mike, was standing there, holding his car keys and looking somewhere between dumbfounded and awestruck. *Crap!.*

"Blake, you have...a *lot* of explaining to do," was all he could manage to say. I flopped back onto the ground, staring at the sky. "Yeah, that...yeah. I'll...get to that in a...second." I said breathlessly.

Part 2

Normally You Can't Go o Space Just By Asking Nicely, But I'll Make An Exception

The tense silence that filled the car ride back was suffocating. Mike was focused intently on the road, his eyebrows furrowed in the expression he made when he was trying to figure out a tough engineering project. He kept a white knuckled death grip on the steering wheel, and as he kept driving, I became increasingly concerned that my neck would suffer the same fate.

"...so, are we going to talk about—"

"Nope."

"Are you—"

"Nope."

"Can I—"

"Blake Alexander Sanchez, if you try to ask me one more question, I will swerve this car into the nearest ditch."

"Ah," I squeaked, then shut up.

After a few more minutes of quiet driving, Mike pulled into the driveway of my house and turned the car off, sighing. He turned to me with an exasperated expression. I grinned nervously and he rolled his eyes.

"Okay. I'm gonna try to be calm, and articulate, and understanding, and scientific about this." He took a deep breath. "WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT?! I THOUGHT YOU WORKED AT A PIZZA PLACE!" He exclaimed, gesturing wildly with his hands.

"I...do."

He blinked. "Uh huh. Don't bullcrap me, Sanchez. I'm just spitballing, but that whole teleportation thing you did? That was some next level science that I *know* you couldn't come up with on your own."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Just that like—" He waved his hands around some more like that would help him form words better. "That's SCI-FI SCIENCE! Which is *ridiculously* cool??? And ALSO how did I never find out about this?!"

"Normally I finish my shift early so I'm just waiting when you get there, but there was this one guy that took *forever*. At least he was nice, though," I added.

"What?"

"I really do work at a pizza place. It's just...out of this world, I guess."

He snickered a little at my awful pun until the realization smashed into him. "Wait, you're not trying to tell me..."

I smiled sheepishly.

"YOU WORK AT A PIZZA PLACE IN SPACE??"

"There you go."

Mike looked like he might explode at the very concept of this revelation. "No way. How do you—when—where—you know what? I don't believe you. It's too impossible."

"Seriously? I literally just used a wormhole to get home!"

"Still don't believe you. You gotta show me now."

"Now?"

"Now now."

"I can't! My shift already ended so the generator's shut off, and besides, my manager would freak out if I brought another human in."

"Hey, that implies aliens! Now you *have* to show me!"

"No. No way."

"Please?"

"Why are you going through this much effort if you don't believe me?"

He didn't know what to say for a second. "Uh...I don't! I really don't believe you, but on the *very*, *VERY* off chance that it is real, it would be quite possibly one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Ever." He gave me his best sincere smile.

"Mmmmmmmno. I can't."

"Come onnnnn, I'll be quiet, I swear!"

"You're being incredibly immature."

"I feel like this is the appropriate level of maturity for the situation. Please?"

I searched his face. Mike *was* a pretty stealthy guy, *and I guess if the boss sees him I can just say he followed me...*

"Fine. Meet me at that parking lot tomorrow at 2:45. The other side of the generator *won't* be open then, so don't mess with any machines you see, no matter how much you want to. *ESPECIALLY* if they look spacey. You can hang out in the back and look around for a bit, but you have to make sure not to tell *anyone* about this. Promise me."

He nodded eagerly. "I promise."

"Alright. Cool. See you tomorrow, then?"

"Tomorrow."

I stepped out of the car and let out a long breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding, strolling back to the door of my house and letting myself in with the spare key. I locked the door behind me and noticed a little sticky note that'd been hastily stuck onto the other side of the door. I pulled it off and examined it.

Sorry for the short notice! I would've texted you, but I left my charger at work again :/ There's a good chance that SOMEONE'S going to bail out last minute (again) and I'll have to work the night shift, so if I'm not back when you get home, there should be some mac n' cheese on the counter you can make. Dad should be home really late tonight, but just in case, lock all the doors. Call me when you read this! Love you, nerd :)

—Obviously your favorite sister, Jamie

I chuckled. My sister was way too nice; she always took over shifts when anyone else had a last minute issue, so of course, she was always exhausted. I dialed her number, but the call went straight to voicemail as per usual. I glanced at the package of mac n' cheese on the counter and decided against it. *It'd be too much of a mess, and besides, I'm not really that hungry anyways.*

I put the pasta away in the pantry, locking all the doors into the house and going into my room. I flopped onto my bed with a sigh. It was only around 8:30, but exhaustion had hit me like a truck. *Maybe going to bed early isn't the worst idea. I could use some extra sleep.* I flipped the lights off and set my alarm.

"Tomorrow," I said quietly to myself, drifting off into sleep.



TRIVIA



NAME THE TOM CRUISE MOVIE BASED ON THE FILM'S DESCRIPTION

This was Tom Cruise's first movie with Brooke Shields?

What, Tom Cruise was in a Fantasy movie saving a Princess, name the movie.

What movie did Tom Cruise play a military cadet along with Sean Penn?

No way, Tom Cruise was in a Musical...what is the name of the movie based on a musical?

Tom Cruise plays Cole Trickle in this movie which is the Top Gun of Auto Racing, name the Movie.

Tom Cruise plays the most badass bartender in New York and Jamaica.

Name the movie where Tom Cruise plays a hustler and is also a sequel to another pool hustler movie.

Tom Cruise plays a secret agent in a movie other than the Mission Impossible films, name the movie.

This is the only time Tom Cruise plays a hitman and the villain of the film. What is the name of the movie?

Tom Cruise starred with Brad Pitt in this Horror Movie, name the movie.

JACKIE
CHAN

BEN
WANG

AND
RALPH
MACCHIO

Karate Kid LEGENDS

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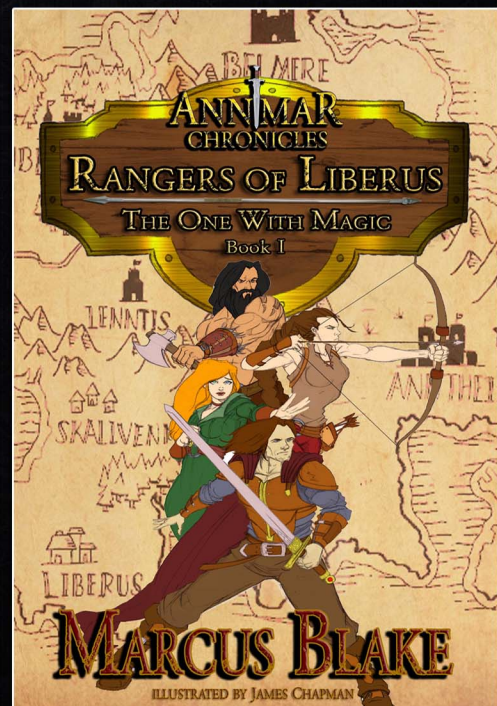
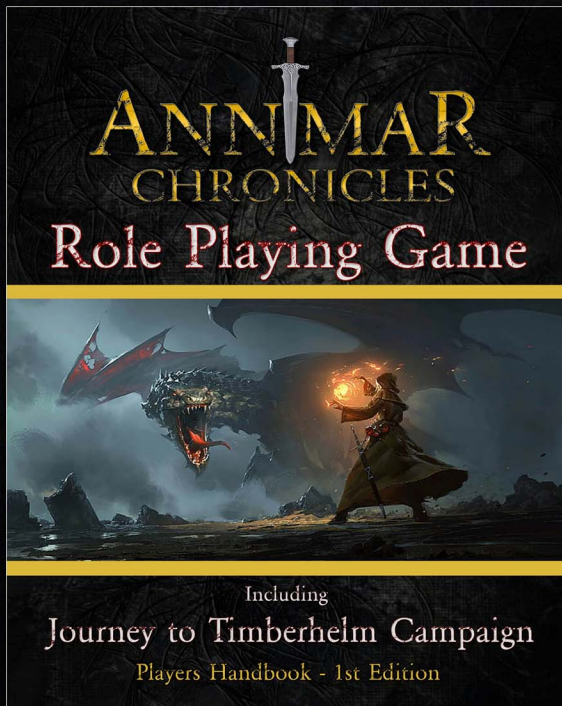


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