

SPOTLIGHT



ISSUE 1

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SPOTLIGHT

A film magazine based at the University of York

CINEMA IS BACK



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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Cinema is back, and so is Spotlight! It's been a long time coming, but the University of York's sole TV and film specialist magazine is reborn with a new face and fresh energy.

This issue is essentially a love letter to Cinema. With the popularity of Letterboxd soaring, and enthusiasts flocking to social media to share their love for film via fan edits, it's clear that cinema is not backing down. Nothing is more telling than the Barbenheimer phenomenon sweeping up the globe and breaking all kinds of box office records. But is cinema back? This issue ponders the question, touching on the writers' and actors' strikes, the rise of drive-in theatres, the Saw franchise, fan-made music videos, video game adaptations, and transnational movements.

We are massively grateful to our small committee for pulling this out the bag amidst all the other demands of university life, and George for being a amazing help with graphics. None of this would have been possible without our wonderful writers who have submitted some incredibly thought-rpvoking pieces for the issue, our members who have helped us reach print, and to everyone who spread word and supported this magazine. And now you, dear reader!

WITH LOVE FROM



AVVAYAR DE MEL
EDITOR



ELLY HOYLAND
EDITOR



Elly Hoyland
Secretary, Editor,
Re-founder
GUILTY PLEASURE: Cutie Honey
(2004) dir. Hideaki Anno

CHILDHOOD FAVE: Eleanor's
Secret (2009) dir. Dominique
Monfery



Avvayar Del Mel
President, Editor,
Re-founder
GUILTY PLEASURE: She's the Man
(2006) dir. Andy Fickman
CHILDHOOD FAVE: Kiki's Delivery
Service (1989) dir. Hayao
Miyazaki



George Udale
Deputy Graphics
Editor
GUILTY PLEASURE: Superbad
(2007) dir. Greg Mottola
CHILDHOOD FAVE: Cinema
Paradiso (1988) dir. Giuseppe
Tornatore



Omar Amin
Deputy Graphics
Editor
GUILTY PLEASURE: Pitch Perfect
(2012) dir. Jason Moore
CHILDHOOD FAVE: 3 Idiots (2009)
dir. Rajkumar Hirani



MEET THE TEAM



Francesca Napolitano
Treasurer, Re-Founder
GUILTY PLEASURE: Barbie in the Nutcracker (2001) dir.
Owen Hurley
CHILDHOOD FAVE: Mary Poppins (1964) dir. Robert
Stevenson



Laura Andrews
Press & Publicity
Secretary
GUILTY PLEASURE: Stardust
(2007) dir. Mathew Vaughn

CHILDHOOD FAVE: Puss In Boots
(2011) dir. Chris Miller



Ayesha Brown
Graphics Editor
GUILTY PLEASURE: The Oranges
(2011) dir. Julian Farino
CHILDHOOD FAVE: Monster
House (2006) dir. Gil Kenan



CINEMA IS BACK - AND SO ARE WRITERS' AND ACTORS' RIGHTS

BY ANNA MALE

On May 2 2023, the Writers Guild of America declared a writers' strike. The Screen Actors Guild followed on July 14th, shutting down production across the US of film and TV. The strikes lasted for five and four months respectively and represented the need for stronger worker protection in the industry in the age of AI and streaming. The rapidly changing technology offers more cinema and television, but forgets to include more rights within this. Historically, these two strikes reminded production companies just how reliant they are on people to create art, and that cutting the costs through replacing jobs with technology is not the way to go.

But what were the issues in the entertainment industry to lead to these changes?

Actors and writers are given residuals every time a show is streamed, a DVD or box set is bought, or when a show or film is shown on network TV. These residuals ensure that they have a steady income even when they are not actively filming a show, especially pertinent for

necessities like health insurance in the US. The previous residual system was set up in 1960, when actors and writers had their last joint strike. At the time, the new prevalence of television meant producers were paid for reruns but actors and writers were not. The similarly historic agreement led to the residual structure that, up until this year, has continued, ensuring that producers give actors and writers a steadier income, and health and pension benefits. For streaming services, this hasn't been the case. Their business structure means that the number of views or streams a piece of media receives doesn't correlate to revenue due to subscriptions. Streaming services can pay actors and writers pennies, as they often don't provide information on the performance on individual shows, and frequently cancel popular shows due to not attracting new subscribers. Like previous strikes, the rise of new technologies contributed to the need for strike action. AI is dangerous to the livelihoods of actors and writers. For actors, production companies have their voices and their images recorded and the ability to manipulate this for new shows or games. For background actors this fear is heightened - as studios

proposed paying them for one day of work in getting their image, and then reproducing this image in different productions without compensating them.

For writers, ChatGPT has the ability to create dialogue and film scripts. This means that writers can potentially be replaced by production companies using AI to write scripts or to add in dialogue - which impacts compensation. For high-profile cinema this won't have as much of an impact but for lower budget, lower stakes sequels and shows this impacts writers contribution and further reduces media made for streaming to a form of commercialised content with little artistry. Writing is also used by companies such as Meta to train AI without writers' consent.

The writers' strike came to an end on the 27th September, with writers officially confirming their deal on the 9th October. The actors' strike finished on 9th November, with the SAG-AFTRA deal approved on the 10th. The writers' deal included provisions to ensure that AI can't undermine a writer's credit nor can writers be forced to use AI; however, writers are still able to use AI, if the company consents and discloses it. Additionally, foreign stream residues and

viewership streaming bonuses were included, guaranteeing that the writers of high-budget subscription videos on demand are fairly compensated, and services are required to provide their viewership data. SAG-AFTRA similarly came to a deal increasing compensation increases, streaming bonuses and limits on AI. The viewership statistics similarly need disclosing, making streaming services more transparent. However, the treatment of AI has come under fire, as actors are worried there are loopholes. For film and TV, production has been delayed, delaying the releases of many films and TV shows. The Emmys were similarly moved from September to January, so it may be a little longer before we see who the 2023 screen favourites are. However, actors are able to promote their upcoming work again, so be ready to hear more about them soon. Meanwhile, late night talk shows have made their return.

Yet again, actors and writers showed that without them art can't continue and their value is not replaceable with technology. There is power in all industry workers standing together to protect their own and fellow workers' jobs.

While the strikes are over for now, who knows when this kind of action will be needed again.

Technology changes will continue to happen and businesses will continue to attempt to exploit those involved to cut their costs. Ensuring that we have art in television and cinema means ensuring those involved are treated and compensated fairly, and the importance of humanity in art needs to be highlighted through this.

Yet again, actors and writers showed that without them art can't continue and their value is not replaceable with technology

But for now, production - and cinema - is back.



The Renaissance of the Cinema as a Third Spaces.

BY AVVAYAR DE MEL

For university students, our third place is often the nearest pub with the cheapest pint, that often being the closest Spoons. Our ‘third place’ – the space that isn’t your overpriced little student home or campus/work-is most often than not going to be the Posterngate, with its one-pound-something pints, or Courtyard if you like them slightly overpriced. Third Places are a historic concept, first put into official theory in 1989 by Ray Oldenburg, but existing well before - most notably the Roman Forums during the Greco-Roman

It’s most likely why you’ll find two Spoons in a city as small as York- the human need to meet and bond in an inexpensive manner. Films and TV shows have since popularised this concept, from Grease’s Frosty’s Place Diner, to FRIENDS’ Central Perk and How I Met Your Mother’s MacLaren’s Pub. One of the most notable third places has always been the cinema - be it drive-in theatres or the classic ‘brick-and-mortar inside a building, maybe a mall’ ones, people have always

rise in social media use, gaming, and an introduction of platforms that allowed individuals to stream movies on multiple platforms at once such as Teleparty. One of the most interesting third place creations during the pandemic actually lies outside the realm of the internet: drive-in theatres. The drive-in theatres’ unique ability to combine being outside of the house with being isolated gave it its ticket to success - drive-ins generated 85% of the North American box office revenue according to Comscore. The UK has seen drive-in theatres go from three to forty. Analysts for Comscore, an analytics company tracking global box office data, credit this increase to the fact that whilst multiplexes do not work in the context of a pandemic, drive-ins satiates the public’s desire to be outside of the house but not at work. With the removal of COVID-19 laws of social distancing, third places have seen a Renaissance as a whole. Drive-Ins are still doing fairly well, averaging 6.2% of the weekend box office revenue in the first 30 weeks of 2021, and with companies like Sun-Ray and PVR announcing plans to build even more Drive-Ins in 2023. So what does this mean for the regular ‘brick-and-mortar’ cinema? Will it face a death, or a joint revival? Comscore saw a 64.30% increase in box office numbers from 2021 to 2022. But these numbers are being largely contributed by older

for two hours with only the occasional gasps and laughter, followed by enthusiastic debate on whether the movie was truly good or bad or simply had attractive actors. Despite the statistically older crowd gathering in cinemas, cinema culture has begun worming its way back into the traditions of the youth, with Barbenheimer creating a social media trend of matching the film you’re watching. Of course, this really started with Minions: Rise of Gru - need to give credit where credit is due. ‘Going to the movies’ has always been a staple of youth culture - most people can recall their first movie in a cinema. Mine was Peter Jackson’s King Kong and I was way too young to watch it, cried and had to leave immediately. It had no negative effects on my love for the cinema, however. The cinema will always be an incredibly unique third place as it stands as a third place not only to meet friends outside of work and home, but to immerse yourself in a cultural experience. Nearly everyone can recall watching an action movie and leaving the theatre feeling incredibly confident in their ability to perform elaborate parkour. You cannot experience the feeling of being invincible after watching a movie on your laptop propped up on your chest. I don’t think I’ll ever personally forget being a kid and leaving the theatre after watching Micheal



Empire. A place between the home and work, where one can exist in a social manner without the obligations of either. The importance of the third place lies in this concept of ‘no obligations’; it’s a place for socialisation; for relaxation and for the forming of human bonds. Oldenburg, in his book The Great Good Place, states,

“What suburbia cries for are the means for people to gather easily, inexpensively, regularly, and pleurably.”

looked to gather around cinemas either on the tried-and-true movie date or in large groups of friends. However, our generation has seen a decline in third-places, or rather in physical ones. The introduction of virtual third spaces – chat rooms, multiplayer games, or multi-view screenings - has made the overall concept of third places more accessible, but not entirely real. The third place is still being experienced within the confines of your first place: your home. The ever-rising cost of living started this dissolution of third places, and the process was sped up by the pandemic. COVID-19 caused an amalgamation of all our places - home, work and the third all became one space neatly packaged into Google Workspaces or Microsoft Teams. People formed new traditions; ways in which we could reap the benefits of socialisation without risking our lives and the lives of others. There saw a

generations - 54% of Top Gun Maverick’s audience was 35 and older, with 37% on opening weekend being over 55. The cinema right now really is your parents’ space.

Youth Culture is still on the prowl for a third space, and it is possible that it’s time to take back the cinema.

Bring back cheesy cinema dates and fighting with your friends on what the ideal screening time is. Don’t bring back overpriced popcorn but bring back sitting in silence

Bay’s Transformers wishing deeply that I was a car. Of course, there is still the issue of the rising cost of living. The cost of cinema tickets rising was blamed on the lack of cinema releases- both COVID and the rise of streaming services being the ultimate cause. However, with the rise in cinema culture and ‘in theatres only’ releases, there’s hope for a drop in prices. Third spaces have become incredibly limited demographically- even pubs with their ridiculous £5 pints. As great as Picturehouse’s Under 25 £5 deal is, cinemas need to bring their pricing down in order to expand their audiences, and bring back a culture so crucial to the development and enjoyment of the arts. As great as Spoons, or Vbar or whatever your choice of watering hole is- cinemas pose an incredibly unique option for a third place. It is possible that it’s time for cinema to come back.



NICOLAS CAGE RETROSPECTIVE

by Jake Grant

Barbenheimer is an event that has had many claiming cinema is back, but we all know only one thing could signify the return of cinema, that of course being the revitalisation of Nicolas Cage's career. After starring largely in generic, low budget and low-quality movies for most of the 2010s, it seems like Cage is making a comeback.

Well, that's how I originally wanted to start this piece, but recently in an interview with Uproxx, Cage indicated that he'd like to stop making movies soon, with maybe only three or four left, and has expressed interest in moving to television. We have no guarantee of any of this, but in any case, I feel like this is a good opportunity to reflect on Nicolas Cage's impact not only to cinema, but society as a whole.

Cage began his acting career as Nicolas Kim Coppola in 1981 and made his feature film debut in 1982 in Fast Times at Ridgemont High. He began using his stage name, Nicolas Cage, to avoid claims of nepotism as much as possible, as he is in fact Francis Ford Coppola's nephew. In 1987, Cage starred

in both Raising Arizona and Moonstruck, which, for the first time, showcased Cage as not only an actor, but a good one as well. Whilst these movies have their critical acclaim and commercial success, and I think they're both enjoyable enough, the next movie Cage would star in is what I'm really here for.

Vampire's Kiss was released in 1988. About five people saw it, and they all hated it. I love this movie so much and I have no idea if it's actually good. Cage's performance is completely unhinged. He plays Peter, who goes insane and starts to believe he is a vampire.

It's weird, because it's clear that nobody involved knew what they were doing, but it actually works. I mean, it is a comedy, and it is funny. Whether or not it's funny when it's supposed to be is debatable, but that's irrelevant. There's even some subtextual criticism of the patriarchy as well as modern day capitalism, but I realise as I'm writing this how ridiculous that sounds so it was probably an accident.

Vampire's kiss later became a cult classic, but at the time nobody cared, nor did anybody care about

anything Cage was in until 1995. Well, he did star in David Lynch's Wild at Heart in 1990, but he would have to wait for Leaving Las Vegas to receive commercial success again. Following this, he would star in three successful action movies, being The Rock (1996), Con Air (1997) and Face/Off (1997), each film being goofier than the last. Face/Off is my favourite - it's about two characters, played by Nick Cage and John Travolta, fighting with each other, or facing off, and they also surgically swap their faces, so their faces come off, hence 'Face/Off'. It's very clever stuff.

There was also a movie in 2002 called Adaptation, written by Charlie Kaufman. Cage plays a partially fictitious version of Kaufman, and over the course of the movie, you see him writing the movie you are currently watching. It's full of creative presentation, and sometimes Kaufman (the fictional one) has ideas for his script which are then paid off in the plot of the movie, but it's written in such a way where it's surprisingly easy to follow. It's an excellent character portrait, and it might be the best movie Cage is in. There is a lack of Cage Rage, and whilst at times the movie is over the top, it's never really because of Cage's performance. This isn't a criticism of the movie at all, I think it's a massive achievement for Cage to have such an outstanding performance without relying on outright absurdity, and I'd recommend it to anybody who is a fan of movies, not just Nicolas Cage fans.

Cage would continue to star in successful action movies for the coming years, including National Treasure (2004), Ghost Rider (2007) and Kick-Ass (2010), but at some point, he got into a lot of debt. To stay out of bankruptcy, Cage started to take a lot of roles. Too many, in fact. Cage appeared in 42 films during the 2010s, and most of them are straight-to-video trash. There's a maximum of maybe three good movies from this era.

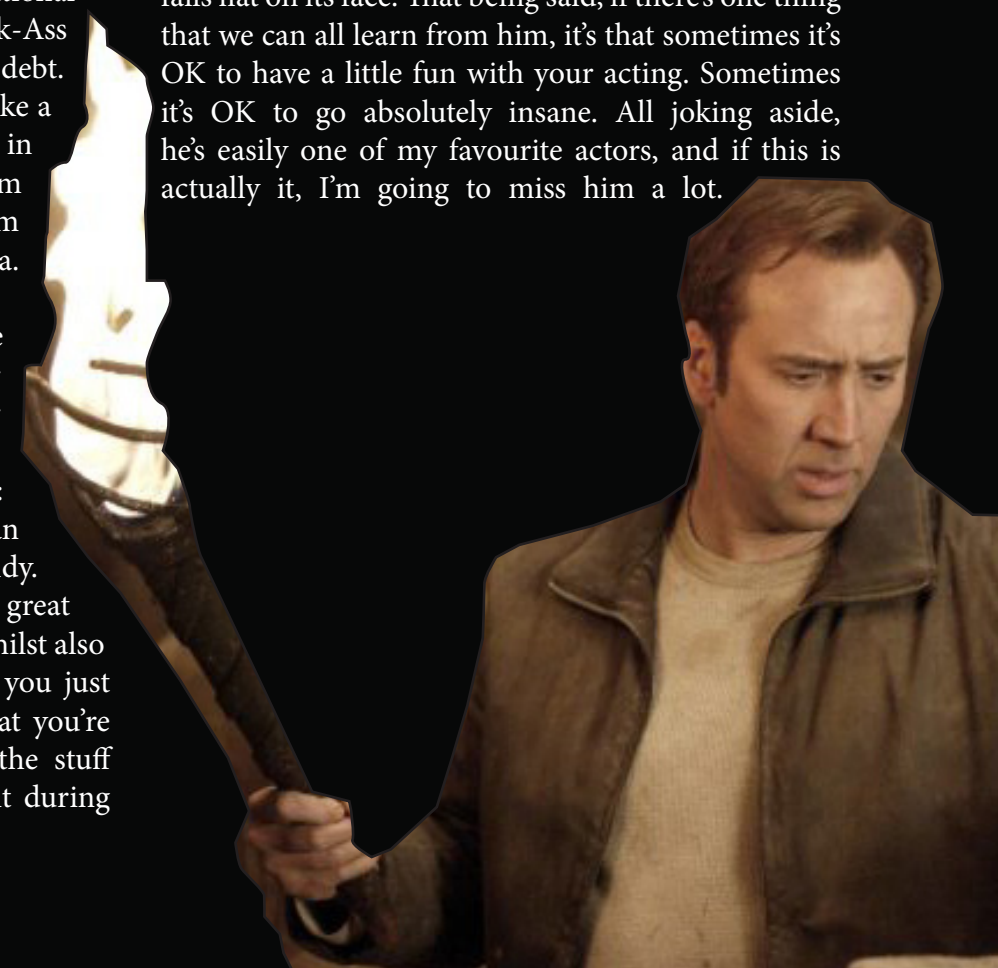
Mom & Dad (2017) is basically the modern day Vampire's Kiss, being a horror comedy of ambiguous quality with another ridiculous performance from Cage. He also made an appearance in Spiderman: Into the Spideverse (2018) as Spider-Man Noir, and that same year he was in Mandy. Mandy is great. It's visually stunning, has a great soundtrack, and manages to be very camp whilst also being very dark. It's camp in a way where you just have to accept the ridiculous nature of what you're watching, rather than laughing at it like the stuff Cage is normally in. Well, I did laugh a bit during



the chainsaw duel. It's got a very weird tone, OK. It's undeniably one of the most interesting projects Cage has been involved in, and one I'm excited to revisit.

The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent (2022), where he plays himself, was the last movie he made before getting out of debt. Since the acclaim from Mandy, as well as escaping debt, Cage has had somewhat of a career revival, starring in Pig (2021), Renfield (2023), and Dream Scenario (2023). So now we're here. Just as it seemed like Cage was getting back on his feet, it seems like he's going away again.

Nicolas Cage is an icon. A national treasure if you will. He's been in a lot of great movies, as well as a lot of bad ones. A lot of actors would be terrified to approach their performances in the way that Cage does, and for good reason, because a lot of the time it falls flat on its face. That being said, if there's one thing that we can all learn from him, it's that sometimes it's OK to have a little fun with your acting. Sometimes it's OK to go absolutely insane. All joking aside, he's easily one of my favourite actors, and if this is actually it, I'm going to miss him a lot.



“Do I resemble my portrait?”: How Ridley Scott’s latest historical drama challenges the Napoleon celebrated on social media

By George Udale

In an interview with Empire prior to the release of his film, Ridley Scott announced that “I compare [Napoleon] with Alexander the Great, Adolf Hitler, Stalin... he’s got a lot of bad shit under his belt”; a damning take that casts the famous French leader down from the lofty heights we see him celebrated as on social media and into the harsh reality of Scott’s recent historical epic. Throughout the duration of its 2 hours and 48 minute run time, Scott’s Napoleon tackles the basis of social media’s recent admiration for the former French Emperor: his deep love letters towards Joséphine de Beauharnais, his fame as a glorified military leader and his admirable stoicism in the face of defeat.

It is the first of these myths (Bonaparte’s relationship with Vanessa Kirby’s Joséphine) that is given the most screen time to be deconstructed. Kirby and Joaquin Phoenix’s on screen relationship gifts us some of the most heartfelt scenes within the movie, but also some of the most comically perverse and emotionally tragic; the dissolution of their marriage and domestic battles collapse social media’s superficial image of them as pure, uncomplicated lovers. Where TikTok broadcasts edits of Napoleon’s letters and romanticises him as a passionate and faithful lover, Scott’s portrayal has him riddled with

jealousy, mood swings and the capability of domestic violence. What’s interesting, however, is how Scott could have easily drawn upon historical fact to collapse this illusion further but chose not to. By keeping Napoleon’s 22 affairs and his passionate relationship with his Polish paramour Marie Walewska out of the narrative, Scott blurs historical fact and fiction to make Napoleon initially resemble that which we recognise today, only to then disfigure this romanticised image of him and Joséphine by showing us their flaws.

This strange synthesis of fiction and fact, mythos and reality, then extends into how Scott constructs Phoenix’s Napoleon as a famed military leader, and how this challenges the social media trends that glorify this. Accompanied by MGMT’s synth-pop anthem Little Dark Age and featuring exaggerated depictions of Napoleon’s wartime successes, these TikTok videos (many of which garner up to a million views) and Instagram posts, and their glorification of a fictional past find themselves represented within Scott’s film, especially through the scene in which Bonaparte establishes his imperial might by firing upon the Pyramids of Giza in an act that any historian will tell you never actually happened. Despite this propaganda, Scott ends the film with the very real tally of French casualties caused by his military campaigns, which historians estimate totals to be between 600,000 to 1.3 million. A very

real reminder that the leader we see glorified on social media is a reductive view of the Napoleon who led French forces over 200 years ago.

Alongside his celebrated military leadership, social media has recently been fixated on his ability to remain stoic in situations out of his control. Soundtracked by the French pop duo Videoclub’s viral pop hit Amour Plastique, hand-coloured engravings that depict Napoleon’s exile on the island of Saint Helene are overlaid with his famous stoic statement that “there is nothing we can do” to create TikTok slideshows that encourage us to emulate his stoicism. Collapsing this false image just as he did with Napoleon’s hopeless romanticism, Scott never has Napoleon utter this statement but depicts him as a man lost in reminiscing about his past glory rather than resolute about his future demise, fixated on returning to France and restoring his legacy. Using the last 20 minutes to drive home the fragility of Bonaparte’s ego, Scott marks the dissolution of Napoleon’s military mythos when the children who also live on his island of exile tell him that it’s common knowledge that, rather than being the result of Napoleon’s successful military campaign, the burning of Moscow was caused by the Russians themselves as an act of defiance against their French invaders. Marking the failure of the propagandised success of his military campaigns that he notoriously used to increase political support, this conversation not only grounds Napoleon in a flawed reality, but is chronologically positioned by Scott so that he fatally collapses shortly after this takes place, aligning the death of the man with the collapse of the myth he sought desperately to maintain.

Outside of social media, Napoleon is widely regarded by historians as a man with too much blood on his hands to be celebrated as part of a glorified myth. Although he did establish the foundation of the French legal system in the form of the Napoleonic Code, centralise university education and reform national health infrastructure, Napoleon was also responsible for up to 5 million total casualties during the Napoleonic Wars and his personal ambition for the expansion of the French Empire. It is this historical reality, not excluding his less than admirable love life and ego, that Scott overlays alongside glorified and fictional elements of the

narrative to prove that even supported by his own propaganda, the weight of his myth collapses under the instability of its historical foundations.

Whilst critics have labelled the film as somewhat lacklustre, Scott’s film shouldn’t be dismissed if it appears disappointing, for this only reaffirms the power that such exaggerated portrayals have had in influencing our perception; of preferring a reductive two-dimensional view celebrated by social media over the three dimensional and flawed Napoleon we see Scott create. Crafting a character with depth and flaws despite social media’s obsession with Napoleon’s surface level glory, Scott’s latest is especially powerful in debunking popular myth. The result is that when re-watching the film, as I would encourage you to do, and Napoleon asks “Do I resemble my portrait?” to his new and much younger wife Marie-Louise, one is able to answer with a profound ‘no’ upon the realisation that he no longer resembles the myth we commonly associate with him today.



Past Lives

and the Now of Transnational Cinema

by Elly Hoyland

Celine Song's *Past Lives* (2023) was a much-anticipated debut, promising a touching story of love revisited and dual cultural identity navigated. For those who could see themselves in the struggles and miscommunications, tears were hard to hold back. But it's hard to shake the feeling that if it wasn't for specific personal connection to isolated events in the film, it would be a very dull 1 hour 46 minutes.

In terms of the themes and situations it questions, particularly regarding relationships, *Past Lives* is a refreshingly complex exploration of love experienced across time and space, of the clash between naïve romanticism and sour realism. And this film is very much realism in all its discomfort and human weakness. In all ways, the upside down of *La La Land* (dir. Chazelle 2016). However, it falls short on delivering the visual complexity to match – and this is only so tragic because of Song's potential that shines through in glimpses. Although none of the performances were bad, all were arguably below average. Yet for both the interesting debates it sparks and the glimmerings of future potential untapped, *Past Lives* is certainly worth a watch, and Celine Song a director to look out for.

Past Lives is an interesting companion piece to Davy Chou's 2022 release *Return to Seoul*, perhaps for all too obvious reasons: a female protagonist returns to South Korea, the nation she is inextricably tied to yet estranged from. Both Nora and Freddie are headstrong and independent, but they mourn their personal histories much differently. The recent release of these films and the popularity of *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (dir. Kwan and Scheinert 2022) speak to a transnational movement of filmmakers seeking to put multicultural identities on the screen and heal wounds inflicted when torn between multiple homes.



Dream Scenario:

Or Nightmare?

by Freddie Smith



Kristoffer Borgli's 2023 release *Dream Scenario* is everything you'd want from an Ari Aster/Lars Knudsen produced and Nic Cage starring fever dream of a film.

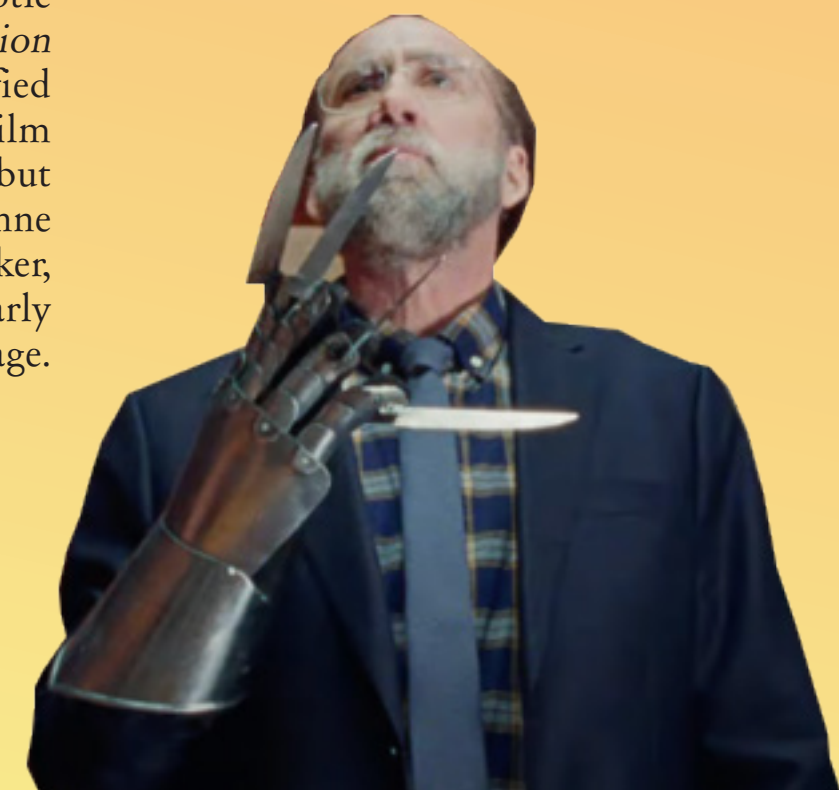
Following average professor Paul Matthews (Cage) and his progressive descent into acknowledgement, fame, and despair through the buzzard discovery that people around the world start to inexplicably see him in their dreams. Through this, *Dream Scenario* explores themes of trauma, family, and the human psyche – as well as mankind's natural obsession with David Byrne's goofy suit.

Cage's performances are always the key talking point of his films, being one of a small handful of actors who can garner a wide audience through use of just their name alone. He brings a more subtle tone to *Dream Scenario*, à la *Adaptation* (2002), with some intense peaks amplified through the dream-like feel the film takes on. Supporting Cage is a small, but effective ensemble consisting of Julianne Nicholson, Michael Cera and Dylan Baker, to name but a few. Nicholson particularly has fantastic chemistry with Cage.

Dream Scenario is an original screenplay, reminiscent of Kaufman and Jonze's works, combining an interesting concept with tinges of horror, comedy and mystery. There are several dream sequences, each unique and

oddly relatable – with the visuals being captured in a manner of bizarre and unique ways. The comedy stems from superb line deliveries, awkward situations, and some really natural chemistry.

Writer/Director Borgli creates a truly hilarious film, far funnier than any outright comedy of the year, and more so than it has any right to be; whilst capturing every disturbing aspect of the uncanny, ultimately resulting in one of the most enjoyable films of the year. This is without doubt, the funniest film and biggest surprise in a long time.



SALTBURN AND 'EAT THE RICH' SATIRE

BY RACHAEL BAKER

Saltburn, Emerald Fennell's second feature film, centres on an Oxford student who is invited to spend the summer at a fellow student's sprawling country estate, the titular Saltburn. The film has split critics over whether it is successful as a satire of class and whether this was Fennell's aim in the first place. Art satirising the wealthy is not a new phenomenon, however, in recent years there has been a notable increase in films and tv that aim to take a more critical look at their rich characters. Some prominent examples are the films Parasite (2019), The Menu (2022), and Triangle of Sadness (2022) and the TV shows Succession (2018) and The White Lotus (2021). The success of Saltburn suggests that this genre is not slowing down any time soon, so it is worth examining why it has become so popular and what some common criticisms of it are.

Parasite won the Best Picture Oscar and Succession garnered 48 Emmy nominations so undoubtedly the genre has proved itself to have potential for both critical and popular success. This in turn motivates the production of more media in the genre because companies are financially incentivised to replicate this success. It might also be that writers feel that in a climate of increased attention to wealth inequality and social issues audiences expect a more critical look at class.

There is less appetite for loveable wealthy characters whose class privilege goes unquestioned.

Another common argument for its success as a genre is that there is a joy for audiences in seeing the downfall of the 1%. Sometimes this is in graphic and gory detail, for example the luxury cruise that turns into apocalyptic chaos in Triangle of Sadness. In these cases the creators are assuming that the audience will find joy in watching characters they have grown to hate suffer greatly. Other times the schadenfreude comes from the notion that rich people are just as miserable as the rest of us. The prime example of this is Succession where no amount of power or wealth can bring the Roy family the genuine human connection they all clearly need.

With the increased popularity of this genre it's worth looking at common criticisms of it. Firstly, that these films aim to have their cake and eat it, indulging in the luxury they are critiquing. The White Lotus shows long shots of the beautiful Maui beaches and Sicilian coastline. Saltburn gives us montages of summer days spent lounging around the grand estate. There is a risk that the audience doesn't come away angry at

wealth inequality but instead annoyed that the characters aren't enjoying their wealth the way that we would in their position.

Whether or not Saltburn aims to be a satire of the rich, it is undoubtable that class is a significant theme of the film. Some on-line commentators have questioned whether Fennell's upper class background leaves her unable to explore class in a satisfactory way. These films and TV shows are mostly made by large corporations and are ultimately profit seeking endeavours. They are made possible by the same capitalist system they aim to condemn and are often made by or funded by people who are themselves very affluent. Which begs the question:

How much can you critique a system whilst also being a part of it? If the world's elite applaud your efforts at the Oscars, has your satire missed the mark?

Ultimately this genre has spawned some incredibly enjoyable pieces of art in recent years. However, perhaps the focus on the

ultra-wealthy, even with a more satirical lens, is preventing the telling of working class stories. Studios and production companies have limited budgets. If it is a safer bet to put their money into a film or TV show about the ultra-rich then these are the stories that will continue to be told. This is contributing to the class inequality that these pieces of media are aiming to critique. If the entertainment industry is invested in actually tackling the issue of class it needs to start by taking a critical look at itself.



WHY YOU SHOULD GO TO THE CINEMA ALONE

By Emily Foinle

If you're anything like me, you love going to the cinema. If you are also anything like me, it takes months worth of planning to be able to schedule in doing anything more with your pals than a quick last-minute pint post a hectic day at the library or work.

So this summer I decided, enough is enough. I'm sick of missing the films I want to see if I have nobody to go with. So after a viewing of Barbie (Gerwig, 2023) with my fully booked friends, I had the next day free and it would feel wrong to not fill my time watching Barbie's counterpart. I took myself off to Everyman (bougie I know) and bought myself a single ticket to a busy screening for one of the most highly anticipated films of the year, Oppenheimer (Nolan, 2023). And guess what ... I had a fantastic time. And despite going to the cinema alone not being a mind-blowing brand spanking new notion, it is a scary concept to many including myself.

So here I have put together a list of 5 reasons why you should go to the cinema alone too:

1. NOBODY ACTUALLY CARES

A year ago, the thought of doing something like this absolutely horrified me. I was scared of doing anything alone for the fear of being perceived as weird by other people. However, unlike doing something mega scary like taking yourself out for dinner, or going solo travelling, going to a familiar cosy cinema, grabbing some snacks and getting completely engrossed in a film is a perfect stepping stone to getting out of your comfort zone. Besides, it's dark and nobody will see you anyway!

2. YOU CAN GO WHENEVER YOU WANT

Seemingly obvious, but you can go literally whenever you want and not have to wait on other people to tell you they're busy. You have a free day and a spare tenna: there's tons of cinema seats out there waiting to be filled!

3. YOU CAN SEE WHATEVER YOU WANT

So, you're super excited for Wonka's (King, 2023) release, but the idea of Oompa-Loompa Hugh Grant terrifies your mates. Why not go and enjoy that chocolate factory magic, free of your pals' judgement?

4. COOL OPPORTUNITIES

The cinema is full of so many cool opportunities that you can't get from Netflix: Q&As, National Theatre Broadcasts and Film Festivals. This is stuff that you don't get to see every day, so why not go and check out the events at your local cinema?

5. YOU'RE SUPPORTING A FABULOUS INDUSTRY

Finally, with the rise in popularity of streaming services as well as the increasing ticket prices at cinemas, it is sadly becoming increasingly rare to see a packed-out screen. So why not go out there and support the industries that you love and make a fun day out of it in the process!

So, if this is something you too have been scared to do, next time the opportunity arises, get yourself down to the cinema... maybe I'll see you there.

“Cinema is the campfire we no longer gather around”

- an interview with Corrinna Villari-McFarlane

conducted by Avvayar De Mel

On the 28th of November, under the barely working heat lamps at the Courtyard, I was able to interview screenwriter and director Corrinna Villari-McFarlane. As the talk she delivered at the York Dialectic Union, we both decided pints were imminent and made our way to the universities most beloved watering hole, where we were able to discuss the documentary format, women in film and cinema culture. The talk, hosted by the YDU's Findlay Milne, mostly centred around her documentary 'Three Miles North of Molkom' (2008). It seemed natural to pick up where Milne left off, and so I began the interview with a question on the inevitability of invasion in the documentary format. This invasion - entering someone's space that isn't your own not in order to share in it but to observe and analyse it- is incredibly fascinating and almost entirely unique to the documentary format. Particularly Villari-McFarlane's documentary set in Molkom, Sweden in a New Age 'Wellness Retreat'. The documentary embraces the intimacy of its format, specifically in its scenes of Tantric Sex; the camera moves with the participants bodies, hugging close to the activity itself and leaving no room for the audience to avoid or back away from what is taking place.

“That was intentional,” Villari-McFarlane confirms, “Intrinsic to the choice of place was this intimacy. I didn't see it as an invasion, I saw it as art.” The intimacy, Villari-McFarlane continues, was intrinsic as the content of the documentary wasn't just one hour forty seven minutes peeping through the window of a 'Wellness Retreat' but rather was a journey following a group of people searching for healing, “These people being brave enough to face their pasts and heal. That's what I'm interested in. We get healed by watching them heal - I heighten the feeling of intimacy to make us heal ourselves as we watch it.”

“There's this line in the documentary that really stuck out to me, ‘This is a temple of nature, this is not entertainment’. What is the line then in knowledge seeking as a documentary and entertainment as a piece of art?” I prod. “That was intentional,” Villari-McFarlane responds, “the audience is lured in with the entertainment - the saturday night at the movies feeling, you're comfortable in your seat, and if a films good you forget you're watching it and you feel relaxed- and I wanted to do a bit of a slap in the face. To say this is real- because to our 'characters' this is real, this is life. This is happening.” It's this wholehearted embracing of the intimate and perhaps invasive format that makes Molkom so interesting. This and its humour. It is incredibly funny, in a way that documentaries often fail to be, specifically ones on healing. To Villari-McFarlane humour is vital, “It's a really good way to make people feel comfortable. And when people feel comfortable things translate, and things communicate,” she claims.

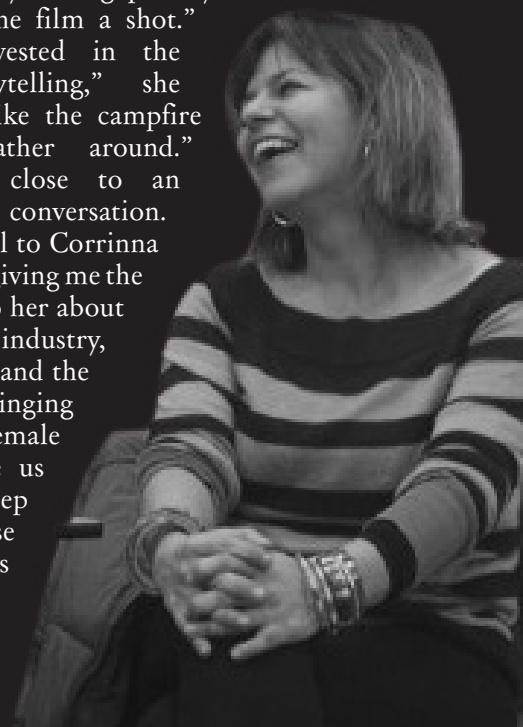
There's a short break here to grab more pints and to complain about the harsh winds of November, and when

we return to the interview, the questions burning on my mind are on Villri-McFarlane's experiences as a woman in film, “In an interview in 2014 you said ‘Nobody wants to see a woman's film’. Do you think that's changed at all? And to sort of narrow it down, do you think films about women are still so heavily commercialised to make everyone relate to them?” “There's a lot more female voices now,” she responds, “We need to listen to what they are saying whether or not we want to analyse them in the paradigm of what I think is the overarching complexity of commercialism. We've definitely moved forward.” She goes on to explain how the system that holds women back now isn't as simple as not having enough voices, but the gatekeeping that exists in every moving part in the machine that is film making. It's a vastly expensive medium; there are more roadblocks every director and screenwriter has to face than they would in any other medium. When the people controlling the funds, the production and the reviews are men who do not see the value in female voices, their voices are doomed to be drowned out.

The night is coming to its close, and I am eager to ask her about her opinions on the resurgence of cinema culture, “Our issue is titled ‘Cinema is Back’ and. well, if cinema culture really is back? One thing you said in the talk that stuck out to me was the idea of modern capitalism- streaming companies want their consumers stagnant.....is going to the cinema a lost art?” Villari-McFarlane's response is enthusiastic in agreement, “Going to the cinema is crucial! Streaming companies prefer you passive, at home, consuming. And they've turned art into something that is delivered to your door. So, it atrophies the power of art from a collective thing that's also reverential like a church - somewhere where we congregate to share in a spiritual experience!”

“Its taking you away from being engaged as an audience,” she goes on to say, “Being an audience is different from being a consumer - because the audience is also earned. The audience by its very nature has a value- it used to be a ceremonial thing, you dressed up to go, it was a treat.”

“There's a trend of films needing those first five seconds to capture an audience so they don't switch off, as opposed to the cinema where you are sitting there for two hours, already having paid. you might as well give the film a shot.” “You're already invested in the tradition of storytelling,” she agrees, “Cinema is like the campfire we no longer gather around.” It's an incredible close to an incredibly insightful conversation. I'm incredibly grateful to Corrinna VillariMcFarlane for giving me the opportunity to talk to her about her work and the industry, and to Findlay Milne and the YDU for not only bringing down such a strong female voice to talk to the us but for going the step further to organise this interview for us here at Spotlight.



Spirit of Stories: A Celebration of Indigenous Culture

by
Katy Murphy

From the beginning of time, humans have asked themselves: who are we? Where do we belong? What connects us to nature, our environment, our home? Although these questions may never have a concrete answer, most of the reasoning behind our personal answers can be attributed to our cultural identity – that is, the traditions, customs, and world we’ve grown up in and around. For indigenous cultures around the world, this rings especially true. For many, oppression is a regular day-to-day occurrence, and displacement from homes, environments, and traditions are concurrent with deforestation and persecution. Regardless, however, cultural identities are constantly shifting and growing, and film is rapidly becoming one of the most significant mediums through which these traditions and identities can be shared with the rest of the world.

The film *Our Country* (2020), for example, revolves around the Dunghutti and Gumbayngirr community in New South Wales, Australia.

Composed of testimonies and footage by local Original Nations artists, young people, and elders, the film intends to spark dialogue around social and emotional wellbeing for young people. Aboriginal culture is rooted in spiritual connections to the land lived on, and this film exemplifies this theme, with insights from community members about their lives, stories, and cultures. Created over fourteen days by production group Desert Pea Media, the company stated they felt “honoured to learn, share and create with the South West Rocks community”. A touching, uplifting and inspiring experience, the film is not one to be missed – it’s a beautiful testimony to how we protect our land and culture, that in turn that protects us.

In the short film *Morning Star* (2022), the history of Aboriginal Australian culture is explored, spanning over 65,000 years. At the core of this cultural web are the Dreamtime stories, conveyed through art, dance, song and testaments. These stories aim to explain the creation

of the world, the origins of landscapes, and the emergence of ancestral beings. The Dreamtime therefore exists as a timeless realm running alongside the present, shaping the understanding of reality for Aboriginal communities. Varying among different Aboriginal groups, these stories reflect the diverse beliefs and ecosystems of Australia and serve as a guide to behaviour, social structures, use of natural resources, and serve to emphasise the interconnectedness of all living things. The story is told in the Rembarrnga language, which is spoken in parts of Arnhem Land in Australia’s Northern Territory. Totemism is a system of belief in which humans are believed to share a relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant. This belief system is most prominent in Mongolian Shamanism, which dates back to 300-400 BC. This intricate identity is portrayed in animated short *The Fourfold* (2020), which explores the worldview and wisdom

of director Alisi Telengut’s grandmother. The film is painstakingly animated with pastel drawings that illustrate the traditional Mongolian perception of nature. Telengut explores the importance of the environment to indigenous Mongolian people, stating that there is “a necessity to reclaim the ideas of animism for planetary health”. Indeed, the animation’s jaw-dropping animation evokes ideas of environmentalism in a personal sense. The belief in Totemism may just be vehicle through which we can fully appreciate the world we live in and the people we exist alongside.



The Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme 2024

by Elly Hoyland

By the time this issue is released, we will be in the midst of 2024's Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme - the biggest yet with 24 films playing in 30 cities across the UK. For 20 years this programme has strived to showcase both classics and recent releases which are harder to access outside of Japan.

They provide an essential contribution to the transnational exchange of cultures via cinema, whilst reaching out to audiences



beyond the bubble of legally dubious internet uploads, accompanied often by questionable subtitles and torturous image quality. Unfortunately, this is commonly how international cinema is accessed, in a world where DVDs cost sixty quid to ship from abroad (plus the additional cost of buying a disc drive, now that computers rarely have them) and Prime Video doesn't even have a category for foreign features. Programmes such as this one offered by the Japan Foundation provide audiences not just with fully translated subtitles and a crisp image, but the rare chance to see one of their films in the cinema, perhaps even with the appearance of an actor or director.

This year, the theme is:

UNFORGETTABLE: MEMORIES, TIMES AND REFLECTIONS IN

exploring 'how memories are employed in the cinematic voices of Japanese filmmakers.

Here are the films showing at the City Screen Picturehouse in York from 29th February until 28th March...

The Fish Tale



The Fish Tale



Winnie



YOKO



YOKO



The Fish Tale (2022) dir. Okita Shuichi - 29th February

'Combining quirky humour with a heartfelt and human coming-of-age story,' The Fish Tale is an adaptation of the autobiography of a popular Japanese fish-expert television figure: 'a heart-warming celebration of individuality'.

Egoist (2022) dir. Matsunaga Daishi - 7th March

Taking its narrative from Takayama Makoto's autobiographical novel of the same name, Egoist is a story of queer romance, adopting 'a documentary-style approach to delicately depict the intimate warmth between the characters and the conflicts arising from love.'

Winnie (2023) dir. Matsumoto Yusaku - 14th March

Winnie recounts the real story of the eponymous computer programme and the legal fight its programmer Kaneko Isamu was put through. Matsumoto 'crafts a thought-provoking exploration of a question that remains strikingly relevant in today's era of technological omnipresence: to what extent can the creator of a technology be held responsible for its users' actions?'

YOKO (2023) dir. Kumakiri Kazuyoshi - 21st March

Middle-aged Yoko is the 'reclusive, penniless, and somewhat hopeless' protagonist of this road movie stretching halfway across Japan from Tokyo to Hirosaki, who encounters a universe of individuals on the way to her father's funeral.

Shadow of Fire (2023) dir. Tsukamoto Shinya - 28th March

'Shadow of Fire transcends the war genre, exploring human principles and tragedy under extreme conditions', following the story of a young orphan who crosses paths with a destitute sex worker and shady street vendor in post-WWII Tokyo.

Egoist



Egoist



Winnie



Shadow of Fire



Shadow of Fire



There's Being Seen and *Being Seen*

by Fran Napolitano

With the endless film reels clicking and rolling and swarms of bodies to swim through to reach your desired screening, I was conscious that I would not remember anything from my one day trip to Aesthetica Film Festival. Blessed with a free day pass, I took to York's dampened autumn streets with the intent to write, and left with so many films squirming in my brain that my head was sore. Outside, the daylight was slipping away, as inside I feverishly danced in and out of fifteen-minute worlds, all whilst chewing on my Pepsi straw. I'd just freed my limbs from the consumer-crowd when, before I knew it, the night had arrived in all its blackness.

And yet, all I could say when anybody asked me how it went was I SAW THIS INCREDIBLE DOCUMENTARY. And said incredible documentary was Ren Faulkner's BEING SEEN for the British Council.

I am a relentless queer pessimist in most of what I write for my course. I hone in on the negative, on the stomach-churning soul-crushing myth-busting anti-rainbow reality that I feel to be most true. So why did slow shutter wide grinning beautiful faces linger in my mind? My mind stopped whirling, the dance ceased, and I sat hugging my knees on the stupid grey upholstery with a tear in my eye, trying not to slap the person next to me who whispered 'Wow' as the credits rolled.

Faulkner's short documentary is a testament to the present-turning-future. It follows three young queer people attending three different everyday appointments. A tattoo, a haircut, a massage. But in each, there is also a queer practitioner, and stories are exchanged with a certain understanding: a nod and a gulp, no need for lengthy explanations.

The concept is extremely simple, yet the aesthetics enrich the beauty of this simplicity vastly: light flooding through windows, engulfed into a glare, the camera disappearing into the scalp, immersing itself in the subject it presents. It is an extremely tactile and slow experience, as we see each tool in close-up before it touches the person, as if asking for consent. Everything seems so natural, and yet these three appointments are pivotal, real moments in the lives of real people. A Welsh girl gets 'queer' tattooed on her in Welsh. A non-binary individual makes the big boyish chop. A trans man removes his clothing and allows himself to be touched and massaged, free of dysphoria.

What Faulkner does so well is depicting queer joy effectively, by which I mean producing the sensation of emotion, overwhelmingly so, in the queer spectator. I imagine the intimacy of the camera and the collage of smiles at the end would have been mere pixels on a screen for the heterosexual viewer, but for me, they were part of an all-encompassing, sensory experience of queer joy. Although the names of those featured escape me now, their fleeting visit remains somehow, burrowed in my chest somewhere. They were there as I cycled home in the darkness and drizzling rain, and they will be there for some time I think.



AESTHETICA
SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

MONEY, MURDER AND MUSIC: THE TALENTED MR QUICK

BY AVVAYAR DE MEL

Emerald Fennell's 2023 *Saltburn* takes its calling cards from René Clément's *Plain Soliel* (1960) and Soliel's blockbuster twin *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) directed by Anthony Minghella. It's a blend of sex, blood, money, and music, with an interesting focus on homosexuality and murder. But its most notable similarity with the *Ripley* franchise seems to be the odd villainization of the working middle class. Fennell's *Saltburn* creates a visually stunning world of obscenely rich beauties and pleasures only to have the working class infiltrator drain it of its soul.

Barry Keoghan's Oliver Quick shares many of the same quirks as Tom Ripley, including a tendency to stare at men in bathtubs, however the one that overarches the entire film's narrative is the idea that they both 'work hard' to steal the little beauties of the upper class through the use of sinister deception. Granted, he is far better at it than poor Tom Ripley. Quick latches onto the rich and glorious Felix Catton, played by Jacob Elordi, Fennell's mock of Dickie Greenleaf. This fascination and perverse obsession is caused both by the life the man represents and the man himself. Both Quick and Ripley's sexual love for their wealthy friend is complicated and vastly one-sided. Fennell uses this obsession to create discomfort, utilising graphic sexual scenes to capture Quick's insanity. However this, at times, seems overdone. Keoghan's performance is astounding; he captures the unhinged essence of Fennell's vision. Rosamund Pike is truly amazing, and her comedic timing is brilliant - she is most definitely one of the movie's strongest points, and I'm all for the Rosamund Pike Revival.

Saltburn works as a dazzling caricature of the rich and insane, but is as much a critique



of the British class system as *Gossip Girl* is of the American. The glorification of the Cattons' and their lives and the eventual villainization of the working class does not culminate in a shocking comment on class, but in a shallow but fun two hours or so. Fennell's approach to the film was a take on obsession, however seems to have peppered in points on class envy. According to Fennell, the film is meant to be a Gothic-Sexual Thriller, and the director definitely combines sex with disgust. Despite the claim that the film is one focused on obsession, the comment on class is definitely present, as their wealth is what ultimately drives Quick's obsession and is the cause of many points of humiliation for him. Unfortunately, it fails to give Quick any kind of emotional drive-something that *Ripley* does quite masterfully. Thus, *Saltburn* makes many points and none at all.

However, the film may not need to make a point at all. It is still an incredibly beautiful work of art with a wonderfully curated soundtrack. The mix of 2003 club music and Catholic hymns truly does drive the insanity of the film over the edge, though the choice to use Catholic music and not have the religious tensions of the upper class be a plot point is truly fascinating. Go watch *Saltburn* expecting a brilliantly shallow time, and you will not be disappointed. It captures the fun and thrill of a film that focuses on aesthetics and excitement, and its castle is a welcome escape. One thing is for sure: it truly does shy away from any horrors of ugliness.



FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S MADE ME SLEEPY

BY JAKE GRANT

The first game in the Five Nights at Freddy's series came out in 2014, and nearly a decade after the fact, well after its peak in popularity, we have been given a movie adaptation. I don't know what anyone was expecting out of the Five Nights at Freddy's movie. It's devoid of any ideas or personality and so obviously made exclusively to make money.

Why should I care about anything happening? Why did anybody think it was a good idea to make the Five Nights at Freddy's movie primarily about the main character losing custody of their younger sister? Why is there all this poorly written drama clogging up the script? There is no tension, it's just so obvious everyone important will be totally fine and nothing bad will happen to anyone.

The animatronics are barely in the movie, and the scenes with them are only slightly less boring than every other scene. The animatronics are not scary at all, which I was expecting, but I can barely tell if they're even supposed to be. I imagine to market to Five Nights at Freddy's fans (children) they didn't want to make them too scary, so they just do nothing, chase some people very slowly, kill a few people off screen, then they chase some more people, more nothing, more chasing, then some more chasing, and then the movie ends.

Okay, so there are two scenes I did like: there's a cameo from none other than Matthew Patrick of The Game Theorists, which made me happier than it should've, and there's a weird montage where the main characters are bonding with the animatronics (who murder children) which is supposed to be really wholesome and it was easily the funniest part of the movie.

Those are the only good things I can say about Five Nights at Freddy's, and they barely even count. This is a horror movie that seems to be afraid of the horror genre, and it will only really mean anything to people who are fans of the games, and even then, it barely delivers.



SAW X IS AN EXPERIENCE

BY JAKE GRANT

Saw is such a vital part of the cinematic canon, and it's been over a decade since the last truly faithful entry in the franchise. However, on September 29th 2023, our prayers were answered. The original Saw was released in 2004, and received massive commercial success, with a budget of approximately \$1 million, and making \$103 million worldwide in the box office.

It introduced audiences to John Kramer (a.k.a. Jigsaw), played by Tobin Bell, a serial killer who puts victims into traps in order to make them value their own lives. The concept, the imagery and especially the editing made Saw a unique horror movie which, to an extent, defined the genre during the 2000s.

Until 2010, a new Saw movie was released every year. The series became renowned for its convoluted plot and ridiculous traps, and each entry in the franchise seemed to go further than the last in this regard. This culminated in Saw

VII, also known as Saw 3D, also known as Saw: The Final Chapter, which is perhaps the most Saw of the Saw movies. The original Saw is probably the best, but Saw 3D is such a beautiful mess, it simply is the quintessential Saw experience.

Jigsaw was released in 2017, seven years after Saw 3D. Jigsaw has some good moments, but, for the most part, it felt like a watered down Saw experience. The visuals are far too clean, the script feels like it's trying too hard to appeal to a 2017 audience, but in a very bland and broadly appealing way, to the point where it feels embarrassing to watch at points, especially during the attempts at humour. For many, including myself, Jigsaw did not quite live up to the Saw name. But it could have been a lot worse.

2021's Spiral: From the Book of Saw is proof of this, and is easily the worst Saw movie. It's boring, it's uninspired, it's not Saw. Spiral: From the Book of Saw is trying to be a more mature entry in the franchise, but that is not what Saw was ever about. It thinks it is an intelligent, gritty crime thriller but is completely poorly conceived. It could easily be a movie in any other franchise, but they just threw in some Saw imagery and Saw in the title. What even is a Book of Saw? John Kramer doesn't even make an appearance, and Billy the puppet is replaced by, ahem, 'Mr Snuggles'. At this point, it seemed like Saw might be dead.

So that leads us to today. Thirteen years after Saw 3D, Saw X has come out, and is set between the events of Saw and Saw II. In Saw X, John Kramer, a serial killer, is the protagonist, and is portrayed in a positive and sympathetic light. The whole first act of the movie is spent trying to make us root for and feel bad for Kramer. Nineteen years after the original, Saw is still able to go where most wouldn't dare and challenge social norms by asking questions like 'are serial killers always bad?'. For me, Tobin Bell's portrayal of John Kramer is what ties much of the franchise together, and what was most sorely missing from Spiral: From the Book of Saw. Amanda, who first appeared in the original Saw, also returns for the first time since Saw VI, and the first time since Saw III outside of a flashback, and Detective Hoffman even makes a cameo.

Saw X certainly feels modernised to an extent,

with visuals and acting that feel very much like they were made in current day, which is a shame, but I can't really hope for the, to put it lightly, aged style of the original seven movies to make a comeback, and it's nowhere near as bad as in Jigsaw or Spiral: From the Book of Saw. That being said, the classic glitchy Saw editing does make a brief comeback when Kramer loses his shit after he realises he's been tricked by a scamming group who gave him fake experimental brain cancer treatment.

The head of the group, Cecilia, is such an irredeemable, cartoonishly evil villain, who genuinely says 'Do you want to know what I thought when I watched them each die? One less person to split the money with', because they needed to somehow make a villain more evil than Kramer. Kramer puts the group of scammers into traps, which takes up the bulk of the movie. Throughout, Kramer justifies his methods of putting people into torture traps, which often result in their deaths, and again, he is portrayed as being in the right.

The traps in Saw X are pretty fun. The poster includes the first trap in the movie, which takes place in a dream sequence, where tubes are connected to the victim's eyes, and then are proceeded to be sucked out from their sockets. There's a trap later in the movie that includes water boarding, but with blood, or 'blood boarding' as it is deemed in the movie. Other highlights include the phrase 'Jig-fucking-saw', and using an intestine for a rope, even when one of them suggests using their clothes, which makes a lot more sense, especially considering the fact the intestine was still inside a person. But I guess an intestine's as good as any rope.

I won't spoil the ending, but I will say that it confirms that the movie seems to think Kramer is some kind of saint, who always does the right thing and helps others. I hope me and my housemate's laughter didn't ruin it for the other three people in the cinema.

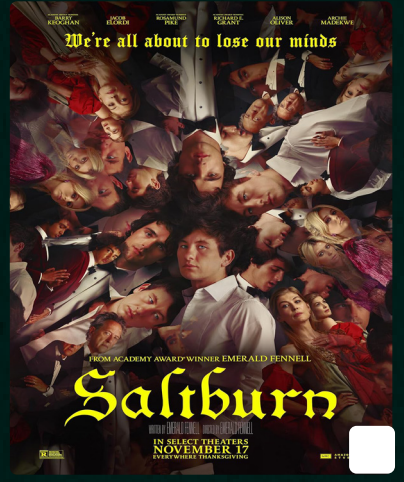
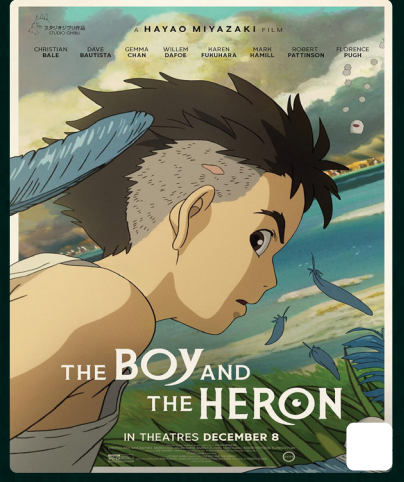
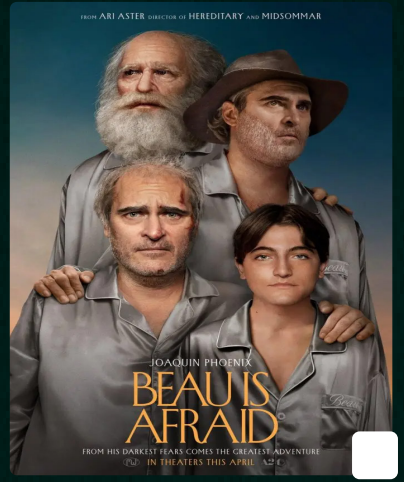
So, does it live up to the Saw name? Absolutely. This is what a modern Saw movie looks like. There are so many memorable moments, and just conceptually this is one of the best. I enjoyed this one a lot and I strongly recommend to fans of the original movies.

GUESS THE FILM



ANSWER KEY:
1. SALTBURN
2. FOE
3. KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON
4. KILLER
5. OPPENHEIMER

HOW MANY HAVE YOU SEEN?



2023 FILM CAPSULE

Early 2024 in Film EDITORS' PICKS

Shayda

Dir. Noora Niasari
Release Date: 8th March (Picturehouse)

Taking inspiration from her own childhood, Niasari tells the story of an Iranian woman and her daughter living in a women's shelter in Australia as they seek freedom from her abusive husband. It was selected as Australia's entry for Best International Feature Film at the 96th Academy Awards.



Perfect Days

Dir. Wim Wenders
Release date: 23rd February (Picturehouse)

Co-scripted by Wenders and Takuma Takasaki, Perfect Days follows Hirayama, a middle-aged man working as a toilet cleaner, who drives around Tokyo from job to job. The film focuses on the search for peace and serenity in everyday life, and has been nominated for Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards, and has already won Best Film at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards 2023.

Evil Does not Exist

Dir. Ryûsuke Hamaguchi
Release date: 1st March (Picturehouse)

From the Oscar winning director of Drive My Car (2021) comes a tale of man versus nature that won the Grand Jury Prize at Venice and Best Film at the BFI London Film Festival. Continuing his collaboration with composer Eiko Ishibashi, we can expect another beautifully moving score.

Monster

Dir. Hirokazu Koreeda
Release Date: 15th March (Picturehouse)

The prolific Koreeda is back so soon after Broker (2022), returning to his homeland of Japan. Monster is dedicated to the memory of Ryuichi Sakamoto, who composed the score and sadly passed away two months before the film's release. An internationally influential composer, pianist and producer, Sakamoto is recognisable for starring alongside David Bowie and composing the grand score for Nagisa Oshima's Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence (1983).



Kung Fu Panda 4

Dir. Mike Mitchell
Release Date: 28th March (Odeon)

After 8 years of waiting since the third instalment and 16 since the first film, Jack Black returns as Po. No information needed; childhood nostalgia is enough to lure me to the cinema for this one.



Spiderman: Beyond the Spider-verse

Dir. Joaquim Dos Santos, Kemp Powers, Justin K. Thompson
Release Date: 28th March (Odeon)

Beyond the Spider Verse is set to follow upon the immense success of 2023's Across the Spider Verse, Being Sony Animations's highest grossing film and subject to multiple Academy Awards and BAFTAs. With the return of Shameik Moore, Jake Johnson, Hailee Stienfeld, and Nicholas Cage, theres no doubt Beyond the Spider Verse will push the limits of animation and storytelling just as its predecessors did.