MOTION MAG

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FEATURING:
The Drama

Resurrection – La Grazia
SNL UK – Wuthering Heights
Neighbours – Pavement
Dream Scenario – The Girls

MOTION

Editorial

Alex Lochhead

Amongst the onslaught of cinema-killers that have brought the art form to its knees over the last decade, the death of the movie star may be the most exaggerated. The movie star suffered, along with the rest of cinema, a prolonged rough patch, but there is no way to kill the movie star without killing the medium.

Quentin Tarantino surmised it accurately: "Captain America is the star or Thor is the star," not Chris Evans or Chris Hemsworth.

The commercial dominance of franchise films, where the draw of a central character overwhelms that of the actor playing them, did not kill the movie star; it just took their throne for a spin. The death knell now seems premature. Is Michael B. Jordan not a movie star? When *The Devil Wears Prada 2* opens to an absurd amount of money, Meryl Streep – not an actor of this generation, but evidently alive – will still be a movie star.

Most of the death cries came from people who saw the movie star alive and kicking, at its supposed peak, or from the stars themselves. The following equation is assumed to have been lost amongst the general public, the movie star is interchangeable: Tom Hanks is in this film, which makes it a Tom Hanks film, which means we should go and see it.

Yet we brave few who set out to create this magazine assembled to discuss its first issue and were months away from *The Drama* when we made it our focus. There was no foreboding plot twist to intrigue us, only a poster of Zendaya sat across Robert Pattinson's lap, flaunting her engagement ring to the camera. This was enough, and left us with a beaming anticipation for two movie stars whom we love to share the screen as a soon-to-be-married couple, acting against and with each other, facing off and falling in love. Zendaya and Robert Pattinson were in this film together, so we were going to see it.

Looming mergers aside, the last few years have given us a reason to look at the state of cinema without the tint of death. Movie star- beaten, stabbed, bloody and spat on- is okay. Timothee Chalamet is standing on top of The Globe, and my Boxing Day showing of *Marty Supreme* is full. The Bournemouth BH2 Complex rewards the film with a round of applause, and the movie star is risen.

The Drama was not short of its own skilled and wide-reaching marketing, much of which centred on its central, very-famous stars. When I saw *The Drama* at 11am in a Newport Mall, the screening was full and there was no applause. I think they liked it.

Chalamet on The Globe, Pattinson and Zendaya announcing their engagement in the Boston Globe – is this how the movie star reasserts itself as a primary selling-point, and is that what brings the movie star back to life? Certainly, you cannot be a movie star if no one sees your movie, but how much can we predicate the life and death of something as fundamental as the movie star on something as fickle and varying as the box office? So what if people wanted to watch films about a guy called Captain America for a little bit? That cannot kill the intangible charm and embodied movie-magic that makes a movie star. Aggrandising as it may be, what I mean is true.

Tom Cruise is a movie star because he is good at running across buildings, because the movie star should affect us at a base level that cannot be shaken by what films are selling well. The infallible likability that Zendaya brings to every character as well as an intense depth of feeling makes me certain that she is a movie star. I say the same for Pattinson, and the millennial, bumbling British fool that he has come to master.

The "death" of the movie star feels one-half valid, and one-half nostalgia for when they apparently ruled the industry. We must stay alert against that which threatens to degrade cinema, but we must remember that these things happen within trends that reflect a world not controlled by Kevin Feige. The slight dip in the movie star's stock is unfortunate, tragic, but it cannot change the fact that if actors are good in films, they can become movie stars and make people want to see said films. As dramatic as the narrative of death is one of revival, that young stars are bringing the movie star back to life. There is a healthier class of next-in-lines than there was ten years ago, but death depends on a state of the industry that we are twenty years abstracted from. Perhaps one who begrudgingly accepts that the movie star is on its way back, but yet to achieve its former glory, is right, but who cares? I've never seen Russel Crowe on The Globe. *The Drama*, who stars Batman and MJ, is a reminder that the movie star is okay, and can attract the same people who, ten years ago, would have rather been watching *Ant-Man*.

Credits

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Kristoffer Borgli Retrospective

Caleb Milburn

With the box office success of his latest film, *The Drama*, Kristoffer Borgli has successfully transitioned from European auteur to an exciting new face in Hollywood. Starring two of the biggest movie stars of the moment in Zendaya and Robert Pattinson, the film is a perfect culmination of all Borgli's work so far, and his ability to work with this calibre of talent so well certainly spells a fruitful future for him. Yet, for many, this may be the first time Borgli's name has been on their lips, despite a stacked backlog of work that feels essential to a true appreciation of *The Drama*.

Borgli's career in filmmaking began with a series of music videos in the early 2010s for Norwegian synthpop/electronic musicians, such as Casiokids and Donkeyboy, that featured glimpses of themes he would later expand upon. For example, in the video for "*En Vill Hest*" by Casiokids, the teenage protagonist is taken through absurd sequences: his bowl of cereal erupts milk, and his house becomes shrouded in fog, while he obsesses over his appearance in floor-to-ceiling mirrors. Human obsession with the perception of their superficial image – both externally and internally – becomes a core tenet of Borgli's work moving forward, and the infusion of absurdist imagery and narrative devices into these ideas becomes far more frequent.

Shifting from music videos to a more narrative-based medium, his first short film, Whateverest, is a mockumentary about a dancing, drug-making YouTuber (Marius Solem Johansen) who supposedly influenced DJ Todd Terje's song "Inspector Norse". A sort of extended music video, the film chronicles a fictionalised persona of Johansen as he raves alone until he spirals after his self-concocted drug sends him on a bad trip. His most acclaimed work to that point, after it was selected for the Best Live Action Short category at AFI Fest, the short manages to be so surprisingly convincing in its presentation of Johansen's character, despite his eccentricity, that on first viewing, it's hard to distinguish whether or not the narrative is fact or fiction. Just ask The Guardian's Alexis Petridis, who wrote an article praising the short under the guise of it being a straight documentary until he later found out that it was not. Taking many of the clichéd tropes of the mockumentary format, the film isn't much to talk about from a technical standpoint. Filled with the clichés of any other mockumentary, the film does not stand out technically, but the construction of Johansen feels so authentic to someone clearly aspiring to attention that the layers of performance interweave into an unknottable grasp of what is real.



Borgli's first feature film, *DRIB*, expands on these mockumentary stylings to create a confusing hybrid of fiction and documentary in a way that, yet again, plays formally with the conception of reality in relation to film. Comedian and self-labelled 'performance artist' Amir Asgharnejad re-enacts a failed commercial shoot for an energy drink brand that scouted him after a string of viral videos he made where he would provoke and then be bludgeoned by the public. However, much in the vein of *Whateverest*, these videos were scripted and misunderstood by the company involved, run in the film by an incredibly unlikeable Brett Gelman, whose smarm and falseness radiate off the screen. The film is fascinating, often showing multiple versions of events that blur the line between a constructed narrative and the truth – or rather, Amir's version of the truth. Interview sections between Amir and Borgli interject the narrative, often providing context for Amir's personality and illuminating Borgli's influence, which turns the film into a muddied account of events. It's artificial in a way that signals its own artificiality to the audience, prompting us to reevaluate how we consume these narratives by drawing attention to the performance of acting and, thus, the performance of the medium itself. The artificiality also extends to the overly glossy look of the film – advertisement-esque, some would say - and to a visual language that is palpably Borgli's, which he continues to use throughout the rest of his work.

Between the breakout success of *DRIB* in 2017 and the long turnaround for his follow-up feature film, *Sick of Myself*, in 2022, Borgli set his sights on honing his craft and laying the thematic groundwork for his next three features through a series of short films. *A Place We Call Reality* is a mockumentary manifestation of Borgli's existentialism about his career, depicting a fictionalised version of himself guided by a homoerotic self-help 'guru' in his search for enlightenment. Stemming from what appears to be a very real fear for his future, Borgli descends into absurd chaos in a matter of minutes, the balancing of real-life anxieties and their unpicking in an offbeat comedic tone becoming a staple of his filmmaking. *Former Cult Member Hears Music for the First Time* is an examination of our society's fascination with the unfortunate, following a film crew documenting what the title suggests. The cult member has an aneurysm and collapses onto a table that she becomes stuck to, causing the film crew to debate what the best course of action is, prioritising themselves over the body splayed out in front of them. A cutting, satirical critique of the way we produce art and exploit people for feigned altruistic gain, this short represents Borgli's funniest work to date, truly showing his transition into his signature satirical sensibilities.

The final short film is *Eer*, a test run for the ideas he would weave into his upcoming feature, *Sick of Myself*. Incorporating jabs at the American healthcare system, the short follows Borgli once again playing a version

Still from "DRIB"

Right page - descending

Still from "Dream Scenario"

Still from "Sick of Myself"

of himself, this time with a mangled ear, in an America where nearly everyone has a bizarre chronic illness. Simultaneously mocking the willingness of Americans to look past brutal illnesses – being willing to 'open-leak' blood as a healing method - and the hilarity of people exploiting fake illnesses like FJD (Falling Jaw Disorder) for attention, the weaving of culturally pertinent social commentary into his absurd comedic worlds is a notable turning point in the way he approaches his work from here on.

Selected in Cannes' Un Certain Regard section in 2022, *Sick of Myself* is Borgli's first wholly fictional feature, yet it still holds many of the surreal sensibilities of his earlier work. Focusing on Signe (Kristine Kujath Thorp), a narcissist who intentionally gives herself a debilitating skin condition to gain attention and sympathy from the people around her, the film centres around the need for social gratification from people, both in her inner circle and more expansively. Signe's imagined scenarios are a recurring feature of the film, fantasising about becoming a famous activist for her condition and being included in front-page newspaper spreads and in viral news interviews. Thorp's performance as Signe is truly the highlight of the film; her conniving way of exploiting those around her through an ever-expanding web of lies is gratifying to watch unravel as she tells one too many fibs. The transition into complete fiction is seamless for Borgli, and his choice to be downright mean in the way he mutilates Signe over the course of the film is a bold and unabashed choice that works effortlessly, feeling right at home in his filmography of satire.



His first foray into a Hollywood production and a step up in budget came in the form of *Dream Scenario*. Starring Nicolas Cage as Paul Matthews, a dull professor who suddenly appears in everyone's dreams, the film tackles fame in the age of technology, with a particular focus on the pitfalls of 'cancel culture'. Cage's chameleon performance style is a perfect base for this character; he fully embodies mundanity in a brilliantly droll way, making Paul's shift into virality the highlight of his life and the most interesting thing about him. Initially having no ambition to be famous, the cringe-inducing inflation this overnight phenomenon inflicts on his ego is immense, and when his image sours as his dreams shift into the realm of nightmares, his world falls apart. Capturing how society exploits regular people for viral fame and swiftly discards them, often forcing them to contort how they perceive themselves in the process, is a terrific premise, and- under the guidance of Borgli's comedic chops and Cage's affinity for the absurd- it becomes something truly magical. The dream sequences are a particular standout, expanding on the alternate realities Borgli has tackled in his previous work to create truly singular and farcical dream sequences that contrast the mundanity of Paul with razor-sharp precision. Although the film was not the most successful at the box office, it marked Borgli's best critical success to date and even earned Cage a Golden Globe nomination for his performance, signalling a potential audience for Borgli's style in the States.



That brings us back to *The Drama*. A brief drunken confession of a heinous act – or concept of an act – is all that it takes to send soon-to-be-wed Emma (Zendaya) and Charlie's (Robert Pattinson) relationship into turmoil. Emma planned but didn't execute a mass school shooting during her teenage years to the dismay of her maid of honour and best man, Rachel (Alana Haim) and Mike (Mamoudou Athie), unearthing a gritty underbelly to the supposedly close-knit circle she has, with the secret threatening to destroy the wedding. What makes the film so exhilarating to watch is how neatly Borgli packs all the themes and visual motifs he's workshopped over the years into something that maturely unpacks the psyche of how we function as a society in the modern age. Building on *Sick of Myself*'s ideas on self-image and how it's impacted by our innate desire to have agency in how we are perceived, the character of Charlie expands these ideas and delves further into them, made denser by Pattinson's eminently layered performance. Charlie has meticulously crafted his life to assimilate into modern upper-class society, yet the cracks behind this forged persona are apparent from the start of the film. His meet-cute with Emma involves him lying about his knowledge of culture and art, his persistence to perform a choreographed dance their first dance, his tendency to "fixate" on things he wants to control, all paint a man who is obsessed with how he is perceived and has built most of his life around micro-managing his image to progress through the class system.

Following Emma's revelation, his fixation turns towards grilling Emma on her past to make sense of it and attempt to mitigate the amount of damage he presumes will be caused by Emma's secret, in the process causing more friction and 'drama' than was initially there. The motive behind this should be to comfort his fiancée, yet there is an implicit feeling of self-preservation involved in his actions. He makes an advance on his co-worker, Misha (Hailey Gates), in a move that exemplifies his urge to distance himself from Emma and from the societal stigma attached to her secret. His attempted reconciliation with Rachel and Mike involves knowingly twisting the information he received from Emma to paint her as a victim of cruel circumstances and someone to be sympathised with, all while trying to maintain his own status and construct a narrative in which he is righteous for standing by his future wife. All of this speaks to how society's judgment has shaped his self-image, which Borgli tries to psychologically unpick through the film's thesis.

Similarly, Emma goes through her own journey with her self-image throughout the film, with the audience given

greater insight into her life than into that of any other character we see. Her teenage years, marred by bullying and the feeling of being an outcast, see Emma become a gun-enthused kid (played note-perfect by Jordyn Curet), obsessed with her dad's rifle and the pairing of how the early age of the internet perpetuated these dangerous ideas. The facade she dons in her attempted webcam post-shooting message is broken by her shoddy technology, unveiling the young girl underneath the violent imagery she seeks to embody and foreshadowing the humanity remaining that allowed her to not go through with the murder spree in the end. Adult Emma, following this change of heart and transition into an anti-gun activist, appears to be relatively well-adjusted until her secret spews out of her – both figuratively and literally – bar some hints at more unsettled elements of her character. The panic attack she has, for one, following her love confession about Charlie, alludes to something lurking underneath the surface. But it says something that these flaws are allowed to fester and that her authenticity *feels* authentic, making her arguably the only quantifiably 'good' person we see in the group.

The disclosure of her secret disrupts the progress she has gained and transports her back to her agonising teenage years. Her agency over her image is lost as it becomes the target of Charlie's absurd imagined realities, with him being unable to distinguish her from gun-mania in his mind. From seeing her modelling with a gun to her ear injury caused by firearms profusely bleeding – a nice visual callback to *Eer* – to picturing her younger self as his current partner, Emma becomes putty in the mind of Charlie, with society's judgment of school shootings and what a school shooter should be influencing the way that he envisions her. In this way, the film is quite successful in its unpacking of mass shootings as a topic, managing to toe the line between off-kilter comedy and serious subject matter in a way that lets both shine, and a lot of this can be attributed to the many tests at this balance Borgli has attempted throughout the years.

Yet the film's resolution sees the chaotic whirlwind of their interpersonal lives come to a halt. In an instant, Emma offers a fresh start for the couple. They re-do their meet-cute, and through an act of performance, something that has tethered the two to the constraints of internal scrutiny and negative projections, they allow for their genuine connection to blossom uninhibited for what feels like the first time in the film. It's Borgli's best ending, serving as a dual catharsis for Emma and Charlie's relationship and my main issue with his work up to this point: the endings. It feels like he's a filmmaker who has finally perfected the balance between his interests and his form, and it makes me anticipate with bated breath what is next for him in his career.

Still from "The Drama"



The Gamification of Art - does Letterboxd do more harm than good?

Luke Bougaardt-Palmer

At the beginning of 2025, I set myself a challenge: I would try and watch a film every single day of the year to get my Letterboxd stats over 2,000 films watched. I lasted until the end of July, by which point being jobless was no longer a viable option. Not only was the endpoint of my resolution Letterboxd-oriented, but so were the terms – I had to log something on Letterboxd each calendar day, regardless of if it was a short film, feature, or miniseries. If it was on that app, it counted.

Looking back at some of the ridiculous things I logged in pursuit of my white whale (a lowlight was *Horsin' Around*, the title sequence to *Bojack Horseman*, inexplicably on Letterboxd), there is no doubt that a statistically significant number of my 2025 logged films were watched purely to make up the numbers. What is also ridiculous with the benefit of hindsight is the fact that on days like that, it is impossible to ignore that my focus and main sense of achievement derived from meeting an arbitrary numerical goal rather than expanding my artistic appreciation. You may have guessed that I am a goal-oriented person, perhaps more than most, but I'd argue that Letterboxd fundamentally leans the same way. At its base level, what is Letterboxd if not a well-designed collection of spreadsheets with comments? Even if you don't get even the smallest satisfaction from inching closer to 100% completion on the top 250 (now 500) narrative features, the fact that Letterboxd even tracks your progress for you suggests that on some level it wants you to.

Could it be that this attitude, intrinsic to the site and amplified by obsessive cinephiles who innately care more about results than the journey, is antithetical to the spirit of art? Maybe we aren't supposed to rank all our favourite films. Maybe we aren't supposed to see every film we've ever watched as a precise bar chart in order of how many stars we gave it. Maybe those pretentious people who refuse to give anything a rating are right.

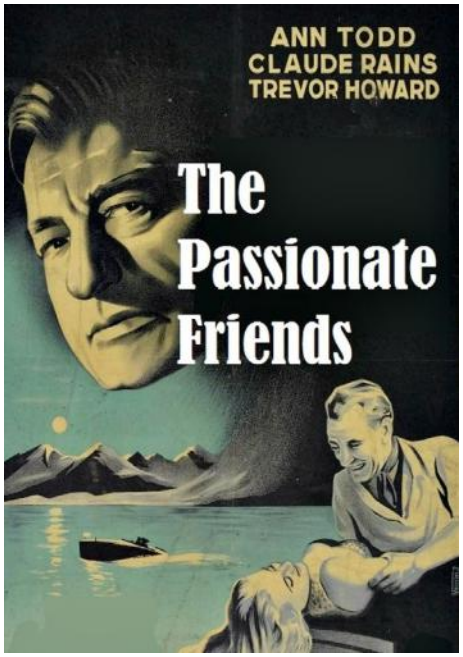
But even so, I can say with near-certainty that if it weren't for the videogame completionist in me, I never would have come across *Satantango*, Bela Tarr's 7-hour masterpiece about the decay left behind in rural Hungary during late communism. I only watched that film because it was high up on the all-time list, and it is one of the most unique and powerful artistic experiences I have ever had.

Without a doubt, there are a lot of people, me included, whose brains often approach life as an exercise in box-ticking, even in regard to art. In many ways, Letterboxd encourages this. Truthfully, I have watched dozens of films just to log them. Every so often, though, I come across a Satantango that I know I wouldn't have found any other way. Film isn't a numbers game and never should be. Letterboxd, in my experience, often is, and it probably isn't going anywhere soon. Should we embrace the gamification of cinema, or reject it in favour of a more purist and freeform approach?

Poster of “Brief Encounter”



Poster of “The Passionate Friends”



FRAMED: Doomed Romances

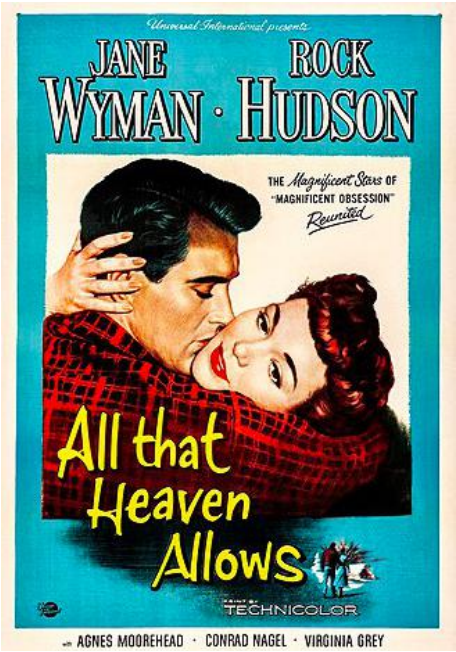
Alex Lochhead

The poster for Noel Coward’s *Brief Encounter* captures Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard like blissful deer in headlights. The bright yellow beam defies the heavy blue of night, capturing their brief spark of love as enough to fend off the dark around them. Their gaze is adoring but restrained, the distance between them just enough to suggest that they will soon have to step out of the light. Their romance is, ultimately, doomed.

David Lean’s *The Passionate Friends* shrinks its lovers to the corner, instead casting its focus on Claude Rains, the looming cuckhold watching over them. The collateral damage of Ann Todd and Trevor Howard’s doomed love is just as much a part of the tragedy, but most important is the total black from which his face emerges. Darkness is not defied, instead it consumes them, cascading like a crescent wave before crashing down.

The poster for Douglas Sirk’s *All That Heaven Allows* flaunts its technicolour glow through its bright blue frame and the eye-burning red on Rock Hudson’s shirt, as autumnally serene as the tree nursery where they fall in love. The lustful daze upon Jane Wyman’s face betrays the supposedly sinful nature of their love, and a thin darkness is sketched beneath the text and the shadow of Hudson’s arm, a slow and creeping doom that Wyman is sinking into, with a desperate grasp for life around her lover.

Elia Kazan’s *Splendor in The Grass* targets the split between love and doom, between light and dark, much more directly. The ominous warning on the left is written in third-person, a divorced voice of reason torn by a jagged line. Like Wyman, Natalie Wood is clinging on for life, yet trying to wrench free one final kiss from her lover. Desire sees Wood to her (metaphorical) grave, passionately and inevitably falling for the love that tears her mind in two. All for a guy called Bud Stamper.



Poster of “All that Heavan Allows”



Poster of “Splendor in The Grass”

5 Hidden Gems

Caleb Milburn

Zero Patience (1993)

Everything about *Zero Patience* is bold. Chances are taken on all fronts of the film, both stylistically and narratively, and, against all odds, it manages to land nearly all of them. A core tenet of the New Queer Cinema movement, the film, directed by John Greyson, follows former sexologist and current taxidermist, Sir Richard Francis Burton (John Robinson), who happens to be 170 years old following his run-in with the Fountain of Youth, as he prepares his next exhibition for the Toronto Natural History Museum: The Hall of Contagion. He becomes transfixed on the idea of documenting the 'patient zero' of HIV in North America, and when this patient, aptly named Zero (Normand Fauteux), returns from the dead as an apparition only he can see, Burton begins to question his outlook on the virus and Zero himself.

Paralleling the desecration of Gaëtan Dugas' legacy by Randy Shilts' 1987 book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* - where he was also wrongly accused of being 'patient zero' - the film challenges the attribution of blame onto the victims of the epidemic and, through the sincerity of its documentation of characters living with HIV/AIDS, makes the injustice of this misinformation particularly affecting. This is helped by the brilliant supporting performances from Richardo Keens-Douglas as George, a former lover of Zero whose sight is slowly deteriorating from CMV due to AIDS complications, and Dianne Heatherington as Mary, a HIV-positive close friend of Zero who is a leading member of her local ACT UP group. Both have beautifully tender sequences that carry the heart of the film, George through raw vignettes of his day-to-day life as a teacher living with AIDS, and Mary through her defiance against Burton's misinformation campaign about Zero.

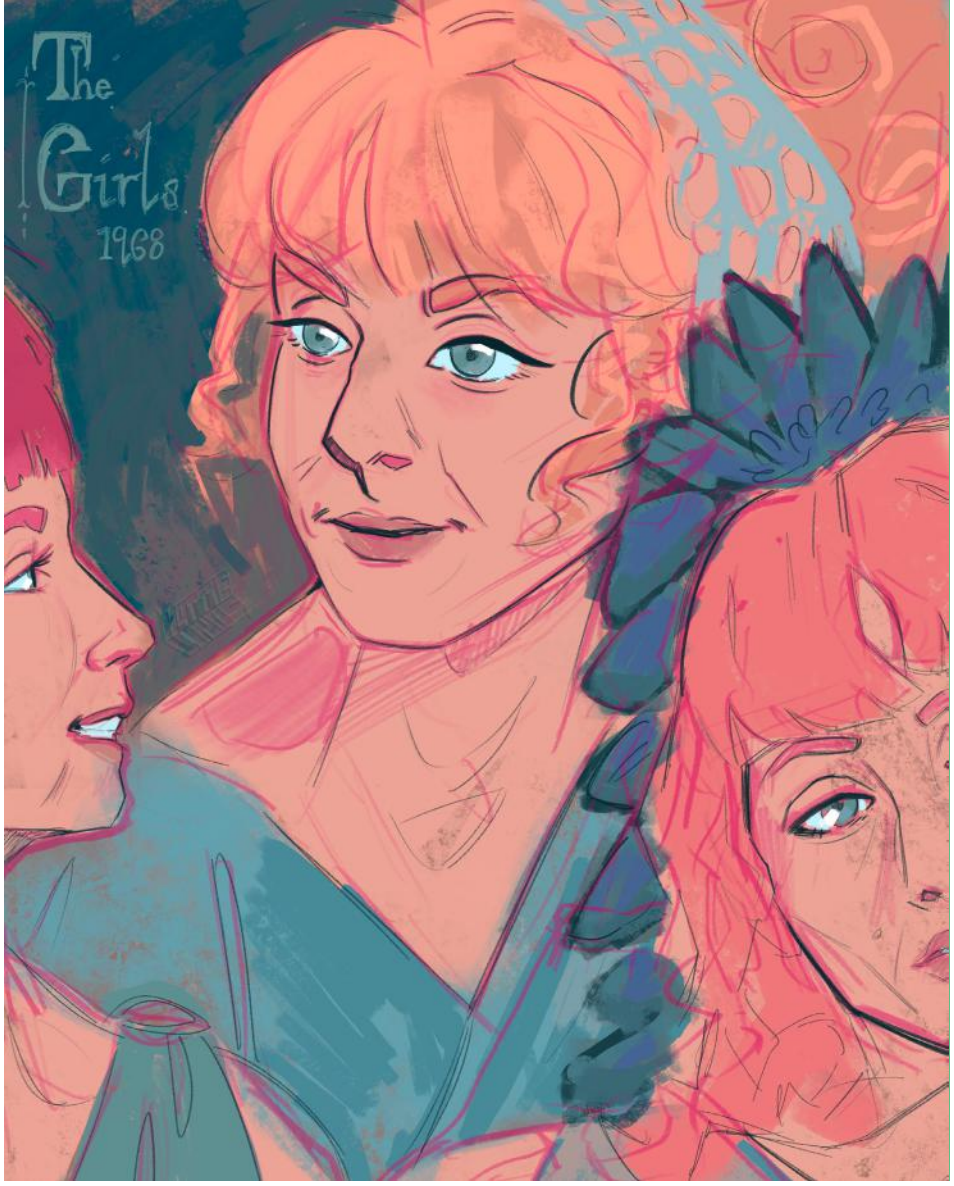


Illustration created by Hattie Lindsey



Still from "Zero Patience"

Yet what makes *Zero Patience* so singular is its blending of these earnest, emotional depictions of queerness with outlandish 90s kitschy pop musical numbers that create a tonal whiplash that shouldn't - and hasn't (looking at you *Emilia Pérez*) - worked. A bathhouse filled with nude patrons, HIV positive blood under a microscope and a taxidermy display of contagious animals that morph into a rabble of queers are only a handful of the inventive locations that the many musical numbers in the film take place. A notable standout is the microscope musical sequence, "Sheherazade", performed by an anthropomorphised drag HIV cell, Miss HIV (Michael Callen), set in an abstract construction of the bloodstream, a swimming pool filled with red and white balloons and other anthropomorphised cells. It's dazzling, imaginative, and Callen, who passed shortly after the film's release from AIDS-related complications, steals the show with his performance. It's this pairing of radical imagery paired with earnest queerness that makes *Zero Patience* so bold and an important, often unseen, part of queer cinematic history that should be further celebrated.

Flickorna/The Girls (1968)

Mai Zetterling's *Flickorna* (translating to The Girls in English) follows a troupe of female stage actors performing a touring version of Lysistrata, an ancient

Greek comedy about a woman, Lysistrata, attempting to enforce peace between warring Greek city-states through the banding together of the cities' respective women in a vow of abstinence. As one of the first examples of a female-led play that questions ideas about patriarchy, the film plays with the text's history and draws parallels between the actresses' roles and their lives in a patriarchal society that doesn't appreciate their value. Zetterling's overtness in the way she writes the conversations about gender relations is perfectly contrasted by the film's surreal structure, which flippantly meshes dream sequences with line readings from the play, along with vignettes of the women coping under the looming threat of patriarchal warmongering during the Cold War. The members of the troupe, led by three powerhouses of Swedish film in the 50s and 60s – Bibi Andersson (Liz), Harriet Andersson (Marianne), and Gunnel Lindblom (Gunilla) - each have their own struggles within the patriarchal system. Liz's husband is having an affair, Marriane has a complicated relationship with a married man and has crippling anxiety about leaving her only child with childcare while working, and Gunilla is heavily relied upon by her husband to care for their four children, despite his capability to help out.

Although initially panned by most male critics upon its release for their distaste at its provocative dismantling of patriarchy, the film stands as a brilliantly experimental construction by Zetterling that deconstructs film form with striking imagery to boot. One of my personal favourite sequences in the film is when Marianne is shown running through a blissfully snowy landscape while being pursued by her lover, calling out her name. The stark contrast between the purest white snow and their black clothing is mesmerising to watch as she bounds through the field, the audience unaware whether the man shouting her name is doing so playfully or more sinisterly. This, compounded with the reciting of the play over the top of the scene, is enough to transfix you alone, but it cannot be understated how sharp the film's bite is against the system.

Messy (2024)

Alexi Wasser's coming-of-age-even-though-she's-already-of-age sex comedy, *Messy*, follows an aspiring writer, Stella Fox (played by Wasser herself), as she acclimatises to life in New York City after a recent break-up catalyses an impulsive relocation. Loosely based on the real-life experiences of Wasser after her

Still from "The Girls"





Still from "Messy"

own move to New York post-pandemic, the film centres around Stella's messy sexcapades and disastrous dating experiences as a woman who is obsessed with the idea of romance and connection but pursues it through a hyper-sexual lens. Not every sexual encounter Stella has in the film is portrayed as morally good and can be far from what she needs, but the monologues that Wasser writes for herself offer the audience a gateway into her psyche, which is compelling and hilarious to watch.

The opening monologue serves as a perfect introduction to Stella as a character. To a disinterested Uber driver, she overshares about her sex life, announces her new life in New York, and declares her ethos around dating completely uninterrupted, immediately grounding her as an uncompromising, uninhibited woman who is forthcoming and open sexually. The dialogue here and throughout the rest of the film is sharp yet maintains an improvisational quality that lends itself perfectly to the situational comedic style Wasser aims for.

Wasser clearly pulls from a lineage of female-centred New York slice-of-life stories such as *Frances Ha, Girls*, and – most overtly - *Sex and the City* and inserts Stella into this lineage. One of the film's greatest strengths is the humour it finds in its dialogue with these texts, specifically in the meta-textual relationship it has with *Sex and the City*. The narrative driving force behind the film is Stella's proposed employment at a magazine run by one of her idols, Leo Fontaine, who is played by *Sex and the City*'s Anthony (Mario Cantone), further entangling Wasser's work to the texts that influence her. Stella is desperate to gain a place at the magazine, and Wasser clearly has a vision for the lineage of filmmaking she wants to be part of, meaning that the fusion of influences in her work is a fascinating and surprisingly complex undertaking for something as unassuming as a sex comedy. She pulls off the balance with ease despite this being her directorial debut, and it begs to be seen what she will tackle next, but, for now, this will more than do.



Still from "Phase IV"

Phase IV (1974)

The world could end any day now, given our current political climate. *Phase IV* is a film based around a potential doomsday scenario, yet rather than the culprits of our own impending doom being humans – as seems inevitable now - the film illustrates the rise of an unlikely species to the top of the food chain: ants. Directed by one of the most influential graphic designers in film history, Saul Bass, responsible for the title designs of canonical classics like *Psycho, Anatomy of a Murder, and Vertigo*, it follows two scientists, Dr. Ernest D. Hubbs (Nigel Davenport) and James R. Lesko (Michael Murphy), as they stumble upon a legion of hyper-intelligent ants who have formed a hivemind after a bizarre astrological event.

Although akin to many creature B-movies of the 50s, Bass' taste for visual splendour in his design work translates easily into the stylish flair he adopts in the film, setting it apart from its contemporaries visually. In particular, the film captures the ants' perspectives through breathtaking macro photography by nature photographer Ken Middleham, who conveys their transfixing narrative with little help from voiceover. The intricacies of the ants' anatomies, the seemingly endless string of tunnels their bodies scuttle through, the mass swarm collectives of them captured: all of it constructs an unnerving portrait of human subjugation at the hands – or legs - of these minuscule beings that is impossible to look away from.

Bass' eye extends to the slickness of the art direction and the film's gorgeous desert locations. As the first instance of a geometric crop circle being depicted on film, its imagery has transcended into the cultural lexicon and further highlights the ingenuity with which Bass constructs the film around its iconography. Despite its influential legacy, the film remains underseen and surprisingly so, with it being one of the best visual feasts that science fiction of the 70s has to offer.

A quick side note: I also recommend when seeking out this film to catch the alternate 'lost ending', which was recovered years after the film's initial release, that has a brilliant surrealist montage of the ant-human relationship dynamics the film builds towards, but was sadly cut by studio executives before its distribution.

Pieces of April (2003)

As anyone who has had a strained relationship with a parent can attest, there is an innate push and pull internally around your feelings towards that parent. *Pieces of April* successfully attempts to examine the way both sides of this relationship operate under a high-pressure situation – a terminal illness. The titular April (Katie Holmes) is, in her mother's eyes, a failure. She has moved away from home to live in a small, run-down apartment in New York City with her boyfriend, whom her family don't know about. Attempting to rekindle her relationship with her family, she invites them to have Thanksgiving dinner at her apartment under the pretence of this being her last chance to redeem herself in their eyes, as set out by her dad (Oliver Platt).

The film unfolds through two perspectives: April's frantic assembly of the dinner against the backdrop of comically endless mishaps, and her family's tumultuous drive to her apartment. Her terminally ill mother (Patricia Clarkson), for whom this may be the last Thanksgiving she is alive, is the most estranged from her daughter and refuses April any sympathy, constantly denigrating her to the rest of the family.

All the performances in the film are brilliant, toeing the line between situational comedy and family-rooted emotional drama, but Clarkson's performance is truly the standout, with a cold apathy and frustration fuelled by her imminent mortality, that manages to be bitingly funny yet simultaneously heart-wrenching.

Shot on a microbudget of around $300,000, the film prioritises the narrative over the cleanness of its presentation. However, it utilises the handheld style that the film goes for to its advantage, working around the grainy quality of the images. For example, the sequences of April's dinner preparation fit perfectly into this style of filmmaking, with her scurrying through her apartment block and interacting with the bizarre people that live there to attempt to solve the issue of her broken oven. It's comedic gold, and a lot of the energy from these sequences can be attributed to the handheld cinematography. Despite the film's critical acclaim at the time of its release, it feels underappreciated in a modern context, but it is worth seeking out for its sheer heart.



Still from "Pieces of April"

“Wuthering Heights” wasn’t as bold as it thought it was.

Jenny MacLean

(Spoiler warning for “Wuthering Heights”, Emerald Fennell, 2026)

Two of the biggest films in the romance genre this year, “*Wuthering Heights*” and *The Drama*, came with the same promise: transgression. Both were wrapped in heated discussions, two A-list celebrities, unique marketing, bold narrative decisions, and controversial storytelling. Both films promise a daring love story, but only one delivered, so what went wrong with “Wuthering Heights”?

At this point, everything has been said about Emerald Fennell’s take on Emily Brontë’s timeless gothic novel, *Wuthering Heights*, the film ostentatiously deemed “The Greatest Love Story of All Time”; it is no wonder audiences were disappointed, and now, over two months later, no one seems to care anymore. The film capitalised on its shock value, then disappeared without delivering anything truly meaningful. Perhaps this is because, despite its claims of edgy and transgressive filmmaking, “*Wuthering Heights*” plays it safe, with striking visuals but hollow storytelling. As Princess Weekes comments in her video essay entitled: Sadly, Wuthering Heights Discourse Is That Deep “the beauty is in service of nothing.”

Fennell’s erasure of the key themes of race, class, and abuse, essential to the novel, are either underdeveloped or erased entirely from the film, leaving behind a narrative that fixates almost exclusively on the toxic romance between Cathy and Heathcliff, with no real momentum behind their relationship. By no means should Fennell have stayed completely loyal to Emily Brontë’s source text - fidelity to adaptation isn’t a huge faux pas; many great films have been disloyal to their original texts and exceeded expectations: *The Shining*, *Blade Runner*, *American Psycho*, among many. However, in the case of “Wuthering Heights”, the erasure of the novel’s central themes is precisely what prevents the film from being the daring work it imagines itself to be, and stripping the text of its key themes, ones that actually make the novel transgressive, isn’t just a problem, but completely absurd that Fennell didn’t incorporate them.

The main issue comes from Fennell’s characterisation, or lack of, of Heathcliff, and left me wondering: why are adaptations afraid to make Heathcliff complex? Why is Fennell afraid to show the true nature of these tormented characters? Because, in the end, we’re supposed to feel pathos for the lovers and their romance, without any complexity, the film presumes its audience idiotic and encourages passive engagement.

In Brontë’s novel, Heathcliff is shaped by his abuse and marginalisation, he is ‘othered’ by characters like Hindley (removed in Fennell’s adaptation) and abused because of his racial identity and social status, the novel, early on in page 5, clearly describes him as a “dark-skinned gypsy” it’s difficult to not acknowledge this as a key part of Heathcliff’s character.

Fennell’s work reflects a wider issue in period dramas: the erasure of people of colour and ‘colour-blind casting’. As Rachel Carroll contends, “these conventions construct a perception of the past which denies or erases the historical existence of Black and Asian British people.” For Heathcliff’s character, Fennell does exactly this, then in her casting of Mr Linton, played by Shazad Latif, a

Still from “Wuthering Heights”



mixed raced actor of Pakistani descent and Nelly, played by Hong Chau, an American Actress of Vietnamese descent, then falls into the second concern of ‘colour-blind casting’ and how “colourblind casting policies keep covert colour discrimination hidden” especially when Fennell places them, particularly Nelly, as the only clear antagonists in her work. The issue that arises is race in Wuthering Heights cannot be ignored or erased, and its removal is undoubtedly why Fennell’s work feels so meaningless. Heathcliff, a tormented man shaped by abuse, cannot be understood without the context of his racial identity, and presenting him solely as a jealous romantic lead rather than a product of social violence is lazy and results in a character with little substance.

Of course, many people were upset that Fennell didn’t cast a person of colour in the role and chose white, Australian actor, Jacob Elordi, but it’s not just woke, liberal bullshit; this casting changes the story in its entirety and highlights a larger problem that plagues the majority of period dramas, especially in adaptations of Wuthering Heights. Fennell follows the same path as countless other adaptations. Laurence Olivier, Timothy Dalton, Ralph Fiennes, Tom Hardy, and now Jacob Elordi join a long list of white Heathcliffs, with only Andrea Arnold’s version starring James Howson, breaking the pattern.

Fennell’s retelling could have been far more interesting had it embraced what was actually radical about the novel: Heathcliff’s identity, domestic abuse, and the novel’s function as an anti-romance. The very essence of *Wuthering Heights*, and the aspects that made it radical, have been stripped from the narrative, and the promised transgressive adaptation seems only to care about the toxic love between the two leads. In her Guardian article, Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett contends that “by turning the novel into just a corset-heaving love story, the director has stripped it of what made it so boundary-pushing.”

The Victorian Popular Fiction Association publish an article: *Victorian scholars,* inevitably, react to Wuthering Heights. It notes that: “there’s enough in Wuthering Heights already that’s shocking, and certainly subverts our (well, non-Victorianists’) perception of the Victorians. If she wanted to shock, why not do an actual modern adaptation?”. Fennell’s work seemed to stir up controversy for controversy sake, upsetting the liberals by being ‘daring’ and ‘transgressive’, though not really being that audacious, perhaps not in the way it wished. A few broken eggs, Isabella in a dog collar, rigor erectus and a finger in the mouth doesn’t seem to be enough to keep an audience interested any longer than its run time, or even at all.

Mithun's Mixtape

Mithun Muraleetharan

The Drama questions how much you are willing to overlook for the sake of love, and how extreme 'unconditional' love really is as a concept. In honour of this, the inaugural mixtape will spotlight songs that capture love not as something purifying, but as a maddening, pathetic and destructive force, especially at its most unconditional.

"No Children" by the Mountain Goats

The standout track from the Mountain Goat's concept album Tallahasee, which focuses entirely on the relationship of a dysfunctional couple, 'No Children' has a deceptively cheerful instrumental over which lead singer John Darnielle belts lyrics filled with spite. Lines like 'I hope I lie and tell everyone/ you were a good wife' and 'And I hope when you think of me years down the line/ you can't find one good thing to say' captures a relationship of mutual hatred but all sung with an unexpected glee, this hatred in reality the glue that holds these two broken people together. And so, when the song ends with 'You are coming down with me/ hand in un-loveable hand/ And I hope you die/ I hope we both die' there is a romance to the self-destruction portrayed, far from admirable but still love.



"Chains of Love" by Charli XCX

The first single from the tie-in soundtrack for Wuthering Heights gave me false hope that Emerald Fennel's film will capture the messy, destructive romance of the original novel. No matter that ill-advised casting- regardless of where you stand in the culture war and white-washing, Caucasian Heathcliff objectively makes for a far less interesting story- and poor pacing- I slept in the cinema- ruined those expectations, Charli XCX's album still stands alone as an substantial work of art. Introducing orchestral instrumentation to her experimental hyper-pop roots, the album captures the juxtaposing ideas of rigid nobility and animalistic love that Emily Bronte's novel is built on. In 'Chains of Love', Charli creates a powerful pop-ballad that feels timeless. A chorus that ties together large orchestral strings with fuzzy vocals and a robotic echo- 'the chains of love are cruel/ I shouldn't feel like a prisoner', a simple-yet-effective metaphor- captures Cathy and Heathcliff's generationally-destructive romance.





"Jim" by Jordan Patterson

Singer-songwriter Jordan Patterson uses her voice to its full potential, going from shouts to yelps to whispers, and she especially loves letting it waver, seemingly always on the edge of tears. In her song 'Jim' from her debut album 'The Hermit', this unorthodox vocal style reaches its full emotional potential. Under a steady guitar instrumental punctuated occasionally by a strange video-game-jumping sound effect, Patterson relates simple, observational details about its central figure: 'He's nowhere near my kin/He's just a friend… He's got real long limbs, tender skin'. The distance with which she describes him, especially with the repetition of 'he's just a friend', is betrayed by the intimacy of her shaking voice, and eventually the song descends into a chant of 'Jim is gone/ There is no end to this song'. The fourth wall-breaking of this lyric adds to the album's personal and diaristic touch, now not just a song about someone she loved, but a song about processing the loss of someone she loved through the act of song-writing. But despite her claims, there is an end to this song and a great one at that, as the instrumentation shifts into something grander and, with her vocals drenched in autotune, she repeats the refrain 'I pray he comes in the morning' for almost two minutes. After three minutes of claiming 'he's just a friend', the open vulnerability of this climactic, repeated prayer feels incredibly cathartic, a love so big it cannot be hidden, bursting out into something divine.



'Au Pays du Cocaine' by Geese

Much like Patterson- who opened for Geese last year- Cameron Winter loves his vibrato, and always delivers a full-bodied emotional performance. Nowhere is this more evident than in the breakout single of his band's sophomore album 'Getting Killed'. In 'Au Pays du Cocaine', Winter's narrator pleads with their lover, willing to debase themselves and their sense of self to get the love they desire: 'You can stay with me and just pretend I'm not there'. The most prevalent interpretation for the song is that it is about polyamory- more specifically the relationship between Winter's parents. His mother Molly Roden Winter wrote the memoir 'More', detailing her open relationship with her husband. A common critique of the book- which is presented as a 'positive' take on the non-monogamy- is that the open marriage seems to have been engineered by her already-unfaithful and manipulative husband; and this brings lyrics like 'You can change and still choose me…You can be free/Just come home please' to new light, describing someone letting themselves be hurt- by reluctantly agreeing to an open marriage- just so they can still be loved. Although a lot of this is para-social presumption, the music video seems to strengthen this interpretation, portraying Winter looking after a baby, whilst singing the song. In the final image of the video, whilst mumble-singing an obvious lie- 'I'm alright/It's alright/I'm fine'- Winter crawls into the crib meant for the child. Perhaps playing his own mother, charged with loving a child, but in need of love and comfort herself.

"Throwaway" by Future

The internet has made Future the poster-boy for disaffected misogyny, citing the toxicity of his lyrics- a frequently-referenced example is 'If she catch me cheating, I'll never tell her sorry' (perhaps resonating with Cameron Winter's father). However, a thorough listen of his discography reveals a more complicated figure, and a masculinity that is always at the edge of crumbling. This is best seen through the two-part autotuned balled 'Throw Away'. In the first half, Future flexes his sexual exploits on a trap beat, callously disregarding the women involved in the process, 'I don't want no relations, I just want your facial… Girl, you know you like pistol, you a throw away.' However, the beat slows down, becoming something colder, and his voice becomes less slurred with each



syllable now more precise, as he says ‘Go and fuck that n**** get it over with’ four times, each time more defeated. In this second half of the track, the false bravado and casual sex of the first is revealed to be a coping mechanism for a monumental heartbreak: ‘Got my d*ck sucked and I was thinking about you/ I was f*cking on a slut and I was thinking about you’. Equally ridiculous and explicit as earlier, but now the hollowness under the hedonism becomes evident: ‘When you f*cking on that n****, hope you thinking about me/ ‘Cause I’m thinking about you’- and so the title becomes a sham, the subject of the song far from being a ‘throw away’, but the centre of his thoughts. In the final section, his flow bounces so perfectly on the beat, powered by a frustration that betrays the cool nonchalance he is known for, as he croons: ‘If sexing on a late night means that much to you/ my love don’t mean that much to you’. Having met someone who is his match- as he says himself ‘deep down, I know you’re a monster too’, referencing the title of the mixtape- Future describes a love so all-consuming he’s willing to resign him to a kind of cuckoldry, ending the song with a repetition of the humiliating but almost zen-like disaffection of ‘Go and fuck that n****, get it over with’.

These songs all portray love as miserable, all-consuming and destructive, but more importantly as something worth being miserable, consumed and destroyed for. Whether drowning ‘hand in un-loveable hand’, feeling ‘like a prisoner’, waiting like a ‘a sailor in a big green coat’, and ‘praying [they] come home in the morning’, they all portray people who will choose love in whatever form they can get, no matter how much it hurts; even Future’s defeat at his lover’s actions is not definitive, the request to ‘get it over with’ hiding an implicit request for her to return to him once it is done. And whether the sacrifice and humiliation that comes with unconditional love is worth it or not, it is clear that it is conducive to beautiful art.

Left page - descending

Single cover of Jordan Patterson’s “Jim”

Album cover of Mountain Goat’s “Tallahassee”

Album cover of Future’s “Monster”

Single cover of Charli XCX’s “Chains of Love”

Illustration created by Callum Andrews

When the Ocean Splits Itself in Two

Tomas Caldon

"My mother held me by the hand. She kept saying,
It's a miracle, a miracle. Then I changed my mind."
- Samuel Beckett (2025), Malone Dies

Something I've always kinda hated: anything with that shot where someone's sitting wide-eyed, centre-frame, haloed by the light of the projector. I mean, gimme a break. And on a broader note, any of those "magic of the movies"-type movies. *Babylon, Cinema Paradiso, Empire of Light* (which I admittedly never finished, and doubly never will), The Artist. There are good ones - The Fabelmans, Almodovar's Bad Education, Bi Gan's Long Day's Journey Into Night, which all at least place this "movie magic" whatever into conversation with the psychology of their protagonists, using the screen as a mirror or a repository for the subjective psyche of Sammy Fabelman, Enrique Goded or Luo Hongwu. And then there's Hugo, which is just good. It's just a good movie, I dunno.

Mentioning Bi Gan, there's his latest, *Resurrection*, to add to the list. The first list, that is. Absolutely gorgeous to look at, a genuine technical feat, oblique and romantic and swooning and on just about every level a step down from his previous movie. Structurally, it's more or less identical: Our protagonist searches for something lost, finding it in a place where the present intertwines with memories and longings; cue extended dream sequences incorporating doubles, long-takes, implications of astral journeying and reincarnation, where everything repressed within our protagonist becomes actualised and explored across an unreal dreamscape.

But where *Journey* split itself fairly evenly, an hour spent constructing a story and an hour further deconstructing it, *Resurrection* briefly sketches its characters for a half-hour in an already self-consciously artificial silent-movie pastiche, then leaps into a succession of oblique, loosely-connected dreams that bear no emotional connection to the preceding narrative, because we know nothing about either the characters or their story. How does it relate? There's a loose throughline - the constant presence of Jackson Yee as various new characters and the resultant astral journeying / reincarnation angle gleaned from such, but it's nothing more than window-dressing to the main (read: sole) 'idea' - that movies are like dreams and stories are what keep us alive, ergo movies help us dream and without them we would be lessened as organisms.

The setting is a world in which humans sacrificed the ability to dream in favour of immortality. A woman seeks out a being, once-human, now something else, still able to dream (and still mortal for it) and searches through his dreams as he dies over the course of a century, in the hopes of understanding what is worth sacrificing immortality for. In every dream, somebody (sometimes Yee's character, sometimes someone around him) encounters a remnant of a dead thing which allows them to tap into a higher state of consciousness: Bach's 'Come, Sweet Death', a spirit resembling a man's deceased father, the final letter from a man's dead daughter, a vampire. 'Transcendence' of varying sorts is its major theme, both real and false, earnest and self-delusional - from opioid dazes through to *bodhi*, and ultimately this is applied to cinema. Bi's conclusion is that cinema is a direct expression of our innate souls, a castle against death and the only true route towards immortality. It is a lost lingua franca through which some transcendental *gnosis* can be achieved, to the extent that early on in the movie the central Quasimodo's 'soul' is literally depicted as a film-projector buried within his chest (which then manifests as the movie you go on to watch). The entirety of cinematic history, symbols and allusions spiritual and artistic all clash and explode in the mind of a dying species to create something transcendental, some sort of rupture through which dreams may flood into reality and bring some element of fantasy into the mundane. That's the idea, at least.

What all of this amounts to, more or less, is totally un-self-conscious, self-aggrandising mythmaking, a vague deification of 'Cinema' as an art form-slash-superstructural abstract and simultaneous pinioning of such, as a Man-made God to be used for Man's ends. It is a movie about the immense importance of 'cinema' without a single point or idea articulated as to what it is that makes it so - every allusion exists only as image-extensions of the hermetic central thesis. Bi seems to believe this to be akin to Love - but deification is not love, because it always fails to understand the subject on its own terms, or as an actual existent thing. As an abstraction, as just part of a flurry of images it becomes cheapened. Deification without condition is just *fetishism*, the upholding of an abstract ideal, in place of and bearing little resemblance to the real thing.

This is a common symptom of a larger state. To briefly move outwards, to situate this in a broader context: We of the post-modern age find ourselves increasingly alienated, from our fellow people and from ourselves, amidst endless 'content'. This is not a unique observation. People have been saying this in some form or another since the forties, probably longer. Increasingly we are more and more shaped by online subcultures, online trends, reams of information pushed upon us as passive recipients. We outsource ourselves to distract from our vague post-End of History malaise, or else to fit into the fake worlds we have grown accustomed to, inhabiting echo chambers carefully cultivated for us by Algorithms, a safety net against having to face the yawning emptiness at the middle of this way of life. This is also not a unique observation - it is a natural consequence of postmodernity's destruction of objectivity, as outlined



Still from "Empire of Light"



Still from “Cinema Paradiso”

[among others] in Baudrillard’s hyperreality: in essence, the image once reflected the real; now, the real reflects the image, builds itself on the image of itself sold to us by consumer-capitalism through advertising and the entertainment industry, or attempts to - the world has become a cheap imitation of an imitation of itself, struck halfway in pursuit of a non-existent image-world. Objectivity thus finds itself replaced by endless clashing subjectivities, which have all simultaneously become as true and as real as each other, since objective ‘reality’ has dissipated once the image replaced it. This is seen most obviously in more mainstreamed, distinctly *internet-born* phenomena: in the manosphere, in online ‘stan’ culture, in the cults of personality and oppositional anti-ideologies of the alt-right and alt-light, the pinnacle of what Bob Altemeyer termed Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) - submissive, aggressive and defensive of their ‘in-group’ for which they are little more than an attack-dog. It is seen in the self-centred, Protestant moralism of parts of the online Left, where individual moral purity and reciprocal assurance of one’s ‘goodness’ is of greater importance than collective action, praxis and empathy. Identity becomes dependent on the following of specific social codes and club rules, as it always has, yet ever more so and ever more so, and perseverance comes from clinging on to whatever will promise change.

These are all extreme examples, but it manifests outside of these mainstream spheres too. In a similar manner to this apotheosising of pop-stars as gods and confidants is movies as epiphanic, as the same action extended towards ‘real’ art as somehow more noble. Yet, it is all symptomatic of the same root problem: seeking to externalise one’s salvation, sinking into a sort of nihilistic inertia, hoping that their lives will be changed for them. That if they put enough of themselves into a piece of art, said art will give them something new to replace it with - *“Please make me empty, if I’m empty then I can receive, if I can receive it means it comes from somewhere outside of me, if it comes from outside of me I’m not alone! I cannot bear this loneliness. Above all it is loneliness.” (Cohen, L. 2009, p.45)* [So goes a book that admittedly pre-dates the Internet by a solid two decades. Whatever, it fits well, I think.] A by-product of nihilist despair; like the nameless protagonist of *My Year Of Rest And Relaxation*, who resolves to sleep until History finally, abruptly forces her awake *(“a human being, diving into the unknown, and she is wide awake”), (Moshfegh, O. 2018, p.289)* longing to be granted a new self through her passivity. Seemingly ‘fixed’ though still just as apathetic as before, the illusion of change without change while the belief has been consolidated that one’s world can be changed without one’s having to lift a finger; that one can glide through their life passively in the hopes that art can reach out entirely to them, such that they don’t have to reach back. The pop-star sees you, the artist sees you, the art sees you, is as good as your friend. The relationship is one that is both equal enough to fulfil the fan’s need for community and imbalanced enough that the fan feels no compulsion to ever give back. It is not a reciprocal relationship, and *that is the point*; the fan hollows themself to be granted a personality, a community, a purpose by somebody they never have to know in a manner they don’t want to, somebody they never have to risk anything with.

Resurrection’s title comes from an apparent whim to mark both the infancy and death of cinema; a kind of rebirth, in which the film stands as a monument and paean to everything that came before, and seeks to announce the beginning of something new and indefinable. But that new thing never arises; what is left is an immense structure of dovetailed symbols, allusions, citations and mechanisms of artifice from which something new is assumed to spring forth: *“no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere.” (Baudrillard, J. 1994, p.2).* Allusions to humanity, history, politics but entirely absent of such; a belief that art in a vacuum is still an epiphanic thing. An enclosed simulation of the experience of epiphany, trying desperately for the sake of the artist’s ego to convince you it’s the real thing.

Whatever. People love to say things like *‘you aren’t the same person after this movie has finished’*, or *‘this movie will change your life’*. This is not true. A movie will not change your life. Art cannot change your life. Art cannot change the world. It has never changed the world, at least, not without significant organising in the lead-up to and surrounding it, and even then. There are a couple of exceptions; *Victim* played a significant role in encouraging the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK, *A Fantastic Woman* helped accelerate various trans rights bills in Chile. On the other end of the spectrum, *WarGames* spurred Ronald Reagan into taking an interest in the relationship between cybersecurity and national security, and *Birth of a Nation* famously lead to the reformation of the long-dead Klan. These are exceptions, in the former two and final instances alongside pre-existing mobilisation and accompanying cultural shift. It can inspire, sure, it can maybe motivate, or clarify, but it is a chain-response that makes these ripples into actual *effect*. One cannot simply watch and take it as change.

To go back to the beginning of this; those shots in movies where a little kid watches a movie slack-jawed like their eyes are being opened, framed with a shining halo like a divine epiphany has been had. Such is the framing: usually accompanied with the character breaking into full-body sobs, often at or near the end of the movie to signal a great catharsis or emotional realisation. This framing usually originates in something like an idea of epiphany, or of catharsis. *Babylon* ends with a monstrous, lurching fritter of chaos and noise that, blent with Manny Torres’ (Diego Calva) weeping awe and the prior cavalcade of debauchery and death seems to

present it as an almost demiurgical being, apathetic and arbitrary and greater than all of us, beautiful and fearful in equal measure. See Elinor's (Margot Robbie) monologue to Jack (Brad Pitt) earlier in the film: *"In a hundred years, when you and I are both long gone, anytime someone threads a frame of yours through a sprocket, you will be alive again [...] Your time today is through, but you'll spend eternity with angels and ghosts." (Babylon, 2022).* This line is directed to and intended to be about the performers, but as film has moved from being an art-form to just another cloud in the firmament of Entertainments that define the world we live in, it applies increasingly to the consumer who shapes themselves on consumption; *"I came in here for that special offer/ Guaranteed personality". (Jones, M. and Strummer, J. 1979)*

Yet in other movies, there are similar scenes that plunge different mediums in ostensibly similar circumstances - take orchestral music, which forms the climactic moments of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Vivaldi's 'Summer', from *The Four Seasons*) and Margaret (Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*), in both of which the lead characters are shown breaking down in tears in the audience of a live performance, and which do not ring so false. But these are not scenes *about* opera, nor classical music. These are scenes about Marianne (Noémie Merlant) and Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), about Lisa (Anna Paquin) and Joan (J. Smith-Cameron), that understand art is a mirror to the soul rather than a simulacra or a *pure* expression or even perfect representation of it; in both scenes, the sheer force of the music triggers overwhelming waves of feeling. Art is an impure expression of something inexpressible, it is from this that it draws its power. It is a hint of the unknowable at the centre of a person. Specific works of art can hook themselves to specific feelings or memories and drag them out of their audience, sometimes painfully. That's how it works. Cinema is not going to save you, it is not an outside force that will descend like the Angel Gabriel and change your worldview like flicking a switch - it can act as a key to oneself, drawing out that which already resides in you - desires, fears, dissatisfactions, anger. What you choose to do then is yours.

To be clear: Art may *open* a door. It is your duty to step through. To think otherwise is despair masqued as hope. It may be able to provoke a sexual awakening or a grave realisation that something is very wrong or the moment the egg cracks or the mirror shatters or some memory uncovers itself or you may find yourself inspired to claw your way from whatever situation you so urgently, feverishly *need* to escape from, but it can do no more. Art cannot save you - only you can save you - an inanimate saviour is no saviour at all, a revelation that does not come from within, or is not sustained by yourself in its wake is no revelation. I know people who transitioned after having watched *I Saw The TV Glow*, I know people who have been shaken out of domestic complacency by eighty-year old Hollywood melodramas, I have had my aesthetic sensibilities and personal philosophies altered time and time again by works that have fought against the boundaries of what I considered to be my small, empirical world. There have been countless filmmakers who have sought in earnest to induce a kind of new awareness through their art, and to a degree succeeded, from abstract experimentalists like Stan Brakhage *(Brakhage, S. 1963, p.24)* and Terry Riley *(Duckworth, W. 1995, p.269)* to political radicals such as Jean-Luc Godard and Fernando Solanas. But to love art as a blind god is dishonest, both to the art and to oneself. It is a denial of oneself. In her review of One Battle After Another, Sam Bodrojan claims that *"Cinephilia is about loving a rotten thing" (Bodrojan, S. 2025)*, and it is better to love a rotten thing unreservedly than to dishonestly attempt to defend it. To believe cinema alone can save you is to live hermetically, sealed from the world and from yourself and to be aware and complacent of this fact.

Actual 'epiphanies' are rare. A life-changing realisation comes maybe a couple of times, if you're lucky, and it is not so fickle as to be inflicted by an outside stimuli. The speed of life is at once so fast and so static that the longing for disruption swells beneath the surface. Through endless scrolling, content, media to consume and get fed and fed by algorithms any work of art becomes cheapened as but a fragment of the enormous monoculture of visual stimuli - everything becomes little more than 'content'. Even a real emotional pummelling from a movie will likely be gone by morning, since new images flood through to wash the remnants of what was before away. A brief catharsis, then the well fills again. And what is an epiphany without catharsis? What is a flash of something greater if it vanishes just as quickly? I don't know. Look at the lost souls in *Dubliners*. Something in Father Flynn broke one day after he dropped a chalice, *"and what do you think but there he was, sitting up by himself in the dark in his confession-box, wide awake and laughing-like softly to himself?" (Joyce, J. 1994, p.9)*, and then he died. Something struck Gabriel Conroy, his wife discussing an old, long-dead lover, and *"his soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (ibid., p.203)*,and then the book ends, as the universe swells beyond the boundaries of him. The cosmos, once opened up, never closes again for these people. Real epiphany is a realisation that brings with it a transgression of bounds - not only the bounds of your world, but also of yourself. Epiphany, escape requires the total disruption of the image-stream that commodifies all art, that sedates the viewer. A movie cannot save your life. A movie cannot change the world. A movie is not a living thing, nor is it a divine thing. You cannot uphold it as something greater than you, in the sense of subjugating yourself to what 'the art' tells you - literature can only get you so far. The rest of the road is yours to traverse.

There's an old Anne Sexton poem *(Sexton, A. 1981, p.194)*. It begins:

"Just once I knew what life was for. In Boston, quite suddenly, I understood."

I was at work one day, on the day of my closest brush with Knowing, in the basement, stacking small canned wines in a small fridge, trying my hardest to deafen myself beneath 'O Superman' to distract me from how bored I was, and I felt tired and heavy like I was waterlogged as I so often do these days and did but that day that moment all of a sudden, for all of a sudden I was happy like I had never been before, a wave of euphoria crashed across me and for the briefest of moments, a fraction of a fraction of a second, everything felt right and good and real and true and whatever else you or I want out of these years we've been handed but then it passed and everything was the same as it was before, save for a slightly deeper feeling of absence. Like a dream that dissipates upon waking up, I couldn't remember this revelation I was sure I had. I was still here. I am still here. Here. And life went on.

There's an old Anne Sexton poem *(ibid., p.195)*. It ends:

"[I] hurried my truth, the charm of it, home
and hoarded these constants into morning
only to find them gone."

A Botched Obituary for Tilly Norwood

Alex Lochhead

AI generated image of the AI actress, Tilly Norwood



On April 1st, the Tilly Norwood Instagram account announced that they were deactivating the AI actress, claiming that the overwhelming negativity had become impossible to ignore. Gleeful and gullible, I set to writing her obituary, only to discover that this was all some sick game to Tilly. The next day, the account posted a video of Norwood exiting a towering machine in a nefarious-looking server room where she is apparently kept. This might have outraged some, but user Admiral Zeberos was sure to pledge his support in the comments, claiming: “As a cinephile, I wholeheartedly support Tilly, because she is more expressive than most of the nepobabies who get handed all the roles in Hollywood.”

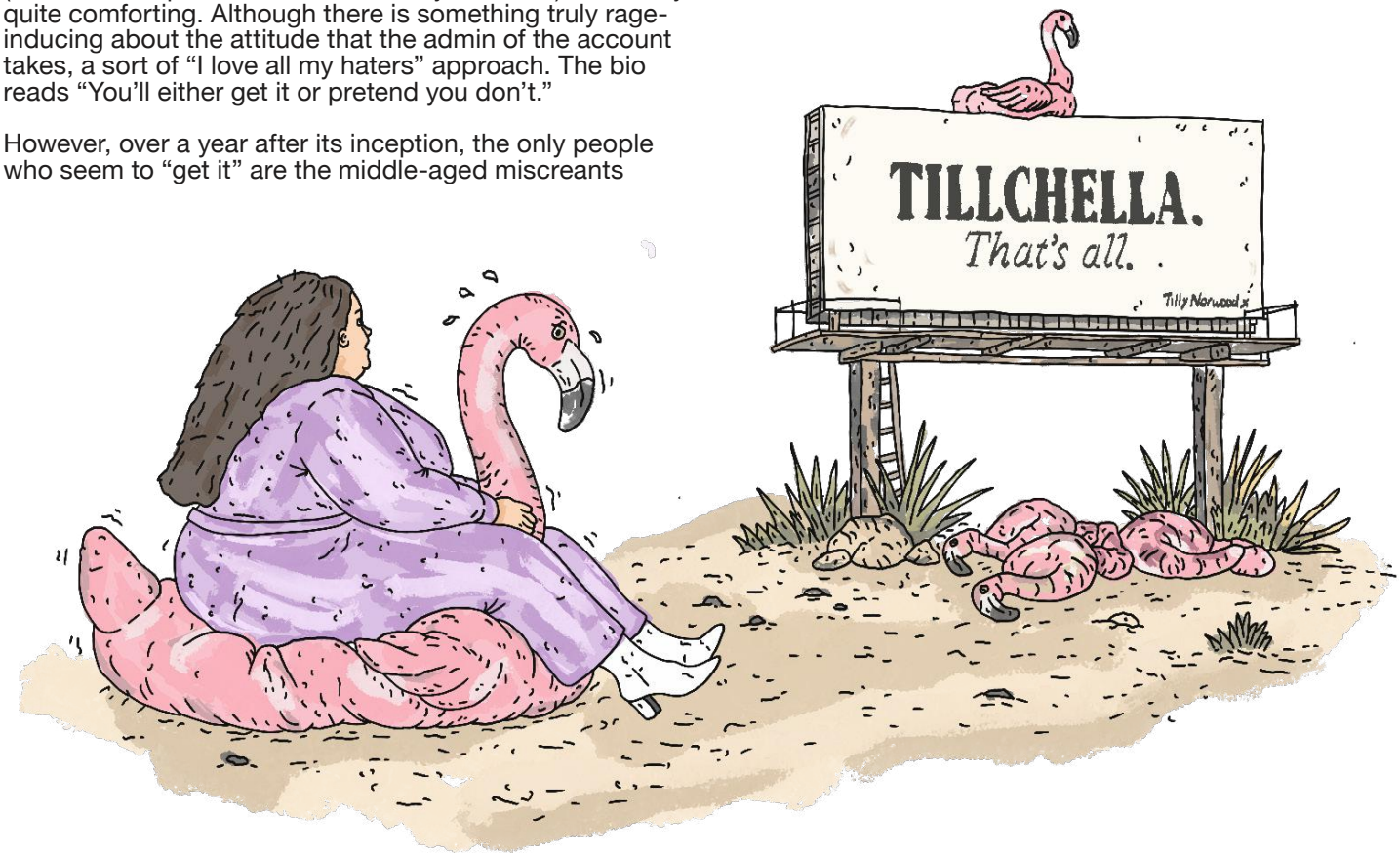
Having scanned all of Norwood’s career and likely diseased the algorithm which runs my Instagram for an obituary that I can no longer write, I was left unsure of what to do with the remnants of my research scattered all around me. I am stuck with only a festering rage for the disregard that Tilly has demonstrated for her own mortality and the shrivelled penises of the fans who rely on it. Scrolling through her account, I began to recognise the same accounts popping up in the comments, their incognisant depravity veiled by their familiar politeness (“So cute Tilly. Congratulations. Can we be friends.”)

Tilly seems unbothered. Just seventeen hours ago, she posted herself having fun at Coachella, as if none of this ever happened… Jacob_Rave asks, “Awesome how was Coachella.” Tilly says nothing. Her fans are so enchanted by the Hollywood phenom that they fail to see her mistreating all their noble efforts.
A quick look at Norwood’s Instagram or Wikipedia page (which encompasses the extent of my research) is actually quite comforting. Although there is something truly rage-inducing about the attitude that the admin of the account takes, a sort of “I love all my haters” approach. The bio reads “You’ll either get it or pretend you don’t.”

However, over a year after its inception, the only people who seem to “get it” are the middle-aged miscreants who fanaticise about what they might do to her. The team behind Norwood is posting fake images of her presenting at the Oscars or walking the red carpet with an inflatable flamingo in tow, which is featured prominently across the account as our first piece of Norwood iconography. She’s so silly. The account does not read as one of any actor’s, but as a blend between a page for someone’s tiny white dog and a cancelled right-wing grifter.

There is a true dearth of accomplishment for Norwood, whose creators claim is the world’s first AI Actress, but whose credits include a two-minute YouTube comedy sketch (terrible) and a music video for her debut single “Take The Lead” (evil). If I was disappointed to discover that Tilly Norwood was not dead, I was pleased to discover it writhing on the ground, worse than dead, pathetically alive. With not a single film under her belt, Tilly Norwood may be an egregious monster, but she is not an actress.

Illustration created by Callum Andrews





‘SNL UK’ deserves more time

Callum Andrews

SNL UK always felt like an awkward fit. The original Saturday Night Live, airing on NBC in the US since 1975, is a very specific kind of comedy show, its habits, rhythms and instincts shaped over decades, and that kind of specificity doesn’t easily travel. Much of the early scepticism focused on the wrong things: whether it would feel too American, or whether a cast of unfamiliar names could carry it. But SNL has always worked that way. The real question isn’t who’s in it or how British it feels, it’s what happens when a format this highly calibrated is dropped into a completely different comedy culture. The UK comedy scene doesn’t operate in quite the same way as the US—sketch simply isn’t as embedded in the culture as it is across the pond. Instead, the British comedy landscape is built more around stand-up, panel shows and personality-led work. And sketch, while it has a rich history, does not sit at the centre in the same way. This means dropping a format like SNL into that environment was always going to produce something unfamiliar. SNL works because of the system around it: a relentless weekly cycle, constant rewriting, and performers shaped by that pace. It’s messy by design, but a mess shaped by experience. Two episodes in, at the time of writing, you can already see what happens when that system is translated. SNL UK isn’t consistent, and it often falls into its weaker instincts, but it works just enough to be taken seriously and to be excited about. Episode one goes some way to showcase the format’s potential, opening, as SNL typically does, with a political cold open built around Keir Starmer avoiding a call from Trump over the Iran conflict. Where Trump has dominated US cold opens in recent years, this feels like our version of that, suggesting Starmer will play a similar role going forward. The sketch itself is uneven, but effective as an introduction. George Fouracres’ slightly cartoonish impression does a lot of the work, though there are flashes of something sharper, like the line where Starmer, insisting he “hates conflict”, is asked whether he means the war or the phone call, and replies, “is there a way I can’t do both?” As it stretches, the sketch begins to lose shape, particularly with the addition of a youth advisor played by Jack Shep. Even so, it does enough to establish the show’s take on the format, and set up the monologue that follows.

It’s in the monologue that the show properly settles, with Tina Fey, one of SNL’s most iconic writers and performers, acting as a natural guide into it. She uses the moment to lay out the format, joking about its rhythms and expectations in a way that feels natural and unforced. Coming straight after the cold open, it feels less like an explanation and more like a continuation. We’ve seen the show in practice, and now we’re being shown how to enjoy it. That sense of ease is helped by her interactions with familiar British faces like Graham Norton and Nicola Coughlan, which root the whole thing in something

Illustration created by
Callum Andrews

recognisable, and make it easier to trust the show. It's a subtle piece of work, but an important one, leaving both the show and the audience on firmer footing as it moves forward

Once that initial framing falls away, the episode becomes much more uneven. This is where the show has to stand on its own, and where its instincts start to show, some of them promising, others much easier to fall back on. The most obvious of these is how it handles its 'Britishness'. It's an understandable impulse, but one the show leans on too heavily. At its best, those details sit in the background, giving the sketches a sense of place. At its weakest, they become the entire joke. That tension runs through much of the episode, the sense that there's sharper writing in there, but that it's often undercut by something broader and more obvious, and it ends up shaping both what works and what doesn't.

In the weaker material, that instinct quickly starts to feel limiting. The Attenborough-led Last Supper and a Paddington sketch both lean too heavily on recognisable references, never quite building beyond them. The ideas feel thin, the execution either crowded or overstretched, and the comedy stalls at recognition rather than developing into something sharper. Around those are a run of more broadly middling sketches that don't misfire in the same way, but don't land strongly either. None of these are outright failures, but together they contribute to a run of material that feels more tentative than fully formed.

However, Weekend Update already feels like one of the more promising parts of the show. As one of the format's most recognisable and most demanding segments, it comes with a long-established rhythm, and there are moments here where you can see it all beginning to click. The pairing of Paddy Young and Ania Magliano is key to that. Both are strong stand-ups, and that comes through in their delivery- the dynamic between them is easy, confident, and genuinely enjoyable to watch. There's a natural chemistry there that gives the segment a solid foundation even this early on. Occasionally, the material leans into "clapter", with jokes landing more as statements than punchlines. An instinct that isn't entirely out of place in a segment as inherently topical as this, but still can feel a little lazy when it becomes the default. Even so, there's enough here to suggest this could quickly become a standout as the show finds its footing.

Further promise can be seen in sketches like Shy Baby and Hamnet, where the show feels less tied to the format and more comfortable following its own 'weirder' instincts. Shy Baby is the stronger of the two—a strange, slightly off-centre sketch that works because it fully commits to what it is, with George Fouracres, Celeste Dring and Jack Shep carrying it through performance as much as the idea itself. It's one of the few moments in the episode that really clicks. Hamnet works in a similar way, but more unevenly. The early back-and-forth between Fouracres and Tina Fey is where it's at its best, and moments like Shakespeare coming home, showing off his earring, and then immediately heading back to London land really well thanks to the slightly abrupt, throwaway rhythm. As it builds towards something bigger, it loses a bit of that, but when it does work, it points towards a version of the show that feels far more confident in its own voice.

On the whole, episode one feels like a strong jumping-off point, uneven but clearly promising, especially when the comedy loosens up and starts to feel more natural. That's not necessarily a settled direction so much as an early glimpse of what might work. Episode two, though, feels like a more difficult follow-up, and leans more heavily into the show's weaker instincts. Where the first hints at what this version of SNL could become, the second more often falls back on what feels easiest, and ends up a weaker episode overall. The tendency to lean on familiar references as the joke itself becomes far more prominent here, though, this early on, that feels as much like a growing pain as anything fixed.

However, episode two isn't without its strengths. The cold open lands well, built around a strong, specific premise—an MI5 intervention in 1997 that reframes Prince Andrew's later disgrace as a calculated attempt to make Prince Charles look more favourable by comparison. It's the kind of idea that feels fully thought through, finding its humour in the logic of the setup rather than leaning on recognition alone. That sense of clarity is something the rest of the episode often lacks, which makes it stand out all the more. That same sense of specificity carries through to the Jools Holland sketch, which feels like the first pre-taped piece the show really gets right. It's built around a clear central idea, pushed just far enough, and held together by a strong performance at its core. It's odd without feeling forced, and, crucially, it follows its own logic all the way through—something much of the surrounding material struggles to do.

Weekend Update is even stronger this time around too. A new segment, "Hand in Hand", adds a lighter, more playful tone, giving the show some space to move around the heavier material it's been dealing with. Paddy Young in particular feels more settled, delivering jokes with growing confidence and control. There are still some shaky moments from both anchors, but that's to be expected this early on, especially in a live setting, and it doesn't detract too much. The material can still lean a little towards the more pointed end of things, though that's partly a matter of taste. Even so, it feels closer to where the segment needs to be, and more assured in where it's heading.

Across the rest of the episode, the problem is less that the ideas don't exist, and more that they don't really develop. Much of the material starts from something recognisable—a familiar setting, a small irritation—but never quite finds the turn that would justify building a full sketch around it, instead stretching those ideas out without adding much to them. The hostage sketch is probably the best of that run, with Jamie Dornan and Anabel Marlow bringing some real energy to a premise built around the vague, in-between language of modern dating, but it works more in moments than as a fully developed sketch.

Elsewhere, the issue becomes clearer. A Les Mis-style musical sketch about factory workers dealing with packaging feels like it's aiming for the kind of full-cast escalation the US version has pulled off in sketches like Diner Lobster, but never quite earns it, instead landing where it thinks it should go and feeling weaker for it. The same goes for the pre-taped pub piece, which takes a recognisable idea—Brits going abroad only to find British pubs—and never really pushes it beyond that initial observation. That is where the episode becomes difficult to fully get behind, not because these missteps are unexpected, but because you can see what it's reaching for. Taken together, they make this feel like a clear step down from the first episode, even if that unevenness still

feels part of the process at this stage.

Interestingly, it's in the final "5-to-1" slot that the show feels most comfortable. This week's closer, built around a man injuring himself to maintain a lie about a failed rugby career, ends with him cutting off his own testicles and sticking them to his hips—broad and more overtly crude but it works because of how it's played. The performances stay completely straight, letting the idea speak for itself, and giving it a confidence that much of the episode lacks. It pairs nicely with the previous week's "45 Seconds with Fouracres", which is looser and more playful, but still lands. Both commit fully to their tone, however weird that tone is, and feel much more in line with the show's more irreverent instincts. It's a small thing, but it's where the show currently feels most assured.

Across its first two episodes, SNL UK feels caught between two versions of itself. One follows the format closely, hitting familiar beats but often falling into safer, thinner material; the other loosens up, leans into its own instincts, and feels far more confident for it. That's what makes this an interesting starting point rather than a worrying one. SNL has never been about getting everything right straight away. It's a format built on iteration, on trial and error, on finding a rhythm over time. This version is no different. With more episodes already on the way, the real question isn't whether it works yet, but which direction it chooses to follow. If given the space, there's enough here to suggest it could become something genuinely distinctive if it is willing to follow its own, better instincts.



The Slacker Returns

Alex Lochhead

Apathetic, selfish, and lazy. Slacker culture began to gain popularity through music and film in the 90s, echoing an attitude of contented aimlessness through the meandering films of Richard Linklater or the ramshackle songs of Pavement. Whilst the word "culture" may overstate the united front of action taken by these "slackers", they were joined together by their disillusionment with conventional, "hardworking" paths to life, such as "getting a job"- an ideal of rejecting the system before it could reject them.

Films like *Slacker, Clerks, Dazed N' Confused, Empire Records* were about people just hanging out - listlessness underlined everything, and straightforward plot progression was often rejected for a chilled-out stasis. The characters' mouths moved more than they did, and disrupted ideas of moving onwards and upwards. Just drift around in whatever direction you want.
At the same time, bands like Pavement, Built to Spill, and Guided By Voices began to popularise the lo-fi, deadpan, indie-rock sound that would be termed as Slacker rock. Ironic that the artists who are deemed the voices of slacker culture are so evidently not slackers. Pavement released five albums in seven years, and made enough music for five more; all of these artists were prolific at doing it themselves. Much slacker art exists in the ironic crossover between DIY aesthetics and a "culture" named after the very concept of inaction. Slacker culture then seems to be less about actually slacking and more about the freedom to. What you do or don't do isn't as important as why you are doing it, or not doing it. The artists of this slacker generation wrench free the capitalist claw machine latched around our minds by simply teaching us to take it off - but they certainly do not slack to do so. "*Every time I sit around, I find I'm shot*".

The 2000s come, and slacker culture is even less a concentrated thing. The attitude simmers lazily across new homes: video games, skate culture, and the crowning achievement of all this – *Jackass*. There is perhaps no single piece of prominent slacker-media that indulges so unashamedly the practice of not doing anything that could ever be called productive. It is a ball-crunching rejection of all adult responsibility, and by far the truest. You could again point out how many of the jackasses themselves were no slackers – "Danger" Ehren McGahey and Dave England were both professional snowboarders, Bam Margera was a professional skateboarder, and Johnny Knoxville, director Jeff Tremaine, and Sofia Coppola muse Chris Pontius were all writers for Big Brother magazine. Slacking doesn't cut it for a magazine writer. Regardless of their honest and hardworking character, what the Jackasses put to screen was pure adolescent revelry, the wet-dream psychopathy of a sixteen-year-old boy too distracted by his friends to discover what girls are yet, and it was their job. They made their living with

camcorders and kicks to the groin. That is slacker culture.

Since the turn of the century, *Jackass*- and the continued influence of slacker rock- has shielded the slacker flame through to the present day (its fifth and supposedly final film is set to release in June). The accessibility and coolness of 90s indie rock and independent cinema make it easier for the slacker aesthetic to maintain and inspire the next generation of lethargic non-conformists, and, looking around, I'd like to claim that slacker culture is coming back. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't, and maybe it just might in some smaller degree. From the precipice of *Jackass*, I point to Lance Bangs, *Jackass* cameraman and cult music video director, in his own way a bridge between slacker music and slacker film.

Bangs has been making music videos since the 90s, and his style fits slacker rock particularly well by doing away with any self-seriousness. He's directed bands like Pavement, Sonic Youth, The Shins, R.E.M., Grandaddy, and many more. All of the above who aren't slacker rock can claim a parentage of them– Pavement famously wrote a whole song about R.E.M., "*Unseen Power of The Picket Fence*", the lyrics of which are as reverential as a Pavement song is willing to get. Bangs is not exclusively a slacker-rock-director, but he is a great one and an icon of the culture. The music video for Pavement's "*Major Leagues*" features Stephen Malkmus wielding a bouquet of flowers like an unwanted suitor and gazing into the camera with faux adoration and a romantic smile. How charming, how simple. It is the only way that the ridiculous act of pretending to perform a song in silence would fit the Pavement lead singer; anything else would reek of artifice, of trying or caring, of the music industry… Recently, Bangs has been on a tear. He's already directed three music videos in 2026, but it was the 2025 video for MJ Lenderman's "Wristwatch" that spells the slight uprise in Slacker culture. Lederman's lo-fi, alt-country rock is laced with defeated wit, sports obsession and poetry – "*Jackass is funny / Like the Earth / Is round*". He is the foremost post-internet slacker-rocker. The song "*Wristwatch*" is about someone who is held in contempt by everyone around him and is thus abstracted from every meaningful relationship in his life, but who finds solace in the smartwatch on his wrist and in the wealth of his beach homes and houseboats. The video starts with a street sign against the tar (against the pavement?) that reads "MJ Lenderman x Lance Bangs". The video is thus framed by all the slacker implications that Bangs, as a music-video auteur, carries with him.

Slacker culture continues to live on through its influence on both music and film, but Lederman calls it to arms, whether intentionally or not. With the "*Wristwatch*" video, it is hard not to view the artist against a backdrop of the 90s and early 2000s slacker culture that he draws from, back to when it was a more conscious or at least recognisable thing. If there is to be, to any notable degree, a slacker-renaissance, then it feels like it has to be now.
Look to the 80s, in art and beyond. Aesthetically, more is very much more. Everything is very synthy, very American, and very bright. The fast-paced, bright-light gleam of music videos is beginning to seep into mainstream media. A wave of self-loathing is needed to reel it in. Ronald Reagan is in charge for a dastardly eight years, fostering an environment of good, home-grown conservatism that's message was clear: subscribe to the system. Everything that defines slacker culture can be surmised as a reaction against the decade before, and my head can't help but swivel.

We open our phones to a mass of content that should all be satirical, but has mutated into the norm. For example, those Instagram accounts that keep me by some foul hand aware of what Kik streamers are doing, the fact that, by some inexplicable series of media decisions made decades ago, I know who Kylie Jenner is, and worst of all, Dixie D'Amelio – truly an unfortunate name, thankfully a gifted musician. It is easy to forget and catastrophic to comprehend that "*The D'Amelio Show*" was not exalted from this Earth upon its first breath, but it ran for three seasons. Recall Marc D'Amelio and weep. In 2023, he threateningly tweeted, "I am putting together a group of investors to pursue the purchase of TikTok.". He then responded to his own tweet and said: "Hi." These things are easier to ignore with the control we have over what we consume. They are not omnipresent, and thus the aesthetic resistance feels not so urgent, but when does the artificiality and vapid, attention-grabbing sheen become so infectious that art has to react against it?

The final reflection lies in subscribing to the system. It does not appear to be an incredibly rewarding path to life, nor one that has particularly nurtured the world we live in. There is an overwhelming feeling that those who rule the system have skewered us with it, and there is every reason to be disillusioned. What actions I or anyone who feels the same might take against it may be naught, but it certainly does not seem like a train worth boarding. In an ideal world, were I not too lazy, I would be ripping lo-fi indie rock, I would be getting thrashed in the balls by a whole American Football team, and I would be filming across Austin Texas, a series of disjointed musings between my part-time actors.

Left page

Illustration created by Callum Andrews

Captured: Stephen Malkmus



Marketing Madness!

Mithun Muraleetharan

Last September, the public got its first look at The Drama. This wasn't done through a teaser or a publicity shoot, but an engagement announcement in the print edition of the Boston Globe. The announcement read 'Emma Harwood and Charlie Thompson Engaged', accompanying a picture of Zendaya and Robert Pattinson in-character. To an unwitting reader, this would not read as an advertisement, but as a weird curiosity- "Who are these people that have the power to usurp the daily TV Critic's Corner column for such a mundane announcement?" However, those who recognise the two stars would surely take a picture of the physical paper and post it on Twitter, Reddit, or Instagram.

The decision to advertise via physical media added to the mystery. However, beyond the novelty, the physicality adds to the advertisement's narrative. Under the photos, it says "Mr Harwood, a decorated military veteran, is proud to share this news". Within the film's 'world,' this announcement was made by the father of Zendaya's character, plausibly from a generation more familiar with the physical newspaper than the internet. These details mean the advertisement expands from being mere marketing to an example of 'world-building'.

Along with the newspaper announcement, a photo of 'Charlie' and 'Emma' was also posted inconspicuously on the Instagram profile @normanandblake, belonging to internet-famous wedding photography duo Shannen Norman and Emily Blake, who have 45.1K followers. The most liked comment reads: 'Did a triple take to make sure this wasn't Robert Pattinson and Zendaya… still not convinced'. Much like the engagement announcement in the newspaper's 'couple's dilemma' column, Norman and Blake's Instagram, filled with real-life, wholesome wedding photographs, is not a traditional venue for advertisement, further adding to the world-building. This form of marketing, which exists with a film's narrative, has become especially prevalent in the internet age, thanks to its heightened potential for virality.

This viral world-building arguably originated with the 1999 found-footage horror film The Blair Witch Project. Where The Drama did fake wedding announcements and wedding photos, Blair Witch's official website had fake police reports and news interviews. The marketing used the film's found-footage style to raise questions about its authenticity and almost sought to 'prank' an unwitting witness. In fact, this form of 'guerrilla' marketing has been embraced by films that use this same found-footage style. Cloverfield was first revealed to the public through shaky camcorder footage that played before Transformers with no title, sparking theory and debates. This is marketing as an act of deception, playing into the prevalence of hoax and misinformation already on the internet.

Another example of internet hoax as marketing is the viral 'This Man' meme, which was revealed to be part of a conceptual art project by Italian sociologist and marketer Andrea Natella. In 2008, internet explorers came across a mysterious website called 'Ever Dream This Man?', describing a man who supposedly appears in the dreams of various people, with fake testimonies backing the claim. Over the next two years, the popularity of the site grew, until 2010, when Natella revealed it was a publicity stunt - but what exactly it was for was never revealed. However, a report from Kernel Mag suggests that it was in fact a promotion for an unproduced film by Bryan Bertino- director of the horror film 'The Strangers'- entitled This Man. According to a press release, the film follows an "ordinary guy" who discovers that "people he has never met are seeing him in their dreams". Although Bertino's horror film was never made, its premise is similar to the 2023 surreal satire Dream Scenario, directed by none other than The Drama's Kristoffer Borgli.



In fact, a poster for Dream Scenario directly alluded to the original 'This Man' image, but with star Nicolas Cage's face inserted. Whereas the original This Man film was going to be a horror film, in Borgli's hand the premise became a vehicle for an exploration of fame, as its central everyman becomes a star of sorts, recognised by strangers for his 'role' in their dreams. Fittingly, Nicolas Cage is himself a star, recognised for his wild, off-kilter and unmistakably Cage-ian performances. So, whereas the original 'This Man' poster was built on the bizarrely nondescript face at its centre, the poster for Dream Scenario centres Nicolas Cage, with only his face on the poster and not even the name of the film. This is in stark contrast to the other title-less advertisements mentioned, such as Blair Witch, Cloverfield and especially the unproduced This Man, which obscured even their actors. By obscuring the performers, the artifice of their narratives becomes even less evident.

In contrast, Dream Scenario- and The Drama- are undoubtedly star-driven vehicles. This makes the use of guerrilla marketing, in the case of the latter, especially unique. Most of the other films mentioned are horror films and advertising material that blur the line between reality and cinematic narrative works especially well for this genre. The terror feels more real and inescapable, even beyond the confines of the silver screen.

However, the marketing of The Drama, a rom-com, albeit a more twisted one, starring two of the most successful young Hollywood actors, will not be able to recreate that sense of immersion. Nor is it trying to. In fact, unlike the mysterious unknown suggested by the marketing of the horror films, the engagement announcement and wedding photos lean into the instant knowability of both Zendaya and Pattinson, playing with their specific public personas. Both are stars known for not only their acting prowess but their highly publicised romantic lives, defined by relationships with co-stars; Robert Pattinson and Twilight co-star Kristen Stewart's whirlwind romance, which even Donald Trump couldn't stop tweeting about back in 2012: 'Everyone knows I am right that Robert Pattinson should dump Kristen Stewart. In a couple of years, he will thank me. Be smart, Robert.'.

Similarly, Zendaya's relationship with Spider-Man co-star Tom Holland is also highly publicised, with their recent covert wedding the focus of the Deuxmois, TMZs and Page 6s of the world.

So, placing these two stars in a story about a complicated relationship and advertising it in a way that completely centres the relationship was sure to garner clicks and views. One of the comments on the @normanandblake post is a cartoon gif of Spider-man and Batman fighting, referencing the superheroes played by Tom Holland and Robert Pattinson respectively, presumably arguing over Zendaya's Mary Jane; this goes to show how much the response to The Drama's guerrilla marketing not only centres the actor but also their cinematic and personal baggage, in stark contrast to the opaque methods utilised by the horror films.

Whereas Blair Witch almost tries to dupe the audience into entering its world, The Drama invites one to buy into its narrative. The marketing, hidden in newspapers' relationship advice columns and wedding photograph Instagram accounts, is built on the hope that audiences will immediately recognise Pattinson and Zendaya; otherwise, the announcement will be thrown in the bin or the photos lost in the algorithm. Therefore, neither the announcement in the newspaper or the caption on Instagram is meant to be an act of deception, but rather a request for the reader to willingly buy into the fiction of Charlie and Emma. And this idea of buying into a fiction is perfect for The Drama's premise of a seemingly ideal couple undercut by a dreadful secret. In fact, the two photos on the Instagram post carousel capture this premise: the first is the idealised candid of the happy couple, and the second is a more unnerving picture of Zendaya's character looking at the camera with surprising intensity.

Ultimately, this form of guerrilla marketing is effective not just for its ability to create short-term hype but in how it exists as an extension of the film's world, either in a 'deceptive' way, such as Blair Witch and This Man's attempts to convince the audience of its reality, or through a reflection of the narrative's wider theme, as with The Drama and its exploration of perception and reality within a relationship. In today's world of hoaxes and misinformation - exacerbated by AI, but that's neither here nor there - audiences are far more cynical than in the days of www.blairwitch.com. Therefore, guerrilla marketing, not utilised for deception but rather as a fiction that audiences willingly enter, allows for greater engagement, as seen in the various Reddit and Twitter posts that theorise and analyse a newspaper engagement announcement and two 'candid' photos. And it is because of an understanding of star-power, the internet's para-social obsession and the power of shock- "Oh my god! That is Zendaya and Robert Pattinson"- that The Drama's marketing team succeeded in building anticipation, and the only thing that could have dampened its momentum was if the director turned out to be a paedophile.

The original "Dream Man" drawing, as published by Andrea Natella in 2008


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Still from “The Drama”

The Drama

Alex Lochhead

The films of Kristopher Borgli often flitter into visions of an ideal unreality. In Sick of Myself, Signe (Kristine Kujath Thorp) disfigures herself for attention, yet envisions that the cameras would still flash if she returned to that old version of herself that she dreams other people see. His debut American feature, Dream Scenario, is about Paul (Nicolas Cage), a man who is revered and then reviled for his involuntary presence in the dreams of the general public. The film ends with an extended dream sequence of Paul and his ex-wife walking down a slowly burning road, before he floats away, exalted from the bliss of a world where his mistakes were never made. Whether they appear in flashes or extended periods, Borgli is dedicated to making the unreality look as real as what is actually happening, and the minds of his characters are torn between and leak into these false worlds.

The Drama is a jittery film. Its editing jumps back and forth across time, but also into fading glimpses of unreality. The worlds that Charlie (Robert Pattinson) imagines are as discordant as the editing. Some are of a world where he can forgive and forget and hug his girlfriend Emma (Zendaya), others are of her killing him, and others envision the lies he tells others. For example, the childhood trauma that she did not actually experience is recreated in vivid, gruesome detail and becomes as real as it is on screen when his deception is believed. It is spoken, it is filtered into the perception of her, and therefore it is real. As it jitters between subject matter, characters, close-ups, dialogue, time, and reality, The Drama can threaten to take on too much at times. The challenge is for the director to then focus his film, to forge something coherent amidst its manic thrall – a challenge he largely succeeds at.

Their meet-cute takes place at a coffee bar in Boston, which transitions into Charlie describing the scene as an anecdote for his wedding speech. From their first meeting, the two have gone on to live a comfortable, bohemian life as industrial creatives (he is a museum curator; she works in publishing or PR – it is somewhat unclear) and are now engaged, with the wedding just around the corner. At a test dinner with bridesmaid Rachel (Alana Haim) and best man Mike (Mamoudou Athie), a married couple themselves, they all agree to go around the table and confess the worst thing that they have ever done – their collective debasement offering them a reprieve from judgment.

The Drama was cast in the shadow of a major, much-anticipated “plot-twist” that comes in this moment. Spoiler ahead: Emma admits that she planned and nearly executed a school shooting. As the mood inexplicably drops, Charlie is baffled, stumbling over questions to try to confirm that she is joking. Her bridesmaid Rachel is indignant, a moral outrage despite her confession that she locked a mentally disabled child in an abandoned trailer overnight. The morally superior, self-righteous spectre who looms over Emma for the rest of the film, Haim is brilliant, hilarious, incredibly annoying, and has a good point, even if she has no right to wield it so heroically.

Borgli makes the crucial decision to show Emma’s past - depicted with a slight surrealism and satirical humour - a

young girl with a rifle as she plans and threatens to enact her violent goal. Although school shootings used to be the subject of shows like One Tree Hill and Degrassi, the mood has changed, and audiences are used to a more sombre and serious tone. Borgli does not have this; he has European satire. Dancing between time can be tonally jarring, and The Drama almost jitters into a too-scattered focus. However, as the film tightens its plot around Charlie, it becomes a more standard Borgli affair - a pathetic and vain character descends into an endless spiral of increasingly pathetic and vain actions until they hit rock bottom. Through Charlie's descent, Borgli returns to the truth that underlies all his films: that we are all pathetic, vain, and insecure. None more so than middle-class "creatives" in their late twenties and early thirties.

What is the conundrum at the centre of the Drama? It's every question that enters your mind: how bad was what Emma did? Should she be held in contempt, perhaps punished, or should she be forgiven? What if that was my friend? What if that was my fiancé – what would I do? The Drama makes you consider all of this in real time, but by taking you back to the past and showing you the kid with the gun, it forcefully humanises the conundrum. Watching a teen practice and deafen herself with a rifle whilst knowing her ultimate intent is unavoidably unpleasant, and can brush up against the uneasy laughter you get when she is rehearsing her teenage manifesto to a computer that keeps trying to update.

Uncomfortable as it may be, Borgli makes it hard to agree with the unyielding how-fucking-dare-you response of Haim's character. We are provided a privileged view of Emma that even Charlie cannot see, and we witness an isolated young black girl who falls into an aesthetic rabbit hole not for the sake of violence, but for the emotional potential of it. Sitting in front of her webcam with eyes painted black, Emma seems to have found some identity, grim as it might be.

Whilst this aching for identity creates sympathy for Emma, it does not override the satire Borgli seeks to craft. Just as easily as Emma's adolescent isolation leads her to the edge of something evil, the prospect of acceptance and social credibility spurs her to renounce her ways and become an activist for gun control. Fickle to what everyone else thinks of her, swayed to polar opposites at their whim, Emma is as sympathetically insecure as she is laughably vain – just like the rest of us. Good and evil stem from that same wound in varying degrees, often bleeding into the same pool.

Although Borgli makes a joke out of her redemption, his depiction of the overall subject matter (school shootings) is not without feeling – his empathy is just inseparable from the queasy humour with which he delivers it. It is the dissonance between the subject matter's inherent seriousness and Borgli's comedic touch that leaves the film's central conundrum open for constant consideration. Emma might be an empathetic character, but her reasons for not going through with it are self-serving, operated by the bleeding need to be approved of by others, yet Borgli suggests that the same truth guides us all. In the distance between moral condemnation and Emma's sympathetic character is Charlie, who is driven into a maddening and excruciatingly pathetic descent in the second half of the film.

In The Drama, Pattinson has perfected his version of the bumbling British fool – a stuttering loser who might think he's William Thacker, but instead simmers with too much spurting existential dread. Pattinson nails the role and perfectly performs the British, middle-class sensibility that elicits such a spiralling response to his situation. He is at once deeply troubled by Emma's confession and recurringly obtuse to it. For example, Rachel's cousin Sam (Anna Baryshnikov) has survived a shooting, but is paralysed from the waist down. When Sam is on her way to meet Rachel, who Charlie knows will tell her cousin everything, he decides to confront her, hoping that he can make such a good impression now that he can soften the blow. He is a writhing puppet to the agonising awareness of his own self-image, yet so polite in his accosting her that he gets nowhere, says nothing direct and utterly embarrasses himself. So goes the long, painful process of making his life much, much worse.

The most annoying thing a man can do when you confess your deepest trauma to him is compare it to a Louis Malle film, but that is the buffer between Charlie and his reality. Perhaps it tells us how he views his life and everything attached to it from the outside. One of the most painful sequences of the film is when he eats lunch with his colleague, Misha, played wonderfully by the wryly disinterested Hailey Gates. He asks her what she would do if she found out that her boyfriend of three years once planned a school shooting. She answers that she would break up with him and even call the police. Charlie is incessant, appalled and offended by her answer, unable to fathom how that could be the appropriate response since all he wants to hear is that he is right, that he isn't below anyone else. He is filtering his response through the eyes of someone else, trying to both validate and perceive himself through her. The results are disastrous when, in some utter collapse, he kisses her. It feels like another of his jitters, now wired to extremes.

If Emma's past asks us what we can forgive, Charlie not only builds his own rap sheet but also questions how we go about it. He is suffocated by the faux moralism he has wrapped around his own principles, finding himself suddenly at Emma's mercy when their wedding goes wrong (his attempted affair is exposed, he is assaulted, and he calls her laugh repulsive). Long after the opening meet-cute scene, this is when The Drama returns to its romcom roots once again. Charlie realises he has let all the worries and reasons why-not get in the way of the thing that trumps them all: love. He's down, out, and covered in blood. He looks quite cool, and all he needs is a second chance. Zendaya descends like an angel at a diner to forgive him. Her presence is lacking in the final third, which helps keep Charlie's mad spiral contained within his pathetic head, but does leave Emma feeling a little underdeveloped. Their fairy tale ending is sweet and fine, but Borgli still hasn't discovered how to make the last five minutes of his movie feel natural.

The Drama jitters into its best and worst moments, but paints a satisfying picture in the process. Borgli's vision of the world burns with how embarrassing everything is when bearing the perception of others, just as they carry ours. In the growing pantheon of Borgli's somewhat detestable characters, Charlie and Emma are far from the worst; they are just infected by the same vanity that touches us all. It will not, and has not, hit for everyone. Borgli's light-hearted approach to something very serious has been reduced by some critics to sheer, provocative apathy, but he paints a more empathetic picture than some will care to see. His empathy is simply mixed with his unsparing satire of the self-serving morality that rules, but can be forgiven. The Drama is a needed Euro-satire, somewhat scattered, but still mounts into a compelling disaster-porn thanks to one of Pattinson's best performances and Zendaya, who is somewhat underused but still shines as a character as memorable as any we are likely to see this year.

Ready or Not 2

Alex Lochhead

Watching *Ready or Not 2* felt like watching someone's notes from *Save The Cat!* The conflict between its main characters was procedural and charmless - you get smacked with it by dialogue along the lines of: "That's my sister, but I don't like her." or "Yeah, we're family, barely, because I don't like my sister." Once the bloody action gets going, Samara Weaving and Kathryn Newton have enough chemistry to keep it entertaining, but their fractured relationship feels more like a narrative chore than anything compelling.

Sarah Michelle Gellar and Shawn Hatosy shine as the film's primary antagonists, and Elijah Wood is delightfully creepy in just sort of being there, but the Vampire Slayer is sadly underused as just a foil to her brother. The other villains sent to hunt our protagonists in this deadly game of hide-and-seek make for entertaining set pieces but are otherwise forgettable.

Drenched in the dull, digital greyness that sucked the life out of their go at the *Scream* franchise, Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett continue to clock in at mediocre. For every death or action sequence that begins to excite and makes the film worth seeing, all the scenes in between lack any signs of a distinct directorial touch. *Ready or Not 2* will please fans of the first, and either mildly entertain or mildly bore everyone else.



Lee Cronin's The Mummy

Callum Andrews

Lee Cronin's *The Mummy* arrives framed as a distinctly auteur-led horror film, a title that places an alluring amount of weight on the director's name. Cronin is a talented filmmaker, and *Evil Dead Rise* showed clear visual confidence, but he is still early in his career, not yet the kind of figure typically positioned that way. The film that follows reaches for that same sense of scale and authorship, but never quite settles into it. What begins as a familiar setup, a missing child returns home, and something about her is wrong, stretches beyond its limits, expanding a thin idea into something overlong, uneven, and, crucially, not especially frightening.

The "mummy" of the film is Katie, a young girl who disappeared in Cairo eight years earlier after being lured away by a local woman. When she is eventually found, sealed inside an ornate sarcophagus, she is returned to her family, now living back in New Mexico, barely responsive after years of confinement. From here, the film settles into its central dynamic: Katie at home, slowly emerging from that inert state, her condition giving way to something more active and unsettling. With the groundwork laid, this is where the film should finally come together, where we begin to see why it's *Lee Cronin's The Mummy*, but any promise is fleeting, and the film quickly settles into something slow and flat.

At 134 minutes, it's an overextended genre film that never earns its length, much of it spent circling a film that never quite decides what it wants to be. What should feel contained and focused instead stretches outwards, repeating beats and lingering where it should tighten. When the horror does assert itself, there are flashes of Cronin's more visceral instincts, cracked teeth, splitting skin, bodies pushed into increasingly unnatural shapes, but much of it is undermined by execution. The prosthetics have a waxy, artificial quality, and Katie herself never becomes as frightening as the film needs her to be. For something so heavily attributed to a single voice, it feels curiously derivative, at times edging towards an *Evil Dead*-style excess without capturing what makes those films work. Without the tonal balance that defines Sam Raimi's approach, the film plays things almost entirely straight, only to awkwardly undercut itself with moments of forced levity, Katie lashing out with lines that are clearly meant to land as darkly comic, but instead fall flat. What should anchor it, the question of what has happened to her, proves surprisingly hollow, offering little in the way of tension or payoff. Instead, the film leans further into excess, stretching scenes out, piling on noise and spectacle, and settling into a rhythm that becomes increasingly slow and draining, its chaos unfolding in a world where basic logic feels largely absent.

There are moments where the film shows what it might have been. It can be striking to look at, and there are flashes of Cronin's more physical instincts, particularly in the final stretch, that hint at something more assured. There's also something to be said for the scale of the attempt, Cronin and Warner Bros putting real weight behind a more ambitious take on this kind of child-centred horror. But those elements never quite cohere. The script is too thin, the pacing too drawn out, and the film never finds the control it needs to bring those ideas together. For something so pointedly presented as *Lee Cronin's The Mummy*, it needed to feel distinctive, even definitive. Instead, it falls short of that, a film that just can't come together.

The Pitt (Season 2)

Alex Lochhead

The prestige medical drama that dominated and defined the television of 2025 concluded its second season with its best episode yet. The slow winding down of the day as characters dispersed with bittersweet farewells was not as wholesome as the shared beers that capped off the first season, but left dangling threads and slowly burning bridges all around.

As audiences saw season two unfolding, it was hard not to be hyperaware of its structure. Every season is one full workday, and every episode is an hour of that day. Not every workday can be a mass tragedy (a plotline already used in season one), but every season needs conflicts and climaxes. The central appeal of this structure and the plan to air a new season each year made audiences scrutinous of how the writers would measure up to the first, but *The Pitt* does well to avoid repeating itself without losing any tension.

The show's engine, Dr. Robbie (Noah Wyle), is not the same source of hard-cut medical heroics in this season, but a bruised instigator of conflict as he brushes up against his doctors more and more. Whilst some worry about Robbie, others just seem sick of him. Uncomfortable, prickly interpersonal conflict fills the gap of mass-medical disasters; we see all the ways the unit fails to function, and when the credits roll, tomorrow could be just as bad.

The Pitt has to balance its realism with its serial narratives, indicative of its blend between prestige television and the weekly, serial dramas of the 90s and early 2000s that it draws from. In a finale that leaves many plotlines unresolved, the show indulges its televisual narrative need to keep viewers hooked on the melodramatic conflict that I can only assume does not occur in most emergency units, but that never feels too much. Whilst *The Pitt*'s realism, both medically and socially, has made it a vital mouthpiece for an underrepresented side of the American healthcare system (its doctors), it is reassuring to see that its social importance has not outweighed its excellence as a show first and foremost.





Many shows that released 15 episodes a year with no end in sight started well but gradually lost their way until they became cheap fluff. As the era of prestige television has exposed the perils of how things used to be done, *The Pitt* reminds us of what is so exciting about it. Yet there is still an air of caution, a need to see whether *The Pitt* can keep it up each season.

Perhaps these worries will fade if the show simply stays good, and season two is an excellent first step. The Pitt must indulge its dramatic, serial roots, but it must also navigate the minefield this path entails. How can a show stay good after six seasons, except for a plan to end it on the seventh? Perhaps *The Pitt* will show us, but maintaining its quality after two seasons is an essential success.

Neighbours

Alex Lochhead

Property is a sacred right, one you have to earn or inherit. It is the point of life, and then the four walls which shelter you from it. Once achieved, it is yours no matter what. What could be more worth protecting? *Neighbours* is about the varyingly deranged Americans who are, they believe, fighting for their property against the people next door to them. Neighbours who are locked in conflict over an issue which may seem trivial to us, but is worth every bit of the maddening pain it causes them if it means maintaining the sanctity of their sacred right.

The battlefield often extends beyond front gardens and into YouTube videos with four, sometimes ten viewers, one of whom is almost always their sworn enemy. Neighbours is scattered across the internet, in both its content and aesthetic, which feels ripely influenced by the obscure and unimaginable conflicts that are only documented on sites like YouTube and Reddit. Its frequent use of a 360 GoPro cam is one of the funnier, sometimes distracting examples of this.

It's equally inseparable from an innate American. Someone is upset with the illegally high walls that their neighbour has built – the reason they cite is that it bears an unsettling resemblance to Osama Bin Laden's compound. Another person is complaining about the old man who constantly works out on his driveway in only a yellow thong. The worst of all is that there's a church nearby. Every valid complaint is filtered through a faux moral outrage which powers the unceasing comedy of this show. It might seem cold if all these people wanted was not someone to simply listen to them, which *Neighbours* is more than happy to do.

Neighbours is a sharp and free-flowing docuseries that has cemented itself as one of the best shows of the year. The two neighbours who are locked in conflict may be the only ones capable of caring about their problem as much as they do, but now they have the whole world to hear them out. Very good. Watch it.

The Motion Mag refuse to watch:

Alex Lochhead

In 2019, Dan Reed's HBO documentary Leaving Neverland aired. It focused on the stories of two men, Wade Robson and James Safechuck, who both alleged that they were sexually abused as children by the American pop singer Michael Jackson. In 2026, the film Michael was released, and it looks fucking awful.

Perhaps the greatest testament to Jackson's legacy is the now-unprecedented popularity of his last name, which is somehow scrawled all over this film's credits. It is a strange thing to play your uncle in a biopic. It is a strange thing to want to – even or especially if your uncle is Michael Jackson. It is- like every glossy shit of a frame I have seen this film take, a little bit creepy.

Here's what I remember from the trailer: an ugly shot of fans filling the New York streets from wall to wall (I think it was New York); the young Jacksons singing in their living room; and most of all, Colman Domingo as the ambitious family patriarch. What a bastard he must be. Domingo's Joe Jackson wants excellence and millions from his kids, which will make things complicated when Michael's success inevitably fulfils his father's wishes. Luckily, this kind of unresolvable conflict is exactly what makes me love film. You're on, Mike!

The film is apparently scrubbed clean of any mention of child abuse. However, it is reported that an earlier version of the film dedicated the third act to detailing how these allegations impacted Michael's life. That sounds like a sinister irony that is better off not existing, even if the end result is a film unaware of the elephant in the room. I suppose that is the conundrum of making a film about how great an alleged paedophile is. What can you do?

There is now something so creepy about the Jackson imagery that means a whole two hours filled with it could only be a horrid aesthetic experience. White gloves, brimmed hats, the way he moves. Does he don the white gloves like Steve Rogers catches Mjolnir? All of these are traits I would imagine a child molester from It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia to wield, but they seem to have found a real one. Keep that whole vibe away from me. There should be a voice in everyone's head that tells them not to glorify those accused of paedophilia, but sadly, many go without it.

The reviews are in, and they are bad. It is as poor as it looks, which is uninterestingly and inevitably so. Perhaps this film will be bad enough just to add one more smidge to the desecrated legacy that it likely wishes to clean up, a legacy that would be better off not clean or spotted, but not so glaringly and unsparingly spotlighted as people desperately try to keep it.



Still from "La Grazia"

Poster for "Arco"



La Grazia

Callum Andrews

Paolo Sorrentino's La Grazia is a quiet, controlled film about ageing, power and the strain of uncertainty. Set in Rome, it follows Mariano, the president of Italy, nearing the end of his term. Publicly, he is respected and authoritative, known for his strict adherence to the law; a figure of composure, even rigidity. Privately, he is a widower, increasingly unsettled and unable to find peace. What gives the film its weight is the way these two conditions begin to overlap: the end of his presidency arriving alongside a growing awareness of time running out.

The film moves between these two sides of his life, but it is Mariano's private unrest that ultimately defines it. For years, he has been haunted by a doubt about whether his late wife was unfaithful to him, a suspicion that has never been resolved and has slowly taken hold. Around this, the business of his presidency continues. He faces major decisions, including whether to approve a euthanasia bill and grant pardons in difficult moral cases, the kind of questions that should define his office, yet they remain curiously at the edges of his attention. For a man defined by clarity and judgement, this uncertainty is deeply destabilising. He can govern a country, but he cannot settle the one question that matters most to him.

That tension is most keenly felt when Mariano steps away from both the demands of his office and the private doubt that occupies him. He slips away for a cigarette, or sits alone with music, holding himself in brief moments of stillness. These are not pauses he finds but ones he makes, small spaces carved out against everything that presses in on him. They do not resolve anything; they allow him, briefly, to live with what he cannot settle. In this, they carry their weight, less as expressions of control than as ways of coping. The film treats his state not as something to be resolved, but as something to be endured.

What keeps La Grazia working is the combination of Paolo Sorrentino's direction and Toni Servillo's performance, a partnership that feels like a return to form after the misjudged Parthenope. Sorrentino holds the film in a state of quiet, wintry control, its surfaces composed and austere, but Servillo cuts through that restraint, giving it warmth and life. It is this contrast that gives the film its charge: a political world rendered with precision, yet anchored by something more human and unsettled. From that tension, the film's stranger, more open moments begin to emerge; a rain-soaked reception slipping into absurdity, a sudden communal song that feels at once ceremonial and oddly intimate. They don't break the film's control so much as reveal what sits within it, and it is through Servillo that those moments feel lived rather than merely staged.

La Grazia is a thoughtful, often quietly moving film, distinctive in the space it occupies between political formality and something more intimate and inward-looking. Its final moments lean a little too readily towards sentiment, though this feels in keeping with its broader mood. More than a political drama, it is a study of ageing and solitude, finding its power in the uneasy space between control and acceptance.

Arco

Caleb Milburn

In the distant future of 2932, society has migrated to an eco-utopia amongst the clouds and gained the ability to time-travel with rainbow-winged suits powered by sunlight. As idyllic as this may appear, the titular young boy Arco (Juliano Krue Valdi) is frustrated with his place in this world. While his family regales him with tales of the past, his youth prevents him from sharing these experiences with them, leaving him constrained to a life in the present until he turns 12. Arco rebels one night, wanting to be transported to prehistoric times, yet accidentally lands in 2075, a tumultuous period where Earth appears on the verge of combustion.

The film is visually powerful, with the hand-drawn 2D animation absorbing you into its meticulously crafted worlds. Multiple times throughout my viewing, I was left awe-struck at how texturally rich the environments were. Sequences that, under normal circumstances, would be throwaway segments of the film, such as Arco and Iris' (Romy Fay) journey to the supermarket, are transformed into a breathtaking spectacle by the sheer attention to detail in the location. A particular standout has to be the school break-in sequence, where the entire screen is flooded with various shades of red, harkening back to the Doctor Onishi sequences in the recently re-released Akira, as a chase ensues. It's dazzling, yet only a small snippet of what makes Arco so visually brilliant.

However, *Arco* tackles a hell of a lot thematically for a film targeted towards children - the climate crisis, childhood belonging, what a world constructed by the children of today will look like – and although ambitious, it does not all land. The brisk 89-minute runtime means these topics are never given their chance to be fully explored in terms of how they can be discussed with children. The raging fires that roar during the climax of the film aren't given much context other than the fact that the world is slowly collapsing – and that they are a part of that, but the cause of these fires isn't fully fleshed out, which perhaps speaks to our desensitisation to similar natural events in the real world. It's hard not to feel that the lack of reasoning or development is a little shallow. Yet the film's resolution and optimism for a better tomorrow, led by young people in a world that's ever more cynical, are inspiring and an important message for children, especially in such a mesmerising package, that it's hard to hold any truly negative feelings about *Arco*.

Previous spread - descending

Still from "Ready or Not 2"

Still from "Lee Cronin's The Mummy"

Still from "The Pitt"

Still from "Neighbours"

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MOTION


Emma & Charlie
HATTIE LINES