

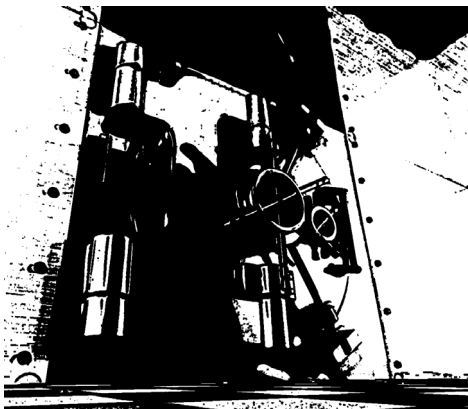
HPLD

CULT MOVIE

VAULT



BEGINNINGS



In the spirit of transparency, it's long past time to reveal a secret that's been haunting us.

Wait, shoot. This is a library publication. We should've said it was "long overdue."

Well, whatever—A secret more stunning than one of those gizmos that shoots out the electric prongs and knocks a guy down. A secret more electrifying than... also one of those gizmos that shoots out

the prongs and knocks a guy down.

Apparently those things have really captured my imagination.

The following account is based on real events. Very loosely based. "Based" may not be the best term. "Loosely organized around" is probably better:

You may recall that before High Plains Library District purchased its admin building, the building was a bank. You may recall, if you've seen any of the billion heist movies out there, that banks all have vaults inside. Long story short, when we bought our admin building, we bought a vault, too.

For a long time, it mostly held supplies. Printer paper, mouspads, empty 3-ring binders, which multiply on their own in any office setting.

One October evening, I went in the vault to fetch up some hole reinforcements. You know, those little donut stickers

you put on a piece of paper you punched holes in because the holes are now too intense? Isn't it amazing? Some inventor made a 3-hole punch. They sold us, basically, holes in paper. THEN, some other inventor invented a hole reinforcer because sometimes you want a hole in a paper, but not THAT much of a hole.

And when I went into the vault to get those donuts, the worst kind of donut, the lights flickered. There was a chill in the air. Which is weird because there's not much of a weather system inside a vault. Not much ventilation in most vaults due to wide vents causing a lot of problems with contortionists/gymnasts squeezing their way in.

Inside the vault, I did not find the hole reinforcements I was looking for. By the way, this is where the "based" part of "based on real events" is about to become very important.

What I found in the vault was a bunch of

cult movies.

Yes, someone had purchased a whole bunch of cult films on DVD, Blu-Ray, and I even found purchase records for digital copies (I know, purchase records aren't that spooky, but it's the 2020s, people. The library has some digital stuff, too) of some cult movies.



Inside the box I also found a note. It read as follows:

Greetings!

Congratulations on being cursed! Once you find this cult movie collection, you must watch every film, and you must pass them on to other people.

"Pfft, so a ripoff of The Ring?" I said

before reading on.

No, nothing like The Ring. Forget The Ring. This is totally different.

Watch all the films. Pass them onto others. Or else your fate...is sealed.

Being a complete scaredy-cat, I skipped the part that normally comes next, the part where the skeptical guy ignores the chain letter and something terrible happens. I figured that instead of doing that, I'd just watch a movie. And then I could "pass it on" by telling you about it, getting you excited to see for yourself.

Thus begins HPLD's Cult Movie Vault!



THE GATE

First things first, The Gate has a 55% score on Rotten Tomatoes, which just goes to show that nobody over there knows what they're talking about. Besides, who talks about tomato freshness as a percent? A movie that's 75% fresh is pretty good, but I don't think I'd be all that keen on a tomato that's 25% rotten. Tomato freshness is kind of a pass/fail situation, if you ask me and anyone who's ever eaten produce before.

The Gate is about a couple of young boys, one being your generic 80's kid played by Stephen Dorff in his first film role, just a decade shy of starring in the amazing Space Truckers, a Stuart Gordon flick that has an 8% on Rotten Tomatoes.

Now, see, we can argue all day about produce that's 25% rotten, but does a tomato that's 92% rotten do anybody any good?

The other 80's kid is a strange cross between a nerd, sort of like Paul from The Wonder Years, and a metalhead. It's a weird dichotomy, and it totally works in a very 1980's way. I'm a little embarrassed to say that this character is kind of my personal style icon.



The first step in setting up this movie is the classic situation where the parents are leave town for a few days and put a slightly older sibling (an older sister, Al, in this case, played by Christa Denton) in charge.

Is leaving the kids at home for an entire weekend with \$40 bucks for pizza

a thing? Was it a thing back in the day, or did this only happen in movies as a convenient way to remove the parents from the situation so spooky stuff could start happening? I ask because it never happened to me or anyone I knew, however my parents were probably too broke to go anywhere for the weekend, what with my horrible addiction to Madballs.

The two boys, through a series of events, end up opening a GATE to, um, heck. "Gate" is probably a bit fancy of label for a hole in the ground in their backyard, but that doesn't matter, what matters is that little demon guys crawl out of the GateHole and run around in some true practical effects glory. It's hard to say for certain, but it looks like a mix of stop-motion animation and some pretty gnarly rubber suit action.

The demon guys are gross and almost adorable. Almost, if you find occasional Garbage Pail Kids cute.

To say a whole lot else would probably

ruin the movie for you, but suffice to say, it's a bit like a more demonic Goonies, maybe like Home Alone if it was during Halloween instead of Christmas, and if the guidance that helps save the day came from a metal album instead of a kindly old man who is obsessed with shoveling snow.

Sometimes people ask about scary movies that bridge that gap between childhood and adulthood. The kids might be a little old for The Great Pumpkin, but they're still too young to watch The Great Pumpkin and have nostalgia feels. And, you know, maybe they're a little young for Saw.

You'd think there'd be a pretty good set of movies in the gap between Charlie Brown and someone getting their face exploded open by a brutalist orthodontic device, but you'd be mistaken.

The Gate might hit that sweet spot for some kids. Not all kids, and you should check out the parental warnings on IMDB

before you screen this one. There's some mild terror and a few choice words, especially some words that were common in the 80's, when The Gate was made, that we avoid these days.

Oh, and !WARNING!: there's a dead dog in this picture.

It's come to my attention that you can throw a kid down a well in a movie, set an elderly woman on fire and send her spinning, in flames, down a hallway, but if a dog (dummy) is (fictionally) endangered in a movie, you'd better think carefully before recommending it.

Hot tip: there's a web site called Does The Dog Die? that provides, well, the exact information on movies you'd expect from the site's name.

If you've got a soft spot in your heart (and your logical mind because the plot on this one is almost completely nonsensical) for movies like Monster Squad or Mac & Me, bizarre blips that

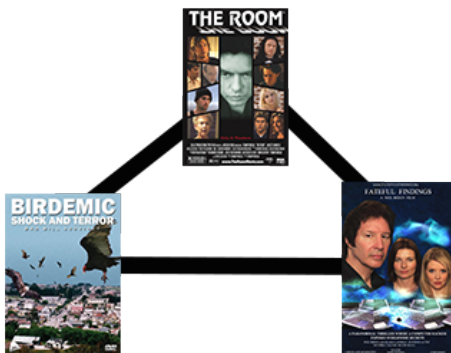
didn't quite make it but still offer memorable moments, this one might be right up your alley. In fact, my suggestion is you just sit down and watch it yourself. If you've never seen it, it'll take you back to the days when you might watch something on Monstervision, find a hidden gem, and then spend years of pre-internet time trying to figure out just what in the world you were watching.

Pop some popcorn, settle in, and if you're not digging it, skip to the end because it's pretty spectacular. Any movie review worth its salt has to come up with a rating system, like "5 library cards out of 6" or some clever, on-theme thing. I'm giving this 2 out of a 3 possible library renewals. I'd watch this more than once if I checked it out. Okay, it's not a great review system. But it makes at least as much sense as comparing movies to grocery store produce.



BIRDEMIC: SHOCK AND TERROR

Ah, yes. Birdemic: Shock and Terror
This movie, along with The Room and
Fateful Findings, makes up the trifecta
of good/ bad movies.



What is a good/bad movie? You'll get
a lot of different opinions on that,
but here's mine: A good/bad movie is a
movie that is so ineptly made, but so

earnestly made, that it's entertaining.

My first good/bad movie experience was with a home movie I made with a friend. This friend had a pretty good Batman costume, and I had a sports coat of my dad's that I was willing to ruin completely by getting white makeup all over it, so with those two costumes and a video camera that would let you fade in and out of scenes, a huge special effect at the time, we had just about everything necessary to make a film to compete with Tim Burton's Batman.

Some of the highlights from our Batman include Batman being unable to unlock the Batcave/ backyard shed, and once he WAS able to do so, he refused to go in because there were wasps inside.

Because we'd never made a movie before, we put it together without a script.

Because it was the only "set" available, this Batman adventure was the first to take place entirely in a suburban

backyard, in broad daylight, no rain, no filthy Gotham streets, just some grass and some spring flowers.

In the stunning conclusion, Batman stabbed the Joker with an artificial hip (getting into why that was an available prop is a story for another article. Maybe an entire memoir), Joker fell down, his hat fell off with perfect comic timing, right in the middle of Batman's dramatic speech, delivered straight to the camera, about how Gotham was safe

The film then faded out, only to fade back in on my tearful, youngest brother, who'd been left out of the production, saying, "I was the Key Grip."

None of us knew what a key grip was. I still don't, but I assume it involves more than saying, at the end of a movie, "I was the Key Grip."

The first time we watched, excuse me, SCREENED our film, Batman (1991), we were

horrified. Why didn't anything on the screen turn out as we imagined it?

Was it the fades? Should they have been fades to black instead of white? Perhaps.

Was it because we were children with no filmmaking experience? Very likely. Was it because we lacked a Key Grip? Entirely possible.

Was it because having the tools to make a movie and having ideas worth filming were two different things? Almost certainly.

But over the years, this became a treasured film in our house. Because it was so inept, and at the same time, because we had tried SO HARD, it was a true masterpiece. A masterpiece that was unfortunately lost when we filmed another, even more inept movie on the same tape.

Which brings us to Birdemic.

Birdemic would be absolutely adorable if it was made by some grade schoolers whose primary filmmaking qualification was having one pretty cool costume.

As it is, Birdemic is a treat because it's two inept movies slapped together. Maybe three inept movies. Maybe more. Less than five, but more than two, for sure.

The first movie is about...nothing. Not in a fun Seinfeld way.

The movie opens, and we watch our hero, Rod, drive to work in what might be real time. This is VERY long and VERY boring, and it's one of a few scenes that seem to be designed to pad out a movie to be feature length.

Here's a hot tip for filmmakers: If you're going to pad out your movie so that it seems more legit, make sure that the shortness is the PRIMARY problem with the movie. And maybe try to pad it out a little bit at a time, not by

having a long, pointless sequence at THE VERY BEGINNING, the time when you're trying to capture everyone's attention!

A couple highlights from this first part of the film:

- Rod at work. One adorable thing in very low-budget movies is when someone has set up what is clearly a residence to look as close as possible to an office, police station, store, or bar. In this case, Rod sits behind cubicle walls, probably in his grandmother's living room, that would appear to pen him in entirely. Picture a U-shape where the tips of the U connect to a wall. It's not clear how Rod gets in and out of his cubicle. This is not mentioned or discussed by any character. They all act like it's perfectly normal to work in an inescapable cubicle. Metaphor? I wouldn't bet on it.
- In our first of a few environmental messages, we watch our hero discuss getting solar panels put on his house.

For quite an extended period. You'd think, based on the rule of Chekov's Gun, that these solar panels or the panel salesman would play some role later on in the movie. But no. We never see this salesman again, and solar panels have nothing to do with the movie. We just have a long, slow price negotiation for putting solar panels on a suburban home, all the excitement of watching your dad walk up and down the aisle at Home Depot to pick out a new push broom. For the record, I don't have a problem with the environment, even though it's been trying to kill humans for a LONG time. I'm a forgive and forget kind of guy. I think I agree with the messages in the movie (they aren't super clear, so maybe I don't), but imagine watching an Avengers flick and in the middle we have Thor talking to someone about xeriscaping his front yard for no reason whatsoever.

Let's skip to the second movie, the movie about deadly birds:

Alfred Hitchcock pulled off something pretty magnificent when he made *The Birds*. He took creatures that are mostly scared of humans and made them seem like an actual threat. No small feat.

Birdemic also makes birds a threat, but they're cheating. A lot.



Birds suddenly and inexplicably manifest the ability to expel acid onto people. And, when they choose to, the birds can explode. Not in a poof of feathers, but actual fire and smoke, hand grenade sort of explosions that'll turn a person into dust.

Which could be cool in a very *Sharknado*

way, but it brings us to another part of the terribleness of Birdemic: there are a lot of birds, and the birds look absolutely horrendous. Not only are they badly computer-generated, the way they fly looks so wrong that it's difficult to describe.

When you see a bird fly by the window, maybe a robin or a finch, it's pretty quick. Birdemic birds sort of lazily hover, flapping their wings slowly but constantly. Not really gliding majestically, not really darting athletically. I know some birds hover in real life. But parrots? Crows? Are there HoverCrows out there that I'm not aware of? Quad- Wing ravens that move like drones?

I don't want to make myself out to be an expert here, a regular Audobon. Heck, I don't even know the difference between a crow and a raven, as demonstrated above, and I DO NOT CARE TO LEARN. But based on what I've seen, I might know more about birds than the people who made a movie

where "Bird" is 50% of the title. And I've made no effort to learn anything about birds. This is simply the result of being alive and casually observing the occasional bird bathing in the gutter.

Let's just call the remainder of the runtime the third movie, which is when things are most pointless and fun.

The characters run around and have various incidents with birds, run into people who seem excited to talk about the environment, and kind of end up taking a road trip, which seems utterly useless as a way to escape BIRDS. Birds are everywhere. Where birds are going, they don't need roads, a fact that's been proven every time a bird achieves liftoff.

If you want to see a movie that feels almost like it was made by space aliens who read the Wikipedia article titled "Movies" and moved forward with no other knowledge about filmmaking, Birdemic,

especially this last portion, is your jam.

You can catch Birdemic on Hoopla and stream it for free! You can also watch the Rifftrax version, and the sequel is there, too. But I'll warn you now, you only get 6 Hoopla checkouts per month, and we can't refund your checkouts, even if you watched something as bad as Birdemic. Believe me, I tried. I'm pretty sure Hoopla has a specific "Birdemic clause" in their contracts for exactly this reason.



CULT MOVIE VAULT: THE STUFF

Oh, The Stuff.



The Stuff is a charming knockoff of The Blob, complete with some fun practical effects, a sort-of commentary on diet trends of the 80's, and a child actor doing completely nonsensical things like hiding in the tank part of a tanker truck, expecting that to be even

marginally safe.

But let's start at the beginning of this movie, which sets the ridiculousness meter to HIGH from the very beginning. The movie starts with a guy working in a quarry. This fellow comes across a bubbling pool of white goo at the quarry's bottom. Upon discovering this pool of white goo, this gentleman dips a finger in and immediately puts the goo in his mouth.

Kids, I doubt you're reading this, but if you are, Kids: don't put mysterious goos from the bottom of a quarry in your mouth, ever, for any reason.

Hmm...maybe this warning is needed for older men who work in quarries...

Older Men Who Work In Quarries: If you come across a goo bubbling up from the ground, don't taste it.

I don't like to just be negative and tell people No, No, No all the time, so

here are some alternatives to tasting goos you find in holes in the ground:

- Call someone else over, preferably someone not known for tasting things as a first means of assessment
- Examine it visually
- Use a gizmo to see if it's radioactive

Really, any other way of examining this goo is better than putting it in your mouth. Putting it in your mouth is the worst way to assess this situation, possibly even worse than:

- Rubbing it in your eyes
- Slathering a kitten in it in hopes of improving the kitten's fuzziness
- Handling it without gloves

Anyway, it turns out that the goo is delicious, so maybe I'M the fool here.

We immediately cut to the goo being sold everywhere as a foodstuff, and it's creatively named The Stuff.



One challenge in watching *The Stuff* is what I call the Ken Jennings Challenge.

Ken Jennings, Jeopardy champ, once told of his family tradition: When they're watching a movie, if someone in the movie says the exact name of the movie, everyone stands up and claps.

So, if you're watching *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* and you get to the part of the movie where Stallone says, "Stop! Or my mom will shoot" the right thing to do is stand up and clap (and not just because the mom in question is Estelle Getty, a Hollywood treasure).

But if you try this stand and clap challenge with The Stuff, you'll end up with a soreness that can only be described as epic.

Bro, you'll be swole to the point that you'll be the envy of all your gym bros, but only until they discover that you've paid a hefty price for those quads. A hefty price indeed..

The Stuff is kind of like an ice cream, kind of like a Cool Whip, kind of like a yogurt, and everyone starts eating it. Best of all, it turns out to be good for you! So we get a couple scenes of people clearing out their entire kitchens of other foods, replacing it all with The Stuff.

It's been my experience that most "diet" foods either let you down in the flavor department, or they taste great and have some other horrific problem. The Stuff falls into the latter category as it turns out to be alive and possesses

people who eat it.

If The Stuff were real, I can see the downside of being totally possessed, but there's something to be said for basically being able to eat ice cream 24/7. I'm not proud to admit that there are times when I might give up my entire personality to be able to eat ice cream and nothing else.

You might notice I haven't spent much time talking about the plot of The Stuff. That's because the plot is pretty confusing and unimportant. There's a corporate spy, a little kid, a marketer, and then there's a guy named Chocolate Chip Charlie who is a sort of Otis Spunkmeyer cookie magnate, who wants to bring down the company selling The Stuff because nobody wants to eat cookies anymore now that The Stuff has hit the market.

By the time Paul Sorvino shows up as a militia man who also owns a radio station for some reason, I've lost the

plot.

But watching *The Stuff* for its plot is like watching *Chopping Mall* for incisive commentary on American consumerism: You've come to the wrong movie.

Instead, I encourage watching *The Stuff* for its effects, some of which are super gross and great, and also as a counter to *The Blob* (1988), which goes to show you just how different two movies about a pile of goo can be.



CULT MOVIE VAULT: THE LIBRARIAN: QUEST FOR THE SPEAR

It's National Library Week, and what better way to celebrate than to examine a cult movie from the world of libraries: The Librarian: Quest for the Spear.

Let's dive right in.

Our hero is Flynn Carsen, who has a very cool name for a librarian. I did go to a library conference once and roomed with a guy named Lando, which is also a pretty cool name, thanks of course to Lando Calrissian. We had to room together in a dorm room, and Lando, like his Star Wars name-sharer, was very cavalier. Unfortunately, where Lando Calrissian was cavalier about space gambling and flying around the galaxy, Lando Librarian was cavalier about not

wearing much clothing in the room we had to share.

Anyway, Flynn is a bookworm who studied his way to 22 college degrees by the time he hit his mid-30s.

A little advice for anyone who has 20+ college degrees (which is probably no one): The impressiveness of college degrees is a case of diminishing returns. 1? Awesome. 2? Great. 3? Spectacular. Then you start to slide into questionable territory. Who has that much time? Which institution is granting you these degrees? How many of your jackets have leather elbow patches? Do you have a digital frame that cycles through your diplomas, just because hanging them for real is a space issue? And if you do have such a frame, is it set to go in a certain order, or do you let it shuffle?

Anyway, the dean of the college tells Flynn that he needs to get out in the



real world, that he's got too much book learnin' and not enough street smarts. This is probably one of the most unrealistic aspects of a movie where we'll soon see an actual unicorn: The dean of a college is kicking out a top-performing student, who is presumably spending A TON of money at the school, because the student's life is a little unbalanced. I can only assume that Flynn keeps collecting degrees because his student loan debt is so mountainous that all he can do is hope to keep putting it off until society either creates complete loan forgiveness or collapses into a Mad-Max-esque state of chaos (there are many bad aspects of a Mad Max world, but student loan forgiveness goes in the plus column. While scavenging vast wastelands for a glass of water will be very unpleasant, a great many of us will be able to close our eyes and say, "Well, on the plus...").

Flynn gets a mysterious invitation to interview for a job at the "Metropolitan Public Library" (minus 10 points for

lack of name creativity here, you could have named the library ANYTHING). The job turns out to be a librarian gig that involves protecting a bunch of weird historic stuff.

Quick tip: Libraries are not going to send you a magical invitation to interview. If you receive any sort of “enchanted” envelope claiming to be from HPLD, please quarantine the parcel immediately and call the authorities.

Flynn gets the job because why not, we’ve got a plot to advance here, and they take him into the huge storage area for all the neat stuff in the secret part of the library.

A brief listing of some of the items:

- Pandora’s Box
- Tesla’s Death Ray
- The Holy Grail
- The Corpse of King Midas
- The Ark of the Covenant
- The Golden Fleece

- A Living Unicorn
- The Goose That Lays Golden Eggs
- Excalibur
- The Real Mona Lisa
- The "Little Boy" Prototype Atomic Bomb
- A Functional Jetpack
- A Flying Carpet
- And The Spear of Destiny

As you may have guessed from the title, this story centers around The Spear of Destiny, a Christian artifact.

I don't mean to critique the interest in the Spear of Destiny, but was there a particular reason we couldn't ALSO have included the jetpack in the story? You know how there's the rule about Chekov's Gun? If you introduce a gun in the first act, it should come back in the climax? Pete's Jetpack is a rule that says if you introduce a jetpack, it shouldn't just come back in the climax, it should be present throughout the entirety of the movie and be the movie's central focus. The Rocketeer was a movie based entirely around a jetpack, and it rules.

It can be done.

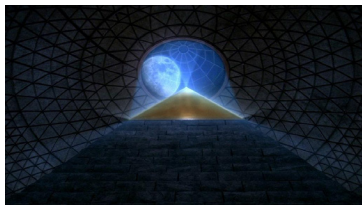
Anyway, The Spear of Destiny is stolen by an ex-librarian named Wilde, who also has a much better name than most librarians have. So Flynn has to give chase, which he does armed with his wits and a book that has gone untranslated since...forever. Oh, and no jetpack. Or death ray. Or enchanted sword. OR FLYING CARPET OR LIVING UNICORN EVEN THOUGH ALL OF THOSE ITEMS WERE IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE.



At this point, we get a jungle adventure, and we meet Nicole, who works for the library as a "Guardian." She's a tomb raider type, a physically capable butt-kicker to offset Flynn's bookishness. And she's a tragic figure because she fell in love with the last librarian, and she blames herself for his death. She

broke the first rule of action movies: Never fall in love. But she did follow the second rule of action movies: Ignore the first rule, go ahead and fall in love because this is a movie, so following no-love rules doesn't make for much engaging action.

From here, a bunch of stuff happens. I know, that's not a great description. But have you ever tried to describe a Transformers movie, or maybe a Resident Evil movie, in terms of plot? It's virtually impossible. Here's my best shot at it: The Spear does stuff, The Spear gets in the hands of the bad guys and Flynn is betrayed, sort of, and then there's something like a portal on top of a pyramid during a full moon (really!). Bob Newhart is a secret Marine who punches a guy. Flynn removes Excalibur from its stone. Everything goes back to normal. Flynn's boss makes a joke that



she hopes he saved his receipts from his "business trip." Flynn meets with his mom, and she meets his new girlfriend, who turns out to be Nicole, who just cannot stop falling in love with the one person she's not supposed to. Nicole tells Flynn there's another dastardly plot afoot, setting up one of the many sequels to this movie.

What I don't love about Quest for the Spear is that it poses the primary qualification for librarianship as being a know-it-all nerd who has terrible social skills. I mean, yes, we of the bad social skills exist, but I'm going to let you in on a secret: librarians don't know everything.

What we know is how to help you find out just about everything. But, as pop culture stereotypes go, I suppose this depiction of librarians gets credit for putting a nerdy GUY in the role (the field is only about 15% male in real life) as opposed to a lonely woman who is absolutely gorgeous, but she wears

glasses, so
OF COURSE we
the audience
understand
that she's
unattractive,
lonely, and
desperate for
love. Batman
'66 tried to
convince us
that Yvonne



Craig was so plain as to never arouse
suspicion that she was Batgirl. C'mon,
guys, I'm willing to suspend disbelief,
but when the steel cable I'm using to
suspend that disbelief is pushed to the
limit, it'll snap.

I would've preferred a little more
library-centric action. Some Dewey
Decimal versus Library of Congress
cataloging discussion would've been
pretty sweet. Maybe some kind of speed-
shelving situation where Finn's library
skills come in handy.

The Librarian: Quest For The Spear is a bonkers movie that never got its due. It's kind of stupid in a fun way, and it's kind of fun in a stupid way.

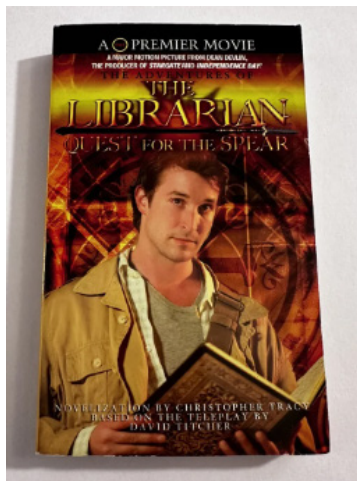
It's odd to say that the best aspect about a movie about librarians and a libraries is its stupidity, and yet, here we are.

If you take one thing away from this, let it be this: The Librarian: Quest for the Spear, is available in practically EVERY library, and I think almost every librarian has seen it. So, if you're thinking of writing a book or making a movie, a good way to guarantee at least a small audience is to throw in a librarian as a central character. Librarians buy books and DVDs and stuff for their libraries, so you might get just a little more exposure for your work if you make the main character a librarian instead of, I don't know, a professional robbery getaway driver? How many of those are there? And do getaway drivers buy movies?

Seems to me they'd just steal 'em.

Oh, one last thing, just to put a cherry on all of this: They made a novelization of this movie. Because... why not?

You can check out this cult gem on Hoopla or in your library.



CULT MOVIE VAULT: LOCAL HISTORY SPOTLIGHT NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

What do Night of the Living Dead, Greeley's now-defunct Chief Theater, and a local ghost story have in common?

Well, this article, for one thing.

This is a little departure from our normal Cult Movie Vault because we've got local history mixed in with the cult movie, but don't worry, this isn't local history like you probably got from our nemeses at the Greeley History Museum (Editor's Note: We are not actually

enemies with the museum or their staff, this is totally unfounded and seems to be added here just to make this article more scandalous).

This is local history that starts with a question:

Was an elderly man so horrified by a screening of Night of the Living Dead in a Greeley theater that he keeled over from fright?

Night of the Living Dead is definitely the movie that lit the zombie fire. This is partially because it's great, partially because it spawned great sequels and spin-offs, and partially because of a copyright mistake that gave the film



wide distribution (uh-oh, nerd alert, copyright talk coming in 3...2...1...)

You might notice Night of the Living Dead is available almost everywhere. If you've ever, like me, bought one of those collections of movies with 100 horror films



packed onto 5 discs, usually stuff like 976-EVIL II (quick aside: famous bad film maker Jim Wynorski made this, and even HE thinks it's bad. Oh, and Brigitte Nielson appears briefly because she lost a game of pool to Wynorski. Really!) and at least one entry from the Howling series, you're almost guaranteed to find Night of the Living Dead somewhere among the rubber sea monsters and weirdly lit interpretations of Dracula.

Why is Night of the Living Dead absolutely everywhere? The short version is that copyright law is funky, and in the funky 60's, it was even funkier.

Back then, if you didn't put specific copyright notice on a film's prints before distributing, the movie wasn't protected by copyright.

Somebody somewhere messed up big time, didn't put the proper notice on the prints, and because of this clerical error, Night of the Living Dead has been out of copyright since it was released. On the plus, this means it was screened and distributed nonstop, so it gained quite a bit of notoriety.

But let's get down to business: Did an elderly man have a heart attack in a Greeley theater during a showing of Night of the Living Dead?

The Chief Theater in downtown Greeley (near the location of the current Clarion hotel) didn't have the easiest run. It was supposedly haunted by a ghost, who was rumored to be an actress killed by the theater's owner and buried somewhere on the premises (though when the theater was demolished they found no evidence

of this). There were a few fires in the theater and a partial balcony collapse, but deaths were not reported for any of these events. Nevertheless, a ghost was spotted by at least two employees who described her almost identically.

A group of paranormal investigators also came by The Chief, and they claimed that they found peanuts and popcorn in cracks and crannies that seemed oddly well-preserved, suggesting the presence of supernatural activity.



Orrrrrr maybe those butters and salts are stronger than we thought, in which case my insides are shellacked and will survive many eons beyond my natural death.

There's also the unsolved murder of Cora "Rose" Allyn, who was murdered in her home after attending a matinee at the Chief. Greeley teacher Susan Seager

tried to find evidence as to whodunit, and she even spent the night in Allyn's former home to try and record any ghostly sounds, but she came up mostly empty-handed. Some theorize that "Rosie" was The Chief's ghost.

There were two sources I found that claim an elderly man died in the theater during a screening of Night of the Living Dead: One was in an old Tribune article, and the other is in Haunted Hotels of Northern Colorado by Nancy K. Williams. Neither provided a direct source or exact year as THEIR source, however.

I searched the Newspaper Archive (available at your local library!), and I didn't find the story of a man clutching his chest and toppling over in his seat during Night of the Living Dead's epic climax.

While I can't definitively say that it didn't happen, I have reason to believe it's a tall tale: If a scary movie was

SO scary that someone actually died in the theater, I'd think that'd be heavily publicized. Maybe people in the 60's were a little classier and didn't want to use a man's death to sell tickets. But I would think that someone somewhere would throw class out the door and go for it. There had to be at least ONE slimeball advertiser out there in the 60s, right? Based on my viewings of Mad Men, slimeballs in the 60s BUILT the world of marketing.

For the record, if I die of fright while watching a movie, please use my death to publicize the movie. Taxidermy my body and place it in the theater seat. I don't know where else to put this information, so I'm leaving it here: I, Pete, am of sound mind and body (arguably, mostly), and would be happy to have my demise used to market the scariness of a movie, provided I did die of fright and not a heart attack related to overdoing it on the popcorn and "butter" that they have at the theater. That's the more likely cause of my death, so start there, then,

if by some miracle my arteries look okay, assume it was fear-based.

We could lay the story to rest there, but there is the matter of how this rumor got its start.

I can't be sure, but I have a guess, and it's that the rumor has something to do with this ad for Night of the Living Dead in the Greeley Tribune from the era:

GREELEY'S FINEST THEATRES

Colorado
352-3636
1516 Eighth Ave.
**FRIDAY 13th
MIDNIGHT
SHOW**

IF 'NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD' FRIGHTENS YOU TO DEATH - YOU ARE COVERED FOR.....\$50,000
A \$50,000 POLICY covering death from heart attack for anyone in the audience during a performance of "NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD" for this special engagement only has been obtained through a leading International Insurance Company in London.

TONIGHT ONLY at 11:30
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
An IMAGE TEN Production

The ad reads, "If night of 'Night of the Living Dead' frightens you to death—you are covered for...\$50,000. A \$50,000 POLICY covering death from heart attack for anyone in the audience during a performance of 'NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD' for this special engagement only has been obtained through a leading

International Insurance Company in London."

I'm guessing this was mostly a scam, a challenge to get people to show up. Which would absolutely work on me. I'd be in the front row. This is like \$400,000 today. You know how a lot of pro athletes will buy their mom a house? This is my version of that: I take a horror movie challenge, am frightened to death by it, and she collects. It probably wouldn't leave her swollen with pride the way it goes for moms whose sons win Super Bowls, but we all have to work with what we've got.

Anyway, I feel some guilt because I feel like I've debunked a spooky story in the season when spooky stories are meant to thrive.

BUT, Night of the Living Dead is still the one that started it all, the sequel, Dawn of the Dead, is the GOAT, Day of the Dead is the underrated third in the trilogy, and even Land of the Dead,

which isn't as beloved, has a few tricks that make it worth a watch. The Dawn of the Dead remake is also amazing, and I say this as someone who loves the OG and was not prepared to enjoy a remake. Shaun of the Dead, of course, would not exist without Dawn, which would not exist without Night of the Living Dead.

It's totally worth a watch, it's easy to find, and because of the copyright weirdness, you can always screen it at your own drive-in theater, if you were to build one in Greeley (I would be there, heck, I'd probably see if I could buy a permanent space and build a shed on the grounds so I could just watch a movie whenever. I promise not to try and pull an insurance scam to buy my mom a house).

For bonus points, you could get a room at the Clarion, which sits where the Chief used to be, and which is still a hotspot for paranormal activity in town. The third floor is the one where most of the ghostly sightings have been

made, so get your third floor room, one with a microwave for some popcorn, get your Night of the Living Dead ready, and if you wanted to take out some extra insurance, I wouldn't give you a hard time about it.



CULT MOVIE VAULT PRESENTS: CAGEMAS

One of my favorite cult movie holidays is Cagemas, the December celebration of all things Nic Cage.

What's my second-favorite cult movie holiday? Blobfest, the celebration of all things The Blob.

Ha, you didn't think I'd have a second-favorite cult movie holiday, did you? Joke's on you, I've even got a third: Leprechaunween, a day in October when it's customary to watch all the Leprechaun movies. You might think this would be a St. Patrick's tradition, but you'd be wrong. It turns out the Leprechaun franchise doesn't really follow Irish lore or culture, like, at all.

Cage is a fascinating actor. One day

you'll see him in an asinine movie where he has a bizarre superpower that lets him see 5 seconds into the future, and the next day you'll see him in a sincere role that breaks your heart in two due to the kidnapping of a pet pig.



Cage was going to be Superman for a bit, he named his son Kal-El, he has a 9-foot-tall cement pyramid crypt awaiting his remains in New Orleans, and in any given decade he's probably involved three of the best movies and three of the worst.

Cagemas is simple. We watch 12 Nic Cage movies in December. They can be old favorites, new favorites, or deep dives into the stuff that's out there on the fringes.

This year, I've got 12 recommendations for you that make for a rounded, some-good- some-bad, super fun Cagemas. Here are The 12 Days of Cagemas

JOE

Closest I can get to a partridge in a pear tree is Joe, a movie about an ex-con who helps out a homeless teenage boy by giving him work for his tree-poisoning outfit. See, there's a tree involved. It's pretty good.

Joe is one of those Cage movies that flew under the radar because of Cage's, uh, lack of choosiness lately, but it's one of his genuinely great performances, and based on the novel by the late Larry Brown, it's well worth your time.

RAISING ARIZONA

This is a wacky one with Cage putting in a performance that lends charisma to the most uncharismatic character maybe ever. Bonus: Holly Hunter is extremely

energetic and fun to watch. You'll never have more fun watching someone kidnap an infant. With the possible exception of Willow.

ARMY OF ONE

Cage stars as Gary Faulkner, a real-life Greeley resident who made an attempt to hunt down Osama Bin Laden. This one's oddness might be because the theatrical cut was altered radically from the cut that director Larry Charles had finished. #ReleaseTheCharlesCut

THE ROCK, CON AIR, FACEOFF

These go together as the "holy trinity" of 90's Cage action movies. If you like high drama and pulsing action of something like Armageddon, The Rock is your road. If you like over-the-top action and excessive gun battles, and if you have an appreciation for



prisons with magnet boots, Face/Off is your jam. If you want something right in the middle with the most dangerous people on Earth all together in a WWII-era plane, and this somehow, shockingly, goes wrong, Con Air is that sweet spot.

WILLY'S WONDERLAND

If you like Nic Cage oddities, this is for you. Cage plays a wordless drifter who becomes enmeshed in a deadly struggle with an evil Chuck E. Cheese. Based on that one sentence, you know whether or not this piece of full-on, unapologetic Nic Cage schlock is for you.

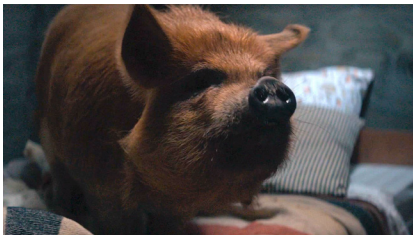
MANDY

Between a chainsaw fight and the Cheddar Goblin, this might be the quintessential weird Nicolas Cage movie that's still a "real" movie. The weirdness can be a bit much at points, but it's beautiful to look at, and it presents the other side of the coin to Willy's Wonderland. They're both bonkers, but Mandy is more thoughtful and crafted. This is the one

your film nerd friend will get behind.

Pig

Just when you thought Cage would be in whatever movie paid him the most to do the least, he busts out a movie like *Pig* where he plays a truffle forager whose prized



truffle-sniffing pig is taken. It sounds ridiculous, but it's a fantastic movie. As a bonus, whoever did the casting on the pig found the perfect balance between believability and cuteness. The titular pig isn't quite Babe, but it's also not a man-eating beast that children should have a healthy respect for at a petting zoo.

SPIDERMAN: INTO SPIDERVERSE

Nicolas Cage plays Spider-Man Noir, a

Spider-Man from another Earth where everything is a lot more like a hard-boiled detective novel. Spiderverse is a very fun movie and an underrated entry into Spider-Man canon, and I'd pose that Nicolas Cage, as a wacky, dated Spider-Man out of his element, understood the assignment and delivered.

THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF MASSIVE TALENT

Call this one The Ghost of Cagemas Future because it doesn't come out until April 2022, but it needs a spot on your to-watch list. Cage plays Nicolas Cage, who accepts an offer from a superfan to appear at a birthday party, and meanwhile the CIA asks Cage to become an informant. Very JCVD, and it'll either be wonderful or a trainwreck you can't turn away from, which is a Cagemas win-win.

DRIVE ANGRY

I had a hard time deciding which Ghost Rider movie was my favorite, but I think

it's Drive Angry. While not officially a Ghost Rider franchise film, it's got a similar vibe, and it's just way weirder. Which is kind of a bold statement because Ghost Rider involves a skeleton man on a motorcycle whose head is constantly on fire.

RED ROCK WEST

A series of twists results in Cage being mistaken for another man, a HITman to be exact. When the ACTUAL hitman, played by Dennis Hopper, shows up, things get complicated. Some great performances and a tight story really make this an underrated and somewhat forgotten gem.



NATIONAL TREASURE

I have a soft spot for National Treasure. I pose that of the many attempts to remake a movie with an Indiana Jones vibe, (Tomb Raider, Fool's

Gold, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull) National Treasure is a rare triumph. Nicolas Cage, you're MY national treasure.

CULT MOVIE VAULT: THE ROCKETEER

The 80's and 90's were a dark time for comic book movies.

If you were a comic book fan back then, you'd see the occasional glimmer of brilliance, like Tim Burton's Batman, but for the most part, you'd see garbage.

Spawn? A little overambitious and underfunded in the graphics department.

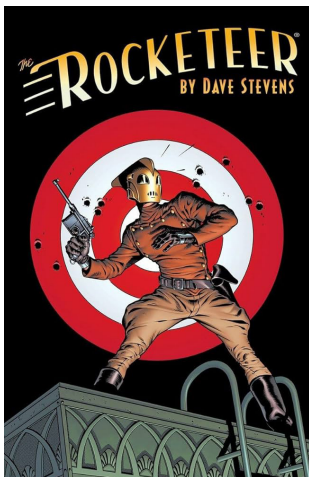
Judge Dredd? Okay, I have a soft spot for this one because Stallone can do no wrong for me. But I recognize that's a character flaw of mine.

The good comic book movies from that era almost went out of their way to distance themselves from the fact that they were based on comics. Men in Black, Mystery Men, The Crow, The Mask: all big movies

that sort of swept their comic book history under the rug. And who could blame them? In the 90's, basing a movie on a comic book was about as appealing as basing an apple pie crust on Play-Doh.

That said, there's an underrated gem of superhero goodness from the era that still, to this day, doesn't get its due: The Rocketeer.

The Rocketeer takes place in late 30's Hollywood. A pilot, Cliff, finds a jetpack that was hidden from Nazis (long story). He runs a couple test flights on it using a dummy, and the results are...let's just say if a human suffered the same injuries, they'd be reported in newspapers from the time in 24-point font with



words like "Horror!" or "Sheer Terror!"

As happens in superhero stories, Cliff is forced to don the mostly-a-bad-idea jetpack to save someone's life, and The Rocketeer is born.

The jetpack doesn't turn Cliff into a full-on superhero, but it's the hub of conflict between secret Nazis, less-secret Nazis, the FBI, and a few other interests, including the mob.

The story moves fast, and it ends with an epic battle atop a Nazi zeppelin. Which is on fire, by the way, thanks to an accident that we'll catalog as a "happy" one.

There's not a lot more to ask of a movie. Jetpacks, Alan Arkin, and burning a Nazi's flying machine. These are all the elements for a great flick.

So why didn't The Rocketeer soar? Fly? Jet above the expected revenue line?

Okay, enough of that.

Why weren't audiences charmed by its Art Deco style? Its everyman hero? Its Alan Arkin?

This writer/cult movie vault keeper has a theory:

The Rocketeer came out in 1991. It was produced by Disney. It was based on a comic book. And because of the timing, the producer, and the source material, nobody knew who this movie was for. Toy Story came out 4 years later. We love to talk about the technical aspects of Toy Story and how revolutionary they were, but we skip over how Toy Story was something new in



terms of going to the movies: Toy Story was enjoyable for adults, too. Up to then, Disney movies were firmly for kids. They were marketed to kids, kids watched them, and their parents...mostly tolerated them.

Quick memory: Snow White was re-released in theaters in 1993. My dad, who never took us to the movies, took me and my siblings to the theater. Not 10 minutes in, I turned to my dad, and he was asleep, his head tilted all the way back so his mouth pointed straight at the ceiling, and he was snoring. I don't know if he'd have made it through Toy Story, but I think he would've at least made it to the arrival of Buzz Lightyear.

With Toy Story, everything changed. Movies for kids started feeling more like movies for everybody.

We got Shrek, which had grown-up humor sprinkled throughout. We got Wreck-It Ralph, which mostly referenced video game characters like Q-Bert, a bizarre,

low-key arcade legend that must've been impossibly obscure to anyone who was 8 years old when Wreck-It Ralph hit screens.

We got Up, a story that opens on an elderly man and his wife and their troubles conceiving children. We got series like Harry Potter, which grew up along with a generation.

This demolition of age group boundaries was so thorough that now, retroactively, adults are fine claiming movies like Beauty and the Beast as favorites.

The Rocketeer may have come before its time, and it suffered. It looked too adult for kids, too kid for adults. Which is sad because it was perfect for both.



Do yourself a favor, get yourself a copy of *The Rocketeer*, and if it helps, imagine it as a story in the MCU. While Captain America was still sitting around as puny Steve Rogers, *The Rocketeer* was tearing it up, flying around in SUPER DANGEROUS fashion, and taking down bad guys.

Oh, also: Jennifer Connelly.

swoon



CULTMOVIE VAULT: WISH UPON

Let's say I told you that your library card was a wish-granting device. Not in a silly, metaphorical sense, not in a "books let you travel anywhere" kind of way. I mean your library card can literally grant wishes.

You hold it up, you make a wish, and it comes true. For three weeks. Then the wish has to be returned. Hey, don't complain. Seconds ago you had NO wishes, so limited-time wishes is a big upgrade.

Okay, so I tell you all this, and what's your move?

My advice would be to make a low-stakes wish, test it out.

So, you hold up your library card, and you wish for a contemporary, clever

horror movie with a few good twists.

What your library card gives you is a little movie called Wish Upon.

You and I both know that, in horror, things that grant wishes (genies, monkey paws, Wishmasters), give you what you asked for, technically, but there's always a catch, a twist.

Your wish-granting library card is no different.

If only you'd thought of that whole "be careful what you wish for" thing BEFORE you moseyed on over to Hoopla and checked out Wish Upon, it would've saved us both quite a bit of confusion.

But you just couldn't help yourself, could you?

Well, we're in this together now, so let's quite stalling and accept our fate. This is Wish Upon.

~

Wish Upon opens with on suburban scene where a woman takes something out to her own garbage can, then, apparently, ends her own life.

This scene does have a reason for existing. Sort of. It's complicated. I kind of regret bringing it up, and if I feel like the first scene of Wish Upon is a clumsy start to this summary, I have to assume the filmmakers have figured out by now that it's kind of a bad start to their movie.

We fast-forward 10 years (a timejump within the first 10 minutes of a movie is NEVER a good sign) and meet our main character, played by Joey King, who I think of as Fake Alexis Bledel, aka Rory from Gilmore Girls. I'll refer to her character as "Rory" for the duration of this review because A) I don't remember her character's name, and B) Rory deserves this punishment for her bad choices. I'm #TeamDean, and I could understand #TeamJess, but #TeamLogan? Just no.

And at this juncture, the movie needs to introduce another character, and we need to play a game. I call this game: Worst Way to Introduce Rich, Estranged Uncle August:



A) A picture falls off the mantle, Rory picks it up and asks her dad something like, "Are you and Uncle August still not talking?" (Pretty bad, but gets the job done)

B) The news is on, Rich Uncle August is being profiled because he did something rich people do, and Rory brings it up with her dad. (Also bad, but serviceable)

C) Rory arrives at her school, Rich Uncle August Academy, and while she stands at the foot of a statue of August, one of her friends says something like, "Must be weird to go to a school named after your uncle." (Clumsy, over-the-top, but functional)

D) Rory rides her bike to school, crashes in a driveway, that driveway just so happens to be Rich Uncle August's driveway, he's out in front of his house getting the newspaper, and Rory says something like, "Sorry for crashing my bike in your driveway, estranged, rich uncle August."

If you picked D, then you must be the screenwriter for Wish Upon, because nobody else would select that option.

It's almost like the screenwriter made a wish on an enchanted Macbook with a haunted version of Final Draft: "I wish for a way to introduce this character that is unique." And that Macbook delivered in traditional, twist-your-wish fashion. Unique? Yes. Sensical? Not in the least.

Anyway, now we've got Rich Uncle August, who exists for a reason. We'll get back to it.

Wish Upon also stars Fake Ryan Phillippe, who turned out to be ACTUAL Ryan Phillippe. Hey, Ryan! It's been a minute!

Ryan plays Rory's dad. He was once a musician, and he is now a garbage picker and hoarder. Maybe as a hobby, but maybe as a profession? It's unclear.

Now, I'm not here to bash on someone who's down on his luck. I myself have done quite a bit of trash pickin' in my day.

It began when I was a youngster. I had a friend who lived in an apartment complex where we found some true treasures in the garbage. And we found some things that were not true treasures, including an enormous stuffed gorilla that was incredibly heavy. Turned out it was heavy because it had been marinating in garbage juice for a few days. Lesson learned.

I furnished my first apartment mostly with

trash, including a liquor store display that became my first bookshelf. How many librarians can make THAT claim!?

Spring at the college, that's where the real trash picking is at! All those freshmen move out of the dorms, they throw away EVERYTHING instead of taking it home, and that's where yours truly scored a George Foreman Grill. That might sound gross, but I wasn't able to afford a faded-celebrity-endorsed cooking gizmo that was remarkably efficient when it came to drying out a piece of chicken and was also very good at making paninis (I assume, I never tried, I have no idea what kind of bread you use for paninis...I just looked it up. Ciabatta? I just told you I got this grill from the garbage, do I sound like I've got European breads just falling out of my kitchen cabinets?).

In Wish Upon, Ryan decides to go trash picking in the



dumpster at his daughter's high school, right at the beginning of the school day when there are tons of people around to witness it, embarrassing his daughter horribly.

Dads embarrass their kids, sometimes on purpose, sometimes on accident, but I have a hard time buying that Ryan was like, "Why would you be embarrassed, as a teen girl, if your dad was jumping into dumpsters right outside your school?"

Plus, even as an amateur a trash picker, I can tell you that a public high school dumpster is not a destination dumpster. Nothing in there but embarrassing poetry drafts (hopes), crumpled homecoming invitations (dreams), and school lunch dregs (biohazards).

In the course of his trash pickin', Ryan finds some sort of weird box, think of an octagonal jewelry box, brings it home, and it ends up in Rory's hands. The box has a bunch of inscriptions on

it, mostly in Chinese, but Rory figures out one of them reads "Seven Wishes."

Of course, Rory's skeptical about a box from the garbage granting wishes,

but she ends up making a wish that the school Mean Girl will rot. Which totally happens due to a case of necrotizing fasciitis.



What happened to necrotizing fasciitis? I felt like my chances of dying from that were like 60% just a few years ago, but now I feel like it's all but gone? Thank goodness Wish Upon has come along to remind me of my irrational fears...

Okay, so the Mean Girl rots.

...

...are you waiting for the "But?" Because there's a "But."

The Mean Girl rots, but Rory's dog dies.

Now, you and I, as viewers of a horror movie, know what's going on. Rory got her wish, but there was a price to pay. However, Rory, who does NOT know she's in a horror movie, does not put these pieces together. Which is, honestly, fair. One wish coming true could be a coincidence, and a dog dying, though sad, isn't unheard of.

Next, Rory wishes Cute Boy would fall in love with her, which he does. But THEN Rory's rich, estranged uncle dies. Remember that guy? The one we met for about 1 second because the movie needed us to know who he was so that when he died later, we would, I guess, view that as a consequence of wish-making? I told you we'd come back to him, and here we are!

Rory still doesn't know what kind of movie she's in, so when she hears her uncle is dead, she makes a third wish, that her dad will inherit her dead

uncle's wealth.

Now, let's hold the telephone. Wouldn't it make a lot more sense for Rory to wish that her family had money, and for THAT wish to cause the death of her uncle? So Rory and Ryan would get money, but not consequence-free? Wouldn't that be a more logical screenwriting move?

Oh, Pete. Now you're asking Wish Upon to abide by rules of logic. You can't ask for a passion project like this to conform to cold logic, you fool!

The dark consequence of Rory's wish that they inherit Rich Uncle's money? Rory's old neighbor dies (played by Sherilyn Fenn, who you may know as Anna from Gilmore Girls. This movie is totally courting Gilmore Girls comparisons, this isn't my fault!).

Rory keeps the wish train rolling and wishes her dad wasn't embarrassing. And she returns home to find him playing jazz saxophone in the living room, and Rory's

friends, including Barb from Stranger Things, fawn over him, calling him "hot sauce."



I can buy young ladies fawning over Ryan Phillippe. He was good enough for Reese Witherspoon, and she was America's Sweetheart. This math is sound.

But playing jazz saxophone? Am I out of line for suggesting that playing jazz saxophone is a more embarrassing dad move than looking through a dumpster?

Horror movies DO have a rich history of attractive saxophonists, most notably the guy from The Lost Boys. But that was METAL



saxophone, not smooth jazz saxophone.

And it was the 80's.

Also, your friends swooning over your DAD is embarrassing. Better or worse than your dad jumping in a dumpster at your school, hard to say, but it's not NOT a humiliating moment.

~

Let's break from the plot here and talk about something very important. This is the warning, the after school special of this edition of Cult Movie Vault.

Let me turn my hat backwards, turn my chair backwards. Maybe turn my pants backwards like Kriss Kross.

If you understood that Kriss Kross reference, I'm betting you, like me, get a lot of internet ads for Metamucil.

Hey, everyone. I'm here to talk to you about a serious condition that affects

millions of horror movie victims: genre blindness.

Let's spool out how genre blindness works with a question: When you're watching a zombie movie, have the characters in that movie ever seen a zombie movie? In some zombie movies, the characters never say the word "zombie." They never say, "Wow, this is just like Dawn of the Dead!" That, my friends, genre blindness.

When a character suffers from genre blindness, they exist in a world that is almost identical to our own but with one key difference: in their world, they are the first and only person to experience the genre they're living in.

So, someone with genre blindness in a zombie movie would know everything you know EXCEPT for anything to do with zombies. I guess whether or not they'd know about Michael Jackson's "Thriller" is a big question mark.

Wish Upon does genre blindness for the "twisted wish" genre. It would seem that the characters are totally aware of pop culture (though perhaps not its evolution beyond the awesomeness of saxophones in the late 80's), EXCEPT for the genre of "be careful what you wish for" stories, which just so happen to be the story they're in.

And this, my friends, is the true terror presented by Wish Upon.

~

When I think about Wish Upon and genre blindness too much, I start to wonder... maybe I'm in a horror story, and maybe I, too, just don't recognize the specific genre I'm in. I'm ready for a grey alien, I'm comfortably aged out of likely slasher targethood, shoot, I'm even prepared for a giant ball of Critters to try and roll over me, reducing me to a skeleton



instantly. But what if I, like every horror movie character, am unfamiliar with ONE genre of horror, and that happens to be the ONE genre I'm living in!?

This is why it's so critical that you watch Wish Upon and every other cult horror film you can get your hands on.

Sure, it might seem silly to watch Wish Upon, but one day, if you find a wish-granting box in the garbage, you'll really regret not watching this movie.

And, yeah, maybe it seems like Army of Darkness is less useful to watch than a Ken Burns documentary, but in the event that you end up sent back in time and have to fight an army of skeletons led by your own clone who grew out of an eyeball on your shoulder, you'll rue the day you decided to watch something "productive and purposeful."

And, okay, it's not super likely you'll end up in a situation where Ghoulies are

real, on the loose for the third time, and they're going to college. But if you do...

~

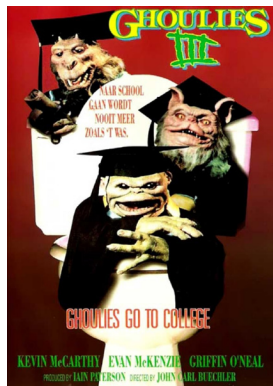
To close the Cult Movie Vault, let me just suggest that your library card might save your life.

Again, not in a metaphorical, "the joy of reading saved my life" kind of way.

In a very literal, "Okay, I watched Psycho Goreman on Hoopla, and I know exactly what to do in this Psycho Goreman situation," kind of way.

Maybe it won't happen. Maybe I'm just being alarmist.

But you won't know until it's too late...



THE FIRST ANNUAL CAGEMAS AWARDS



Cagemas is BACK!

And this year, we're presenting the First Annual HPLD Cult Movie Vault Cagemas Awards in some very official and important categories.

The criteria and judging are all very officious and very boring, so let's just be clear: All First Annual HPLD Cult

Movie Vault Cagemas Awards (FAHPLDCMVCA for short) go to movies starring (St.) Nic himself.

And that's pretty much the only criteria.

Let the FAHPLDCMVCA Ceremony Begin!

FAHPLDCMVCA MOST BIZARRE CHARACTER QUIRK AWARD: GHOST RIDER

Cage likes to add little quirks to his characters. For example, in Face/Off, his character gets all his stuff delivered to him in a weird wooden box, and inside we have bizarre pistols, a very impractical dragon-head-shaped money clip, and a box of Chiclets, fruit flavor, which Cage shakes next to his head, I guess in order to make sure they're real? As though his lackeys would put in his genuine golden pistols, a huge wad of real money, but then one thing they'd skimp on would be the Chiclets?

But in Ghost Rider, cage, a stuntman, inexplicably "drinks" red and yellow

jellybeans from a martini glass. More than once! I'm not sure why, I'm not sure whose idea this was, but for a quirk to stand out in a film that features a hero with a head that is constantly, literally, on fire, it must be solid gold.



FANPLDCMVCA BEST JAPANESE POSTER AND TITLE TRANSLATION AWARD: MOM AND DAD

Mad Daddy. Hilarious. And accurate.

When something checks both the "hilarious" and "accurate" boxes, I'm all



set.

FAPLDCMVCA MOST IMPLAUSIBLE ROMANCE AWARD: NEXT

As is the case with many an action movie, the romances in Nicolas Cage's movies seem...like a bit of a stretch. Cage's somewhat-romantic- costar in Willy's Wonderland is 34 years younger than he is. His Ghost Rider and Bad Lieutenant love interests are both played Eva Mendes.

To be fair Eva Mendes is good-looking enough that the concept of ANYONE other than Ryan Gosling being her love interest stretches reality, so this one gets a pass (plus, we already gave one to Ghost Rider. I really can't get over those jellybeans...)

It's not just Jessica Biel's pairing with Cage in Next, it's her undeniable, magnetic, volcanic scale of attraction to Next Nicolas Cage that puts this one

over the top.

And that's important, because Next Nic Cage is not 90's Superman Nic Cage. He's not charming, Peggy Sue Got Married Nic Cage.

Cage DOES have a superpower in this movie where he can basically play out the future over and over in his head until he gets it right. So, it's possible that it took him THOUSANDS of attempts to make this work. And yet, even with superpowers, this one is more far-fetched than a Labrador's tennis ball launched from a cannon capable of putting said tennis ball into orbit.

FAHPLDCMVCA BEST NON-MORGAN-FREEMAN NARRATION AWARD: IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

Isaac Hayes. Why had nobody thought of this before?

Honestly the cast in this one is stacked. Rosie Perez is hilarious, as

always. Wendell Pierce is perfect as the best buddy we all want to have, and his plan for the lottery winnings (buy the Knicks, place himself as forward) is the unmade movie we all want to see. Also, Red Buttons is in this movie. If you know who that is, just a reminder that you, like me, should make sure you've got all your old man cardigans out, because it's cardigan season!

FANPLDCMVCA BEST CASE CHARACTER NAME AWARD: LEFT BEHIND

This is a HOT contest. We've got: Memphis Raines, Bill Firpo, Stanley Goodspeed, Cameron Poe, Benjamin Franklin Gates, Johnny Blaze.

But nothing tickles me as much as Left Behind's Rayford Steele.

I mean, THAT'S who you want piloting your plane when it's going down. Don't worry, RAYFORD STEELE is on the stick. When you're putting a band together? Rayford Steele is guitar/lead vocals.

Rayford Steele is the doctor from every doctor show who is always screaming at other people to get out of his way so he can use those paddles to bring someone back to life because he just won't give up.

"Give me a hundred billion hexajoules, NOW!" "But Dr. Steele, that's twice the recomme—" "I SAID NOW!"

FAHPLDCMVCA FOR MOST LEGIT STORY CONCEPTION AWARD: JOE

This being the time of year for forgiveness, we always have to allow our friend Nic to make some movies with plots so thin you could hold them up in front of your face, look through them, and still pass an eye test with a 20/20 score.

Look, a movie about a planeload of prisoners who take over said plane isn't about soul-searching, okay? It's about explosions and running away from those explosions without looking back. And Con

Air does that beautifully.

Joe is another animal. Joe is based on a book by the late Larry Brown, a grit lit writer with a ton of heart. If you've got a tough sort in your life, get them On Fire, which is a series of true stories Larry Brown wrote while volunteering at a rural fire department, and you'll see what I mean.

FAHPLDCMVCA NIC CAGE DESCENT INTO MADNESS SEQUENCE AWARD: COLOR OUT OF SPACE

Nobody does descent into madness quite like Nicolas Cage. Sometimes it feels like...the character is already right on the edge, and the descent isn't a long fall, but I digress.

Cage goes for it in the horrifying "Alpaca Scene," which brings The Thing-type horror into the modern day, and Cage is eating up every minute.

FANPLDCMVCA MOST (PROBABLY UNINTENTIONALLY) HOLIDAY- LOOKING POSTER AWARD: PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND

Don't be fooled, this movie has nothing to do with the upcoming holidays. I think. Pretty sure.

To be honest, POTG is one of the more confusing Cage movies, and that's really saying something. So it's possible that this movie directly references Christmas in ways that passed right by me like Santa's sleigh whooshing a thousand feet overhead in a blizzard.



CULT MOVIE VAULT: THE HAPPENING

Over the last couple years, we've decided to culturally reevaluate anything and everything.

This may have started with reevaluating the place of pop music and deciding that pop music is, in fact, good. It's a valid form of music. The only thing more rock solid than Britney's abs in the early 2000's was "Toxic."



It's been fun to go back and say, "Hey, maybe Garth Brooks was pretty legit,

even though he was ignored because he worked in the Country genre." Or, "Gee, maybe comic books from the 90's were legitimately artsy."

But this reevaluation may be getting out of hand, or maybe we've just run out of stuff to reevaluate. Because now I'm seeing several articles about M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* with headlines like this:

Hear me out: why The Happening isn't a bad movie

Why M. Night Shyamalan's The Happening Doesn't Deserve Its Bad Reviews

The Happening is Super Dope and Anyone Who Says Otherwise is Going to Get A Happening-esque Comeuppance, Probably In Being Dropkicked By a Douglas Fir, And Also By My Friend, Douglas Fir, Who Just So Happens To Have The Same Name As A Variety Of Tree

Okay, I made up that last one, but

there's no shortage of articles defending The Happening out there, and they even have some quotes like this:

But what I find particularly resonant about The Happening, especially in these pandemic times, is the way it brings to bear the frailty of human knowledge, how easily our scientific and civilizational advances topple when confronted with something that eludes understanding.

Ooooookay.

Because of all this reversal, I decided to bravely wade into The Happening, watch it for real, and reevaluate the reevaluations to find out if what people are saying is true: Is The Happening a secret success?

CONCLUSION

No. The Happening is very bad.

...you want more than that? Okay, fine.

WATCHING THE HAPPENING

I have to shamefully admit that I've never sat down and watched The Happening before.

Wait, why is that shameful? I've climbed a 14er. A few of 'em! I've stood on 3 of 7 continents, which isn't a TON, but it's not bad. Why am I ashamed of never seeing The Happening?

Well, because it's bad movie royalty. And I discovered why.

SPOILER SECTION

The story of The Happening is thinner than my patience in waiting for HPLD to open up a donut stand inside the admin building where I work.

That said, we are going to pierce the very weak, wet paper bag of plot here, so spoilers on the off chance you've been WANTING to watch this and are actually

going to, ignoring everything I've said up to this point.

I guess if you've already made the terrible decision to watch The Happening, the good news is that the decision to stop reading this article could only, AT WORST, be the second-worst decision of your life. No other decisions will take the crown of Absolute Worst once you decide to watch The Happening. You will have officially made the worst possible decision.

The film opens, and people start committing suicide in grisly ways, seemingly while in a trance. And it turns out this happening is because plant life is releasing, I don't know, goofy gas? Some kind of goofball gas that makes people kill



themselves?

This is a self-protective measure taken by the trees, a way to maybe prevent them from all being turned into whatever people are turning trees into these days. According to my Instagram feed, that'd mostly be wood tables with colored, poured resin rivers running through them.

That's pretty much it. We get that setup in the first third of the movie, and it never really goes anywhere from there. Imagine the plot of a typical movie, like Raiders of the Lost Ark. A thing happens, this causes another thing to happen, and so on until the last thing happens, a Nazi's whole head melts, and everything is cool again other than the next decade of coming nightmares for a young Pete.

The Happening is not like that. In The Happening, ONE THING happens, and then a bunch of people walk around in a world where that thing continues happening,

but not to our main characters for...some reason.

Huh. Maybe that's why it's called THE Happening. It's singular because only one thing happens.

But it's not the plot that makes The Happening so bad. It's a bunch of smaller things...All the / Small things.

SMALL THING: THE TALKING

All the talking in this movie is...weird. Sometimes it feels like no two actors were ever in the same room, doing their dialog at the same time.

You see this in Birdemic. What the filmmakers did there is film one actor doing all of his lines for a scene, then film the other actor doing all of her lines for the scene, then cut them together (the problem in that movie is that an air conditioning unit kicked on during one of the actor's shots, so the

ambient noise between the two shots is really different, and every time the shot switches from one character to the other, you get this loud BWAAAHHHHH!!!! from an A/C unit. There is a way to cheat this, by the way, if you've made the mistake of shooting a scene this way and don't know what to do with the raw footage: first you reduce the sound in both clips to try and remove excess noise, then you add in an ambient noise track, in this case, the sort of noises you'd hear in a diner, that plays constantly and without cuts beneath the entire scene. That way, the small difference between the two tracks will be covered up, and the noise won't noticeably change between the two. But now we're getting into fixing Birdemic, and we don't have enough time to do that here. That's why film school was invented).

In The Happening, it's not that there are jarring audio or visual differences when characters are talking, it just FEELS like the actors don't know what is going on, why they're saying the things

they're saying, who they're talking to... it's like they don't know anything.

SMALL THING TWO: SAYING WHAT IS (THE) HAPPENING

You'll see this sometimes in screenwriting, especially if it comes from people who are used to writing novels and so on: the writer forgets that the images can do some of the explaining.

In other words, when you see something... Happening, you don't need a character to say exactly what is...Happening because you see it...occurring as well.

Characters in The Happening LOVE to narrate what's just Happened. They saw it, everyone around them saw it, and WE saw it. Everyone involved has the same amount of information, and yet, the characters feel compelled to remind us of things that we JUST saw moments before.

Imagine you get drive-thru burgers, and something mildly funny happens at the window, like the person handing out the food had a tattoo of Marky Mark from The Happening. You'd talk about it right after it happened with your fellow passenger, sure, but would you stop talking about it, and then, after a 30-second silence, be like, "Hey, remember that Marky Mark tattoo?"

SMALL THING THREE: THE NEWS

One of my pet peeves (has anyone named a rowdy kitten Peeves? Seems appropriate) is when a movie or TV show decides to do all of the explaining by having news anchors on TV just straight-up say what's going on all the time.

This happens constantly in The Happening. Someone has the news on, everyone falls silent, crowds around the



TV, and the person on the news is like, "Here's exactly what's happening to you, Mark Wahlberg's character, whose name I can't remember because why bother?"

This has NEVER happened to me once in real life. I guess that's the difference between being famous and not being famous: The news might focus on you, what you're doing, and what's going on in your life if you're famous. Somehow, I doubt I'll ever turn on the news and hear, "Okay, Pete, dentist appointment today is looking good, though you've got some buildup on those back molars again."

THE MOST REDEEMING FACTOR

Some of the movie is just weird, and it's what I find most redeeming.

There's the famous "Hot dog guy," who just decides to tell everyone:

We're packing hot dogs for the road. You know



hot dogs get a bad rap. They got a cool shape, they got protein. You like hot dogs right?

A "cool shape?" I...

There's also a weird semi-affair Zooey Deschanel is having with some guy named Joey, but she insists they just met up and ate tiramisu. Which, TBH, I would forgive my partner for doing. Tiramisu is delicious, and I don't feel like it pops up all the time. When you have the chance to eat it, you should take it, even if it feels like a form of emotional infidelity. Deal with the emotional fallout later.

THE ELEPHANT GRASS IN THE ROOM

I'm pretty sure the original reevaluation of The Happening came from Onion A/V Club's Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, who posed the theory that The Happening is meant to be a campy, 50's-style B-movie, and therefore its failure is actually a secret success.

Basically: The Happening's attempt to be like a lousy movie with wooden acting and bizarre dialogue and no story is successful, and if it was TRYING to do that, it succeeded.

I say this is nonsense. Poppycock. Banana oil. Other anachronistic things that mean "manure." See, I can use words like "anachronistic," too. I'm a bigtime film guy. Look at me!

Because the thing is, someone already made a movie that relies on 50's drive-in movie stylings that still manages to be good, scary, fun, and doesn't come off as being horrible: Frank Darabont's The Mist.



That movie was originally meant to be screened in black and white, and if you can find a copy in black and white, I recommend it. The effects look better, and it's clear this was the intended style of the movie. Mist has never looked mistier.

What Darabont did is to pull some of the tropes of 50's movies that still work, but he left behind those that didn't. For example, outrageously bad acting. Also, Darabont didn't skimp on having bizarre monsters. The Happening's monster is literally the wind.

And, I mean, come on, The Happening. "It was supposed to be that way" has to be the weakest excuse for making a crappy movie that anyone has ever heard of. When I burned Bagel Bites in the oven so badly that they looked like little lumps of coal, the "I meant to do that" excuse didn't make those Bagel Bites any tastier. Nothing could salvage those Bagel Bites. I hate throwing out food, especially when it's pizza-adjacent, so

the Burned Bagel Bites Incident of 2017 still haunts me to this day. I see them every time I close my eyes...

If The Happening was meant to be crappy, then it succeeded, but that doesn't mean the movie itself is a success. It's still crappy.

BIRDEMING

Here's the big thing that makes The Happening feel irredeemable to me: The Happening and the aforementioned Birdemic are, essentially, the same movie. Both have an environmental message that, while correct, doesn't make up for much. Both have really bad acting.

Both have a premise that comes into play, and then...people just sort of walk around in the premise.

And when the closest comparison to your movie is Birdemic, we've got a problem. Especially because Birdemic cost \$10,000, and The Happening cost somewhere between \$60 and \$80 MILLION.

Numbers don't always give perspective, so let's take a deeper look:

You could make SEVEN THOUSAND Birdemics for the budget of one The Happening. You could sit down and watch a new Birdemic every single day for the next 19 years, and you'd still have a few left. I have no idea whether you'd have any will to live, whether you might become some kind of super zen person who could withstand any torture, but what I DO know is that you don't come out of 19 years of daily Birdemics the same person you went in.

ONE GOOD THING ABOUT THE HAPPENING

I must admit, even though The Happening was bad, it doesn't seem to have ruined any careers the way some stinkers do. Mark Wahlberg has gone on to be in a movie starring a living teddy bear. By which I mean: He was in Pain & Gain with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. But I guess he was also in Ted, which starred a living teddy bear. If you ever need a guy to star alongside a human-like teddy bear or a teddy- bear-like human, Marky

Mark is your boy.

Zoey Deschanel out-manic-pixie-dream-girl-ed Natalie Portman, the original manic pixie dream girl, in 500 Days of Summer. Not to mention her sitcom, New Girl, which is a delight. Also, she appeared alongside her real-life sister, Emily, on Emily's on-going series, Bones. The two real-life sisters played second cousins who don't see the resemblance, which is hilarious.

John Leguizamo? Dude is working A LOT, and he's made a fine career of popping up in great movies (Encanto, John Wick 2), and some movies that are Land of the Dead.

And M. Night Shyamalan?

The Happening might have been the official end of his run of successes. But he's found a new niche in movies with lower budgets and smaller stories.

And I like these smaller Shyamalan's.

They make me feel like he's back in the groove. Like he's a filmmaker with class and distinction again.

Like *The Visit*, a movie in which a used diaper is shoved in an obnoxious pre-teen rapper's face for horror purposes.



CAGEMAS IN JULY(ISH)



Years ago, with our first Cagemas event, we got this letter from a reader named Chris:

How could you not include 'Family Man'??? Literally a Nic CAGE-ChristMAS movie!! LOL! I enjoy your newsletter! :0)

And I have to admit, Chris was right. Our newsletter is great and very enjoyable.

ALSO, I have to admit, we somehow skipped the one Cage movie that is definitely, unequivocally, a Christmas movie.

It's been a few years now, and we've meant to remedy this, so we thought we'd

do it up right, give Family Man its own Cagemas.

And what better time to do a Christmas-based Cagemas than July(ish)?

What's that? Any other time, literally any time but now? Okay, good point.

But we're here now, so...I don't know, deal with it.

FAMILY MAN

I threw in the disc, popped some popcorn as the credits rolled, and we're off! According to IMDB, Family Man was released in 2000. Which is the first thing I found very strange. Cage looked older than I remember him looking at that time. Not WAY older, but just a little rougher around the edges than a man in his late 30's who was pretty famous at the time for getting jacked and stepping off an airplane with the wind in "his" hair.

2000's Cage was a hunk, right? He was

maybe going to be Superman around this time. This older, still charismatic, Cage was...not as I remembered things. But no matter, the color palette for this movie is absolutely stunning. The purples and pinks really bring a new vision of what the holiday season might be, and the way the movie is filmed might be part of what gave it this odd, out-of-time feel. Maybe the age makeup on Cage was done on purpose, to separate the audience from the Cage they knew and instead see the character he was playing?

There was also the issue where, at first, I didn't really see how this was a Christmas movie, but I started putting it together, eventually. There's a religious element, representing some of the original Christmas tale, plus a group of bikers who ride through the night. I can only assume they are meant to represent Santa's reindeer. The religious figures and bikers work together, and although this is not exactly what I was expecting, I

understood the metaphor: maybe there doesn't need to be animosity between those who hold religious beliefs around Christmas and those who celebrate in a more Santa-oriented way.

Maybe these groups really want the same thing: peace, harmony, and good will. This was all a beautiful and stunning realization, and I congratulated myself for being shrewd enough to get it. Then it all came crashing down in the form of a little green guy vomiting mac and cheese.

I was confused by the Cheddar Goblin, a macaroni and cheese mascot who barfs cheesy goodness all over the place. Try as I might, I couldn't figure out which part of any Christmas story he might be. Then there was the



chainsaw fight between Nicolas Cage and one of the religious folks. Try as I did, I could not place that in any of the Christmas contexts I'm familiar with. Chestnuts roasting on an open fire... that requires logs...logs come from trees, which are cut down by chainsaws...

Astute readers have probably, by now, figured out that I did not watch Family Man, and instead I ended up watching Mandy.

By way of explanation: sometimes things get a little confusing in the HPLD Cult Movie Vault. I'll have several discs and their cases out at the same time, and oftentimes, in a euphoric haze that comes from eating a three-section barrel of flavored popcorn and switching from cheese corn to caramel corn, and then BACK to cheese corn, I have been known to make the occasional mistake. All this to say, I must have accidentally switched the discs, and because I was prepping snacks during the movie's opening, it wasn't until VERY late in the game that

I realized I'd watched 2018's Mandy instead of 2000's Family Man.

In my defense, they both have "man" in their titles, both star Nicolas Cage, and it's pretty dark in the HPLD Cult Movie Vault. What kind of "vault" would it be if the lights were bright and useful?

Besides, are you going to stand there and tell me you've NEVER returned a DVD case to the library with the wrong disc inside? Because I've spent quite a bit of time checking in items, and let me tell you, your batting average on that one is not something you want on the back of your trading card.

Let this be a lesson to us all: don't forget to double-check your discs before you return them to the library. Otherwise, you might watch a totally awesome movie and have the experience tainted by trying to mash the story into a Christmas narrative that makes absolutely no sense.

How does Mandy hold up as a movie, provided you don't have expectations that Nicholas Cage is going to learn something about the holiday spirit?

If you've got a strong stomach, you're up for a good-bonkers Nic Cage performance, and you've got a taste for the weird, Mandy is an awesome choice for Cagemas in July(ish). It's truly bizarre, a visual feast, and gorehounds will find plenty to sink their teeth into. This one is probably not for the kids, and I say that as someone who grew up watching The Land Before Time, a movie in which adorable baby dinosaurs team up in a futile effort to slightly delay what we know to be their slow, painful demise.

As for Family Man, I still can't speak to it. I guess that's a dream once again deferred.

Maybe we'll see it this December?



CULTMOVIE VAULT:

M3GAN

I'm just going to start this out with something that I both love and hate about this movie:

I HATE that the title is stylized as M3gan. When you look it up in our catalog, DO NOT type "Megan" unless you want to sort through a ton of other movies, including Her, which is in a similar, though less splatter-y, vein, and The Phantom Thread, which is one of those artsy movies, NOT a movie about a ghost who likes embroidery.

That use of "3" in place of "e" is what I hate about M3gan.

I also LOVE that the filmmakers went with the silly idea of putting a number in the title and stuck to their guns.

Oftentimes, when movies do this, they don't really force the issue. For example, 2015's FANT4STIC, which...I guess a 4 is kind of close to an A, depending on the font.

Or Slm0ne, which is just out of control. Or The VVitch, which did itself no favors in the "Is this movie pretentious?" line of questions with that double-V crap.

M3gan's filmmakers have the courage of their convictions. They're like, "If you're going to seek out this movie about a killer doll who dresses like a weird turn-of-the-century creepy Crackerjack mascot, you'd better stretch your fingers out, because you're going to need that top row of laptop keys." I'm not exactly sure why it's "M3gan." They do lay it out in the movie, but who can remember nonsense like...Model 3 Girl...Abomination Nonsense-tech?



It's totally irrelevant because by the time you get the explanation, you've already had to search "M3gan" and just sort of grow up and deal with the uncomfortable feelings.

M3gan is your classic scary doll movie, following in the footsteps left by Chucky's Keds, and of course some lesser dolls, such as Annabelle, Brahms from The Boy, the COMPLETELY DIFFERENT Brahms from The Boy 2, the titular Dolls from Dolls, and who could forget the puppets from the Puppetmaster series? While technically puppets and not dolls, eh, close enough, and no Cult Movie Vault would be complete without mention of our favorite little mischievous puppets, such as Leech Woman, Decapitron, and Bonestripper (one of these is not a puppet, but is in fact a fictional ride from the movie Nothing But Trouble. See if you can spot the outlier!).

The twist, of course, is that M3gan uses AI to learn and to complete goals, such as "Keep this little girl safe at all

costs."

Sure, there's no way that could go wrong...

Folks, if you're putting an AI together, maybe include some caveats. When you say, "Protect this child," maybe instead of "at all costs" or "no matter what," something like "within reason," might work out a little better. "Protect this child, but not in a way that involves proactively killing people who you perceive as minor threats to the child's general comfort," might be the way to go.

Or, maybe: "If you, robot doll, are chopping off your hand and replacing it with a kitchen knife in order to complete your objective, you have gone too far."

Anyway, there's a lot to love about M3gan. For one thing, you might think I've already spoiled a good chunk of the movie, but you'd be totally wrong! We've

covered less than 15 minutes. M3gan is like 90 minutes long in total, and it wastes VERY little time getting set up.

Finally. Finally, a modern horror movie that says, "We probably don't need to have this go on for 2-and-a-half hours."

I'm not here to say every movie must be 90 minutes, or that every movie is better that way, but when your movie can be summed up with the phrase "Killer robot doll," maybe a 2.5-hour philosophical treatise isn't exactly what viewers want. We saw *Ex Machina*, it rules, but we don't need it again.

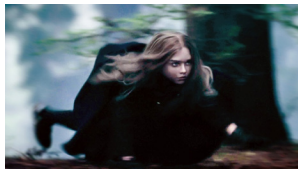
Which get us to my favorite thing about M3gan: Although M3gan has somewhat of a message, somewhat of a tale about what it means to be human and trauma and so on, we're allowed to mostly forget all about that before the end.

I've seen many a horror movie lately that, while good, leans heavy into the whole, "Maybe the real monster is

SOCIETY," or "The real monster is US," or "This movie really holds up a mirror to..." kind of thing. Which, fine, but it's refreshing that, in M3gan, the real monster is DEFINITELY M3gan.

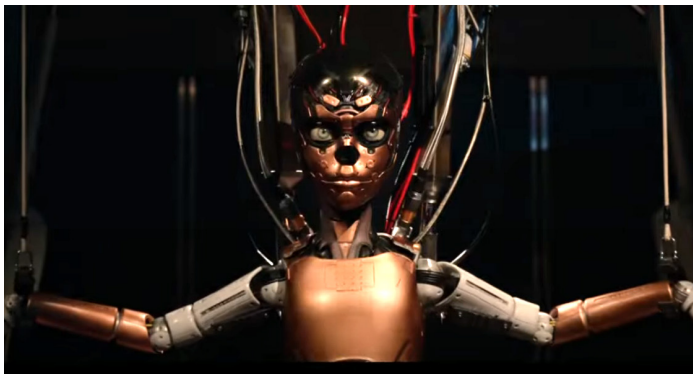
It's not you, it's not society, it's not the government, It's not a political ideology, it's not corporate greed. The monster is 100% M3gan, the overly strong, super creepy doll that scuttles like a crab for no real reason other than to terrify.

M3gan is well-designed, she's pretty creepy looking, and one of the most hilarious parts of the movie is that they put skin on her to make her look LESS creepy, and this has absolutely the opposite effect.



Especially because, for some reason, while M3gan is recharging, she never

closes her eyes. Why? Why on earth would you design a robot that is constantly staring into the middle distance?



Unfortunately, M3gan was released as a PG-13 movie with toned down violence and gore, and this is the version I saw. It was satisfactory, but who is this person asking for a less-bloody killer doll movie? Who is like, "I would love to see that movie about the murderous doll, but no killings"? Who is this person? Why do they have so much pull in Hollywood? I want names.

Another plus for M3gan, the filmmakers

were smart enough to use a good deal of practical effects. In fact, there were animatronic dolls created for some of the scenes.

This means that somewhere, out there, a M3gan actually exists!

And therefore, my plot for M3gan 2 (M2gan?) is as follows:

After wrapping filming on the movie M3gan, the animatronics are put into storage. Where they are, I don't know, hit by lightning or something, who cares, the transformation part is never important. Lightning, peeing into a fountain, magic fortune cookie, these things happen in movie worlds, just accept it.

This living M3gan animatronic is then brought out of storage because there's an actors' strike going on, so the crew is tasked with starting M3gan 2, and they figure they can just shoot the doll scenes for now, no actors needed!

Of course, the techie who adds all this functionality to M3gan is unable to finish programming her to understand the difference between fiction and reality, and mayhem ensues.

I recommend M3gan wholeheartedly. It's not a movie that someone is going to sell to you as a life-changing viewing experience or "the best horror movie in the last decade." It's...a movie. It's fun.

So sit down, invite your friends Mike & Ike to join you, and enjoy M3gan. Especially the scene where her face melts off and everyone in the movie is like, "...Should we be doing this?" No.

I mean, YES, as a viewer of this movie, you should definitely be doing this.

But as a human being pretending this is a series of real events: Why aren't you running yet?



CULTMOVIE VAULT: DEMOLITION MAN

It's September, and September 5th through 24th, Centennial Park Library will be closed for remodeling. This is the perfect excuse to talk about Demolition Man.



Calling the remodel "Demolition" would be a bit dramatic. Which means it's perfect for this section of the newsletter.

Besides, nobody ever made a movie called Remodel Man where Sylvester Stallone

plays a Ty Pennington type, remodeling houses and pleasing families. Although now that I mention it, an Expendables-style movie with a team of house flippers, lead by Stallone, would be an instant blu-ray purchase for me. Those bonus features would be pure gold.

No, Stallone made Demolition Man, a movie where Stallone plays a Stallone type, demolishing buildings and foiling Wesley Snipes' evil schemes.

Stallone plays John Spartan, a cop who is known as "The Demolition Man" because of his penchant for destroying a lot of property in his attempts to catch criminals, and also because it allows me to stand and clap when a character in the movie says the title of the movie (like 2 minutes in).

Spartan is tricked by Simon Phoenix (Wesley Snipes) into thinking he's responsible for the deaths of a whole building full of hostages. Of course, it's not Stallone's fault, it's all a

setup, but whatever, all this happens BEFORE the opening credits roll, so that tells you how important this is.

Because Stallone's attorney was NOT very good at even asking basic questions, like, "Your honor, the only reason we have to believe that the hostages died due to Stallone's actions is the word of the world's most heinous super-criminal, don't you think that seems suspicious?," Stallone ends up in Cryoprison, which is a fancy name for a badly-lit warehouse where they freeze naked guys in giant hockey pucks of semi-transparent...ice? Science liquid? Again, doesn't matter.

The real nonsense, and real fun, of Demolition Man begins here. What difference does it make if you're in Cryoprison for 10 years or 10 minutes? The prisoners are not



supposed to be conscious, so it would be almost identical to them either way. Why different lengths of sentencing? Couldn't you throw a guy into Cryoprison for 10 minutes, tell him it's been 50 years, and...whatever!?

Ah, but see, the prisoners are being reprogrammed while they sleep, computers somehow rewiring their brains. I guess that takes several decades?

We'll come back to this shortly.

So we've got Stallone and Snipes, both in Cryoprison. Snipes has a parole hearing at the 40-year mark for some reason, I don't know why, I'm not sure how you get time off for good behavior when you're literally frozen solid, and I'm also confused as to why he has a parole hearing, the person who definitely kidnapped and tied up all those hostages in the first place, as opposed to the person whose maverick rescue attempt may have contributed to their deaths but certainly didn't CAUSE them, but,

whatever, Snipes has a hearing, mounts a violent, eye-gouging escape during this hearing, and starts going on a rampage.

The setting in which this rampage occurs is San Angeles, 2032. Apparently, the new millennium started out with a few decades of turmoil, and some guy who dresses kind of like a cross between the Pope and Otho from Beetlejuice magically fixed society. So the world is very kind and gentle. Violence is something only displayed in a museum, nobody eats food that's unhealthy, and everything is extremely safe and extremely boring.

Which means Wesley Snipes is INCREDIBLY effective, crime-wise, because nobody is equipped to deal with someone doing bad things on purpose.

The future cops can't stop Snipes themselves, so they come up with a plan:

Let's thaw Stallone to take care of things.

Stallone comes out of the ice a bit confused, has a tussle with Snipes, and then finds he's got a strong desire to knit. This is because his former tendencies were replaced by gentler, more productive desires while he slept. Which is kind of cool, I'd like to take a year-long nap and then emerge fluent in Spanish (take that, Duolingo owl!).

The problem, though is that it doesn't seem like the new behaviors replace the old ones. Stallone still likes blowing things up and fistfighting Wesley Snipes, he just ALSO likes to knit.



Look, we could talk Demolition Man all day because it's like 10 movies in one.

It's a snobs versus slobs comedy where the snobs have taken over the future to such a degree that things like swearing are outlawed.

It's a romantic comedy with Sandra Bullock's Lenina Huxley finding herself attracted to the kindred spirit Stallone, denying Benjamin Bratt, who plays the romcom staple character "The Other Guy." By the way, this is 7 years before Bullock and Bratt come together in Miss Congeniality, where Bullock ALSO plays a cop who's a little rough around the edges. Is Miss Congeniality actually Demolition Man 2? Film scholars say Yes.

It's an action movie with Stallone at some of his action nonsense best.

It's an action movie with Snipes at his peak, seemingly having an absolute blast.

It's a comedy with things like the 3 Seashells joke, a joke about Schwarzenegger becoming President

(that became less a joke, closer to a prediction in 2003 when Schwarzenegger became Governor of California), and Rob Schneider being an absolute smarmy tool.

It's a head explosion movie, which is not a genre that most people talk about, but I'm writing this column, so here it is.

Demolition Man is a lot of things, but what it is most of all is a film that makes us realize that a fancy Taco Bell with plates of tiny, delicate food and Dan Cortese playing the piano is the definition of a future nobody wants.

~

To promote Demolition Man's release in 1993, MTV held an event at a real building demolition. The Belknap Hardware and Manufacturing Company building in Louisville, Kentucky, already slated for demolition, was fixed with some extra explosives, guests were invited, and the thing was imploded.



Stallone was quoted as saying the demolition was, "Very uplifting," so maybe John Spartan was more a part of Stallone than I originally thought.

That said, Warner Bros., if you're ready to make Demolition Man 3 (Demolition Man 2 already being made, as discussed above), HPLD invites you to Centennial Park Library. We might not be able to blow up the entire thing, but perhaps a sparkler or two could be arranged?

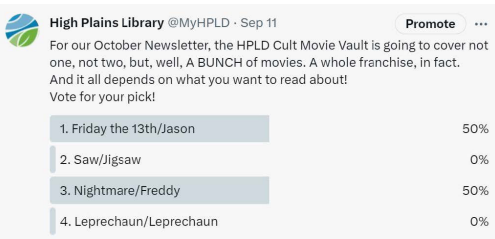
I know it's not quite as cool, but on the plus side, Demolition Man Fan #1 will be on hand, ready to push down a giant novelty plunger and kick off a new era for Centennial Park Library AND great action movie franchises in one (controlled, mild, safe) explosion.

CULT MOVIE VAULT: YES, THAT IS RIGHT. ALL THE LEPRECHAUNS...

Because Halloween is such a special time in the HPLD Cult Movie Vault, we decided we should cover an entire franchise for October's newsletter.

To help us pick the very best one, we put up a vote on our social media, and you, the people, got to choose between 4 juggernauts: *Friday the 13th*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Saw*, and *Leprechaun*.

Well, you got to pick between 3 juggernauts and *Leprechaun*.



And we had a bit of a problem: A tie between Freddy and Jason. Just as they battled to a standstill on the big screen in 2003's *Freddy Vs. Jason*, they were now battling it out on HPLD's social media. Which titan of terror would win?! Who would rake in the profits? *How do you make money from this? Please tell me! Please?*

~

Let me share something with you, dear reader: After a few years managing HPLD's Cult Movie Vault, I have become a master of horror. Something of a terror titan myself.

Horror is all about making you THINK one thing is happening, making you THINK you're in control, and then pulling the rug out from under you. And underneath that tasteful yet surprisingly inexpensive rug that makes you go, "Woah, why didn't I buy this earlier?" Bugs. Slime. Buckets of blood. Horrifically ugly laminate flooring with a pattern that looks suspiciously like a super scary ghost.

When we put that poll up online, you THOUGHT you were in control of this

month's Cult Movie Vault.

You were wrong.

Consider the rug, which you were standing on moments ago, pulled out from under you, thrown into a pit of ghosts, and washed in the cries of a thousand lost souls.

As we bring you: A Review of the *Leprechaun* Franchise

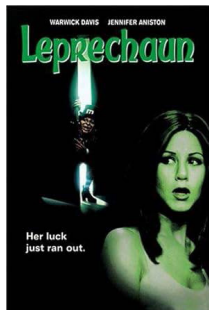
Eeee heee hee!

~

LEPRECHAUN

When it comes to this movie, the only thing everyone wants to talk about is that this is the early on-screen work of a huge star: Mark Holton, aka Francis from *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*.

Okay, the REAL biggest story is that *Leprechaun* stars Jennifer Aniston in her first big role, and it co-stars Aniston's original nose.



I don't have a ton to say about Aniston's original nose. If I'm mistaken for anyone in a movie, it'll probably be the goofball friend, like a, "Hey, where did they find ugly, less charismatic Steve Zahn?" kind of role. Or possibly a C.H.U.D. So when it comes to matters of beauty I should probably just shut up.

The Leprechaun, played throughout the series by Warwick Davis, is kind of a cross between the leprechauns of fairy tales and Freddy Kruger. I'm not sure what's going on with his face, but it definitely looks like they scraped the skin off Freddy's back, stapled it over Warwick Davis' face, and everyone goes to town from there.

In most of the movies, someone steals the Leprechaun's gold, and he tries to get it back using the only tool in his toolchest: Murder.

As for this first entry, the Leprechaun was sealed in a box by a 4-leaf clover, the clover gets knocked off the box because it's JUST SET ON TOP OF THE BOX, no nails, not even a piece of tape, so OF COURSE it gets brushed off by a light breeze. C'mon, guys, you couldn't hit

the craft store, get a little barrel of Mod Podge and at least make a Pinterest-level effort here?

Anyway, the Leprechaun is freed, and he wants his gold.

Nay, NEEDS his gold.

Which, unfortunately, the man-child played by Francis from *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* swallowed a piece of.

Francis swallowing the gold is really not an issue for the Leprechaun, he'll simply cut Francis open to retrieve the swallowed coin, and if anyone else gets in the way, he'll go ahead and kill them, too, most likely using a bit of magic or the razor sharp buckles on his shoes. This was the first time I found out how hardcore those big golden buckles you always see on Pilgrims' shoes could be.

If you're only going to watch one *Leprechaun* movie (hey, it's your life to waste in not finishing this epic saga, left to wander the wasteland, never knowing how it all turns out), this is definitely the one to watch. Unless you're a big fan of movies with ambitious ideas and less-ambitious budgets. In which

case, stay tuned, Leprechaun goes to space before too long.

LEPRECHAUN 2

Throughout the series, one noticeable feature of the Leprechaun is that his powers and limitations change without warning. In this movie, if you sneeze three times and nobody says, "Bless you," the Leprechaun has the right to take you as his bride.

This gimmick has added a bit of fun to my home life, as whenever someone sneezes three times, the sneezer immediately screams, "Say it! Save me from the Leprechaun!"

The Leprechaun also has the power to create hallucinations, and this results in a Leprechaun-induced hallucination where a guy sticks his head in a lawnmower, putting this movie in the rarified air of horror movies where a lawnmower is used as a weapon.

Other movies with lawnmower kills include:

- *Dead Alive* where a lawnmower is used to mow down zombies.

- *The Happening* where a guy lays down in front of his own lawnmower because trees are giving off weird gases(?)
- *Slaughter High*, which has a lawnmower kill that's built up to be awesome and is INCREDIBLY underwhelming (I take my writing inspiration from this aesthetic).
- *Saw 3D*, which has a scene where a couple people are suspended in the air over a bunch of overturned lawnmowers.
- And with an honorable mentions, *The Final Destination*, where a person is killed by a lawnmower, though by something that gets caught in the blades and launched into their face as opposed to the blades, so it squeaks by on a technicality, *Maximum Overdrive* where a kid is menaced by a lawnmower that appears to be covered in blood, so presumably killed someone offscreen.
- Dishonorable Mention: *The Lawnmower Man*, which you would absolutely think would involve a lawnmower kill, but you'd be wrong. How they missed this opportunity is beyond me.

The best sequence in this movie is when Sandy Baron, who you may recognize as Jack Klompus from *Seinfeld*, challenges the Leprechaun to a drinking contest. Which Sandy wins! And then loses because, you know, the Leprechaun is kind of like a genie who twists all your desires into terrible nightmares.



It was at that point I really turned on the Leprechaun. First, I was like, "Well, he just wants his gold. That's not totally unreasonable." But then he lost a drinking contest, fair and square, and still takes his revenge. Not cool, bro. More like LepreCON!

LEPRECHAUN 3

The story behind *Leprechaun 3* is that the writer, David DuBos, was tasked with writing the movie based on a three-word premise: Leprechaun in Vegas.

Having never seen the previous two entries, DuBos was off to the races,

quite literally as he had a pretty short time to turn in a script.

You'd think this premise would be ripe for some great shenanigans. What better city for a gold-obsessed, magic-power-having Leprechaun than Vegas?



And we do get a few scenes, possibly (let's face it, almost certainly) filmed without a permit, of the Leprechaun walking across busy Vegas streets.

Imagine being in Vegas in the 90's and having to wait to cross a road while they filmed Warwick Davis scuttling about in a Leprechaun costume. This was probably shot at like 3 am. If I ran into that, at that time, in the state I'd be in at 3 am in Vegas, I'd either immediately head to the airport and flee or decide to make Vegas my home forever. There's no middle ground.

The new gimmick in this one is that this dude, Scott, gets one of the Leprechaun's gold coins, and while it brings him great luck in the "casino," it also

slowly transforms him into a leprechaun, evidenced by an Irish accent, penchant for rhyming, and desire to eat potatoes.

You might be wondering why "casino" is in quotes up above, and it's because the "casino" in this movie appears to be a crappy motel lobby with roulette wheels on folding card tables. Like it's a secret, underground casino that the owners fully expect to pack up in moments if there's a police raid.

This one's got some good kills, but it drags. The main character, Scott, is kind of a dud, although the actor who plays him, John Gatins, would go on to write and produce other movies, and was even Academy Award nominated for his screenplay for the Denzel Washington movie *Flight*.

Maybe there IS some luck in these movies.

LEPRECHAUN IV: LEPRECHAUN IN SPACE

As the title would indicate, the Leprechaun is inexplicably in space. I assume it's inexplicable, because they don't even TRY to explain why the

Leprechaun, last seen in Vegas, is in the future, living on a meteor that's floating around in space. The movie is kind of like, "I don't know, man, just deal with it."

We open with Leprechaun chatting with a space princess, who he intends to marry. Space Princess is also planning to marry the Leprechaun, and both of them are plotting to...look, this really isn't important. Talking about the plot of this movie is like describing movie theater popcorn by outlining the process of creating fake butter: I could bore you with the chemical reactions, but the preferred experience is that you just eat it.

The movie kind of operates as an "in space" checklist, doing all the things that space movies and shows are legally required to do:

- Lightsabers make a barely-copyright-safe appearance.
- Space Marines run around with guns and Britney Spears headset microphones.
- There's a guy in a Commander-Pike-esque space wheelchair that looks

extremely uncomfortable for the actor crammed inside it.

- There's a man-spider, which I think was established as a space staple in the *Lost in Space* movie from the 90's.
- Lots of conversations on viewscreens.

This movie does win the dubious "Pete's Award for Most Ridiculous-est Excuse for Presenting Nudity in a Horror Film."



Previously I bestowed this honor on *Friday the 13th Part 2*, which had a sequence where a woman strips, skinny dips in the most terrifying nighttime lake you couldn't pay me enough to get in, then she comes out of the water, and the movie resumes. This has NO effect on the plot, it's just a thing that happens, presumably because someone was like, "It's 1981, this is a slasher, we need to cram some nudity in this picture!"

But *Leprechaun 4* manages to top it: An

alien woman flashes some people, and then claims she did so because on her planet, flashing people is a threat, the equivalent of a kiss of death.

Dennis A. Pratt, writer of *Leprechaun 4*, send me your address, I'll send you the trophy for this award. Which is 27 metric tons of dried corn.

Did you know it's possible to order 27 metric tons of dried corn, delivered to someone's door, on the internet, for a mere \$110 dollars?

LEPRECHAUN V: LEPRECHAUN IN THE HOOD

I've seen a small number of horror movies that have specifically gone to "the hood" as a setting, and what's weird is that between space and the hood, the hood has a much better track record:

Tales From The Hood: Solid, Legit.

Candyman (1992): Excellent, 10 out of 10.

Leprechaun in the Hood:...ahem

Our engaging story opens with a flashback

that features Ice-T in the 70's finding the Leprechaun by accident, accidentally removing the necklace that keeps the Leprechaun in a stone statue form, accidentally replacing said necklace and turning the Leprechaun back to stone, and also accidentally coming across the Leprechaun's magic flute, which grants people the power to...I don't know, enchant other people or something? Unclear, unimportant.

Ice-T was ALL OVER B movies of the era: *Surviving the Game*, in which Ice-T is hunted in the woods by a bunch of rich dudes, including Gary Busey, *Tank Girl*, in which he played a kangaroo man(?), *Johnny Mnemonic*, in which he played a guy who cures a brain disease by hooking up Keanu Reeves' brain to a dolphin's brain, among others.

And those are all the examples I've got, because you can't go further than "hooking up Keanu Reeves' brain to a dolphin's brain."

Cut to the present, and we have a trio of rappers who are trying to become famous, and the only problem is nobody likes their music. This COULD be because

they have a positive attitude that doesn't appeal to lovers of hardcore rap, or it COULD be because they're terrible rappers.

The rappers get the Leprechaun's flute from Ice-T for reasons that we don't need to go into, then spend the movie sort of walking around in "the hood" avoiding both Ice-T and the Leprechaun while the Leprechaun engages in his lowest-energy chase to date.

This lack of Leprechaun verve COULD be because, early in the film, in what is probably one of the stranger things that's ever happened on a screen, Ice-T and The Leprechaun share a bit of the, er, Jazz Cabbage. Goof Butts. Giggle Smoke.

Marijuana, okay?

Is it possible that *Leprechaun 5* is an indictment on marijuana use? A warning to stay away from drugs because, otherwise, your once lively enthusiasm for murdering people who "steals me gold" will fade into a general malaise, and you'll barely be able to muster the energy to head out into the world and kill people, mostly offscreen,

mostly without doing anything remotely interesting?

Eh, no. I'm going to say that's NOT possible.

Leprechaun 6: Back 2 Tha Hood

I'm not going to lie, it's a struggle to find anything to say about this movie.

At first I was like, "Okay, the first foray to the hood was pretty disappointing, so maybe it's good if they give this a second shot!"

And, typing this now, I realize that I'm 6 *Leprechaun* movies deep, and I'm STILL hoping for the best. I may be the world's greatest practitioner of optimism.

There's a part in this movie where someone's talking on a cell phone, the other person hangs up, and we hear a dial tone, even though dial tone is not a thing on cell phones.

In 2002, just a year earlier, Kelly Rowland famously "texted" Nelly in their video for "Dilemma," and she seemed concerned that he wasn't texting her back. Which may have been because Kelly was clearly texting IN MICROSOFT EXCEL.

Lots of people make fun of these technological blunders, but I give them a pass. In the early 2000's we all had cell phones, and we had no idea what we were doing with them.



I had my first cell phone around then. I paid like \$3 dollars so I could have a Panic! At The Disco ringtone and another \$3 dollars so I could have a Spider-Man wallpaper. Yes, I paid real, human money for a digital picture of Spider-Man that appeared on a 2"x3" screen.

Is that enough? Can we move on?

~

And that's a wrap on *Leprechaun*.

You might be saying, "Pete, where is *Leprechaun Origins*? And what about *Leprechaun Returns*?"

You *might* be saying that, but I doubt it.

I don't consider those canonical as

Warwick Davis did not star as the titular Leprechaun, and therefore they're beneath my interest. Which is a powerful statement from someone who watched 6 *Leprechaun* movies, but hey, my standards are low, but they still exist.

Davis said that he decided to get out of the horror movie game after becoming a father, that it felt different to be in violent gorefests as a dad, but that he would consider going back to it once his kids were a little more grown up.

His kids are now in their 20's. Is it time for The One, True Leprechaun to return?

Funny you should ask.

Word on the street is that Darren Lynn Bousman, director of *Saws 2-4*, is interested in bringing the series back. "Interested" is probably an understatement:

"I really want Leprechaun to get a time machine and start a whole new franchise. I want to send him to the Colorado gold rush. He's gonna go back in time to the Colorado gold rush, and antics will ensue. I will only do it with Warwick

Davis, and I will make this happen. I will will this into existence."

And I think Bousman might be the right person to do it. He GETS *Leprechaun*:

"Here's what I love about the Leprechaun franchise. They're ridiculous. They're fun. They're violent. It's a perfect popcorn horror movie. It's not trying to be uber-serious. It's not trying to be uber-scary. It is just a fun time. I think that I miss those types of movies that are just fun. While I love the Hereditarys and the Midsommars, The Witch. Those are my favorite types of movies. They're not fun."

I may have been a bit young to be on the scene when the Leprechaun was scuttling around Las Vegas, but Bousman, Davis: If you are headed Colorado way, and you need an extra with his own boots and cowboy hat who can watch a leprechaun do something super messed up and then yell "Holy Toledo!", I am 100% your huckleberry.



THE GHOSTS OF CAGEMAS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE!

The other night some friends invited me to go out to the movies.

"A Nic Cage movie?!" I asked.

They said "No, it's—" and that's all I heard because I hung up the phone. And I mean I really hung it up. I created a pretty advanced phone cradle that I use to hang up my cell whenever I'm particularly unhappy. Nothing helps a feeling of betrayal like slamming a phone down, you really should try it.

Then I crossed my arms, turned on the TV, and went through my Nic Cage DVD's.

Yes, I still have DVD's. Did you think someone with a phone that can be hung up on the wall wouldn't have DVD's?

And as I scanned the titles, something caught my eye.

Superman...Lives?

I opened the case, and -WHOOSH- out flew a ghost. At least, I was pretty sure it was a ghost. It was a lady in an old-timey dress, and she was bright and fuzzy around the edges, and her clothes were all wispy and stuff. And when she talked, she taaaaaaalked liiiiiiike thiiiiiiiiiiiiis, which is a thing only ghosts do constantly. The living get bored trying to keep up that whole ghost accent pretty quickly, so they drop it unless they're saying words like, "Boooooo" or "Halloweeeeeen!"

I said, "Greetings, ghost."

The ghost said, "Aren't you frightened by my appearance?"

I said, "I guess not. I thought I would be, but conveniently enough to keep this plot moving, I'm not. So, what are you here for? You want me to lay your body to rest or something? Some kind of revenge against my great-grandfather? Ancient ritual to let you pass to the afterlife, but then it turns out you suckered me in and I doomed the entirety of existence with my buffoonery?"

The ghost looked a little confused, then said, "I am The Ghost of Cagemas Past, and I bring you to a Nicolas Cage movie from the past that was never made!"

Which explained *Superman Lives*.

The ghost said, "You must watch this DVD, and you must not tell a soul what you see here today."

I said, "Rad, will do." Then I looked off to the side and winked. Because from the very first second, I was TOTALLY planning to tell you all about *Superman Lives*, but the Ghost didn't need to know that.

~



As is now fairly common knowledge, Nicolas Cage was set to play Superman in the ill-fated *Superman Lives*, which was

loosely based on *The Death of Superman*, an event that happened in the 90's, sold a billion comics, and is for sure responsible for the 90's comics bubble.

I guess *Superman Lives* is kind of a weird title for a movie about Superman's death, but it was the late 90's, and we weren't ready for a grim Superman movie that was hopeless. You know, the kind where him and Zod fight and destroy all of Metropolis, Superman's adopted father dies in a completely preventable way, and Lois Lane is kind of sad and mopey for valid reasons, but still, sad.

Superman would have been a pretty monumental Cage role, maybe the pinnacle of his action career. It would've released pretty shortly after the back-to-back hits of *Face/Off* and *Con Air*, and before the 3-movie slump of *Snake Eyes*, *8mm*, and *Bringing Out The Dead* (all have their charms, but none can beat *Con Air* in a "Cage" match).

With a script written by Kevin Smith, the DVD I saw was a bit unusual, but at the same time, kind of delightful. You can tell Kevin Smith is a big fan of comics, and he goes to great lengths to have

cameos with characters like Deadshot, a very underrated and underused (until recently) DC villain.

Before we go any further, anyone want to take a shot at Cage's first line as Superman from the script?

Take, I don't know, 1,000 guesses, you won't get it.

Because it's a very Homer Simpson, "Mmm... spaghetti." It mostly makes sense in the scene, but it's still a pretty strange first line from The Man of Steel after such a long hiatus from the big screen.

ESPECIALLY unusual is, Sandra Bullock cast as Lois Lane, and she's Cage's SAME AGE!

Since when is the romantic lead age-appropriate? This truly is an alternate-universe movie.

By the way, I'll just say it now, late-90's Sandra Bullock is perfect Lois Lane casting. Snooping reporter, constantly getting in over her head, battling verbally with Lex Luthor. This is truly a loss to be mourned, but save those tears for Sandra BullockTimes Day, the

day when we eat chocolate and watch *Speed* on repeat.

It's hard for me to describe this Superman movie, the feel of it, but Cage has said that if you want to know what his performance as The Man of Steel would've been like, you can just watch *City of Angels*:

I was supposed [to play] Clark Kent after [City of Angels] and I was already developing this alien otherness playing this angel. That is a perfect example of the tonality you would've gotten for Kal-El and for Clark Kent: Clark would've been a little more amusing but Kal-El had the sensitivity and the goodness and the vulnerability and all those feelings that were kind of angelic and also terrifying.

Now, unless you're visited by a weird analog-format-loving ghost like I was, you'll never get to see this movie, and that's for a variety of speculated reasons. But a lot of fingers seemed to eventually point back to Jon Peters, producer, who had some of his own ideas for the film, including:

- Brainiac (Superman's enemy) fighting

Polar Bears

- Brainiac giving Lex Luthor some kind of "space dog" companion
- Giving Brainiac a sassy R2D2-like sidekick/assistant
- And, of course, the movie's third act would NEED to have a fight between Superman and a giant mechanical spider, spiders being, as Peters put it, the ultimate predator.

However misguided some of his ideas may have been, Peters recognized one fundamental truth: He believed Nicolas Cage was the perfect actor to convince audiences that Superman was, in fact, from outer space.

And on that note, I must agree.

~

As the ghost opened the DVD tray and took out the *Superman Lives* DVD, she made me promise to not tell anyone about the movie I'd just seen.

"Oh, totally," I said. "Your secret is safe with me!"

And then that ghost disappeared.

Before I could figure out how to write a great IMDB review of a movie that didn't exist, a second, new ghost popped into my living room.

This ghost looked a lot like the first ghost, except she wore a pair of mom jeans and had some sort of ghost phone that she never once looked up from the whole time she was talking to me.

"I'm The Ghost of Cagemas Present," she said. "Here. You're supposed to watch this Nicolas Cage movie from the present that was never made."

And I was handed a DVD called, "*Joe Exotic: King of Tigers*"

~

In our world, Cage was reportedly offered the role of Joe Exotic in a Tiger King movie.

If you haven't seen *Tiger King*, it mostly follows a man named Joe Exotic who ran a...let's call it a zoo where he kept a bunch of wild cats in big cages in



one of those states where that's still something people are allowed to do for some reason. I'm a pretty "live and let live" kind of person who doesn't like to tread upon the freedoms of others, but I suspect that line would get very blurry for me if a dozen tigers lived next door.

And that's the thing: each person who owns tigers seems to own multiple tigers. This isn't a one-and-done pet thing, you either have zero tigers or like 15.

The show *Tiger King* takes a lot of twists and turns, there's an alleged murder, which was allegedly covered up by HAVING A CORPSE DEVOURED BY TIGERS, which I suppose is the only way a person could say there's a reasonable use for large cats as pets (although this presumes that murder is a reasonable thing, which it isn't, but we're dealing with a pretty unusual set of circumstances here, shortcuts in logic must be taken).

As I watched Nicolas Cage play Joe Exotic and run through several of the scenes from the documentary, I was stunned by a weird feeling.

This was a movie I didn't think we

needed. The *Tiger King* show was pretty compelling, and I didn't think Cage would add any weirdness to it that wasn't already there.

However.

HOWEVER.

A small portion of the TV documentary focused on Joe Exotic's career as a country music singer. I won't impugn the man by saying anything about his songs. Just...listen for yourself.

And as a DVD extra, there were several music videos where Cage sang Joe Exotic's songs AS Joe Exotic.

And then, another bonus feature, a live concert where Cage performed all of Joe Exotic's songs, AS Joe Exotic.

This concert film, my friends, was far better than *Primal*, the Cage movie we DID get where Cage plays a big game hunter or something and gets stuck on a boat



with a bunch of his captured animals that, of course, get loose. This movie took a wrong turn from the start because there's an obvious Noah's Ark parallel here, except instead of saving two of each animal, he has to kill two of each. Missed opportunity.

~

The Ghost of Christmas Present said something about her phone being almost out of battery and disappeared.

Then Robocop showed up.

This resulted in a very long, very drawn-out conversation between the two of us.

Why was Robocop there? Nic Cage wasn't in Robocop, right? Did the makers of *Robocop* meet this ghost and create Robocop to resemble him, or...what?

I'll spare you all of this because the answers were all ridiculous and really throw off the believability of an already unbelievable story here, suffice to say The RoboGhost of Christmas Future used his data spike thing to stab into my DVD player and start playing a Cagemas movie

from the near future.

~

Slated for 2024, *Longlegs* is a movie with very little info out there, but Cage did share some details:

It's about a character who's hearing voices. It's kind of like a possessed Geppetto, who's making these dolls



As an aficionado of doll-based horror (of which there is TONS), I was already in. *M3gan* is my Movie of 2023, even though it came out in 2022. *Dolls* is an underrated classic. And the novel *Toy Cemetery* has to be the most bonkers thing I've ever read.

Plus, *Longlegs* is directed by Oz Perkins, who's made some pretty solid

horror flicks over the last few years.

What can I say? I don't want to ruin it for you. But if you, like me, and like anyone of taste, look forward to a movie where Cage plays an energetic, bizarre creep, then I suggest purchasing your shades now, because your future is about to get pret-ty bright.

~

Once the credits on *Longlegs* rolled, I was back in the present with you, you normals who don't hop around through time or dimensions or whatever it is I did.

I checked my DVD rack, and sure enough, *Superman*, *Tiger King*, and *Longlegs* were all gone. Although there was still a huge hole in my DVD player where Robocop stabbed it with his data spike thingy. I wish he'd just played the DVD. I mean, this was my moment, like when the kid in *Polar Express* has the bell at the end, so he knows it really happened. But couldn't I have a bell or something instead of a destroyed piece of electronic equipment?

But I calmed down after I realized, hey,

I'd just seen 3 Nicolas Cage movies that nobody else on Earth had seen. This was something I could call up my friends and tell them about, and they would SEETHE with jealousy.

And isn't that the true spirit of Cagemas?

WAXQUELS: DOUBLE THE WAX, DOUBLE THE FUN!

And that's NOT just what the doctor said when he had to irrigate my ears one time because of an overabundance of wax. No, he said something like, "Wow, gross!" Which seemed unprofessional, but enthusiastic, so good enough for me.

Welcome to this edition of HPLD's Cult Movie Vault, the semi-monthly column where we talk just a little bit about some movies because of a curse or something. I don't know, I can't even remember how this happened...alien prison? Gremlin? Ghoulie? Munchie? Spaced Invader?

This time we have a DOUBLE Feature with *Waxwork* (1988) and *House of Wax* (2005), or, as I like to call them, Waxquels.

Why "Waxquels?"

Well, the holidays just passed, which

means I participated in my annual Scrabble tournament. It's a little grandiose to call it a tournament when I play one game, get totally destroyed, and go home in a huff, but in my defense, most tournaments, whether they be athletic, intelligence-based, or skill-based, go like that for me.

Do I lose the Scrabble tournament so badly every year that once I demanded we rotate the board counterclockwise and each person move into the seat on their right because I could only assume the drubbing I was taking was due to a curse placed on the western side of the board and/or table?

Yeah. Yeah, I did that.

This year, as I stared at the useless letters on my little wooden thing that holds the other little wooden things in Scrabble, I came up with a great word that'd win me the day: Waxquel.

Unfortunately, this was not a word as of 2023, and I went home in tears. But in 2024, with the publication of this newsletter, "Waxquel" will now enter the lexicon, as backed up by a LIBRARY newsletter.

THE WAXQUELS

Right off, something both of these movies have in common is that they are remakes of older movies. The original *Waxwork* was made in 1924, and the remake came out in 1988. 64 years! Maybe that's what the Beatles were talking about with their song "When I'm 64," the appropriate length of time between *Waxwork* reboots.

A person who was born when the first *Waxwork* came out could be retired by the time the remake was in theaters. They could've lived a full life! Got an education, had a career, children, learned to craft, I don't know, wooden flutes or something. This would be a completely different person, justifying the statement: The same man can never step into a theater twice to see *Waxwork*.

Someone born when *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* came out wouldn't even be able to get themselves to the theater to see *Spider-Man: Homecoming* without someone calling the police, which is the correct thing to do when a toddler is out and about on its own. The last thing we want is a *Baby's Day Out* situation on our hands.

House of Wax has a pretty healthy time chunk between its two iterations as well, the first one being in 1953 and the second in 2005, and perhaps most importantly to the remake's feel, the 2005 version came out after the explosion of 2000's bands such as Prodigy, The Deftones, and Marilyn Manson.

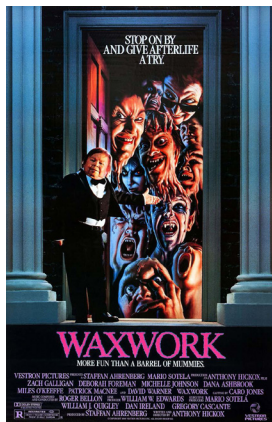
Let's start with the *Waxwork* and then get to *House of Wax*. Because all work and no...wait, that doesn't work. Work before play...house...I guess...

WAXWORK

The first time I saw *Waxwork*, I was NOT convinced. It's kind of slow, you know what's happening way before anyone in the movie does, and it all feels a little drawn out.

But then you get to the last 10%, and your life is forever changed.

The basic setup here is that there's a wax



museum with a bunch of your classic monsters in it: your Draculas, your Phantoms of the Opera, your Copyright-Safe Zombies, your Public Domain Terrors (although Jason doesn't appear, Kane Hodder, who often played Jason in the *Friday the 13th* series, DID play Frankenstein's monster).

If wax museum goers cross the barriers and go into the exhibits, they find themselves sucked into the world of those exhibits. Which, to be fair, I'm on the wax museum's side, here. All these people have to do is respect the velvet ropes and nothing bad happens. I bet lots of museum curators watch this movie and think, "Well, that's comeuppance for you!"

The characters are slowly entering exhibits and getting trapped with the monsters, including the least believable part of the movie when a jock character is super intrigued by being in the world of *The Phantom of the Opera* (yeah right, we ALL knew a quarterback who was into serialized French novels).

There's more story, I don't know, a bunch of nonsense about some guy collecting

the 18 most evil objects on Earth or something like that in order to rule the Federation of Planets or whatever.

None of this matters because the ending is about to jump out and slap me right in the face.

I'm not a big "the ending makes it worthwhile" guy, and *Waxwork* is the one exception I make to that rule, because it's TOTALLY worth it.

After seeing the end, I almost suspect the boredom of the first 7/8 of the movie was intentional, that we would be lulled into a stupor, and then when the ending hits, it's like waking up because someone jammed a beer funnel filled with 5-Hour Energy in your mouth, clamps headphones to your head that are blasting Dragonforce, and you're also freefalling from a plane. Any one of those things would be jarring, all three is a lot, and coming straight from sleep into that scenario, that's kind of the *Waxwork* effect.

Okay, as we approach the end, everyone knows the wax museum exhibits are real, and the various monsters are entering our world.

Or ARE they!?

Because we fortunately have a whole bunch of grandpas with axes and other hand weapons who charge into the museum and do battle with a bugman, a mummy, Moriarty, vampires, The Marquis de Sade, zombies, a demon baby, a giant man-eating plant, a werewolf, a pirate.

I'm not really sure why all the good guys are elderly men, but I guess good for those actors. You don't get cast as the weird old man with the shovel in *Home Alone*, and it's slim pickings out there.



This giant melee with no seeming sense or reason to it is almost indescribable. Explosions, people being shot, stabbed... it feels like it was storyboarded when the director put a 7 year-old into a

room, somebody dumped a complete mishmash of action figures out on the floor, and then whatever the kid did with a ninja, a barbarian, a space man, a vampire, all of that was recorded and re-created in the big battle scene that wraps up this movie.

By the time we get to this sequence in the movie, the movie's body count is a respectable 20. By the end, which comes in about 10, we're up to 74. In the climax of this movie, someone is exploded, stabbed, or bursts into flames about every 20 seconds.

I did manage to dig up a little background on this movie and learned a little bit about why it probably felt like a rushed, chaotic collision of maniacal energy, and the reason it felt like that is because it WAS like that.

Let's talk a moment about completion bond companies.

In film, a completion bond is an agreement between the movie's production team, the investors, and a bond company, and what it does is guarantee that a movie will be delivered on time and on budget.

Now, let's say your movie is NOT going to wrap shooting on schedule.

The completion bond company can take on a few options to get things on track: They can pay back the investors, which is a super expensive proposition, they can get involved and basically watch over production's shoulder to make sure things are getting finished and the budget is being respected, OR they can assert their right to completely take over the production and finish the movie. Meaning that an entirely new crew will take over the film's production, including a new director, cinematographer, etc., and they'll just finish up the movie however they like.

Waxwork was going over budget, and the bond company came in and told the production they had a single, 13-hour shooting day to complete this final battle sequence, which was by far the biggest, most elaborate piece of the entire thing.

To give you an idea of what that meant, a typical movie might do 20 or so setups (term for putting together the actors, sets, lighting, effects, etc. for a shot)

a day, and a sitcom with pretty standard sets and lighting and so on might get 35 or 40 done in a day. *Waxwork* had to do something like 80 setups in one day, and those were action sequences with special effects and costumes, crowd scenes, the (wax)works, if you will.

They filmed about 4 times as much movie as is reasonable in a single day, and it shows in the best possible way.

Waxwork is a little sleepy during most of its run, but if you make it to the end, you'll see one of the wildest sequences ever committed to film.

HOUSE OF WAX

We can't talk about this movie without talking about Paris Hilton.

Which is a little weird because the cast is rounded out by Chad Michael Murray, Jared Padalecki, Elisha Cuthbert, and MY MAN DAMON HERRIMAN, DEWEY



CROWE HIMSELF!

So many stars were in this movie, the skies were dark for weeks! So what's with the casting of a celebrity not known for her acting?

Well...the rumor is that Hilton was the first role cast in the film, and she was the third choice after Kate Winslet and Jennifer Connelly.

Let's start here: I suppose you can ASK Kate Winslet, who'd been nominated for the Best Actress Academy Award twice in the previous 7 years, Best Supporting Actress twice as well, to be in your horror movie. Of course, you're free to request Jennifer Connelly, who spent the last 10 years working on movies like *Requiem for a Dream* and *A Beautiful Mind*, be in your movie.

You can ASK whoever you want to play the 4th or 5th tier character in your movie, right? Here, watch this: I'm asking Kate Winslet to star in an HPLD video we're shooting to promote our Book a Librarian service. How about it? If you have leftover cardigans from your role in *Steve Jobs*, that'd be about perfect.

Now, when I go to cast library staff in the movie, I'll say, "We've got a request out to Kate Winslet."

My suspicion is that Paris Hilton was cast because the producers of this movie knew it needed something, an extra push, a way to get people talking about it. Because it's otherwise kind of a bumbling movie.

For starters, it has an overcomplicated "which twin is the evil one" subplot that doesn't matter because WELL before the end of the movie, BOTH twins are evil. One was apparently born evil, the other came to evil a little later in life, but by the time we meet them in the movie, both have been killing hapless teens for several years, maybe even decades, and I don't know how important it is that one of the twins was born a monster and the other was a bit of a late bloomer.

The other very weird thing is that the filmmakers REALLY blew the reveal, that the wax figures in the titular House of Wax were not really statues, but people who had been covered in wax!

Here's how it goes in the movie: Elisha Cuthbert and Jared Padalecki go into the

house because, at this point, it's a sensible thing to do. They are separated, and you, the viewer, see Padalecki abducted, taken to the basement, and put into a machine that covers him in wax, sort of like a tanning booth but instead of spraying a flattering tan, it sprays hot wax.

THEN, Cuthbert discovers what we already know, that Dean/Sam, depending on your Padalecki era, has been waxed. Cue *Scooby-Doo* chase music (or, in this case...let's go with Prodigy).

Here's how they SHOULD have managed this:

The pair is separated, and we, the viewers, follow Cuthbert. As she goes off and does whatever it is she's doing in the house, she then comes back and notices a statue seated at the piano that looks suspiciously like Padalecki. She sits next to it on the piano bench or examines it or whatever, and then realizes it's his REAL CORPSE.

That's an exciting reveal!

When you show us the whole process of making the waxified corpses, it takes the

punch out of the reveal.

This is why I think Hilton was cast: Because the movie is kind of a hot, melty, waxy mess, and I could totally see the producers being like, "We need to reveal the killer way earlier" and "Can we throw in a twist with twins or something," and "How about a stunt cast?"

I ALSO suspect this casting came later because if you're casting Paris Hilton in a movie about people who get turned into wax statues, wouldn't you absolutely, 100% have her turned into a wax statue? As a beauty and style icon of the time, as well as being an inexperienced actor, being turned into a wax statue as soon as possible was the role she was born to play! It's like casting Arnold as a super-intimidating killer robot who barely speaks.

Or, you know, you could just have her killed in the woods and put her body in the back of a pickup truck. You do you, *House of Wax*.

Hilton's casting was also interesting because it seems the producers and Hilton herself sort of embraced the

public perception of Hilton. The tagline "On May 6th, See Paris Die" ended up replacing the movie's original tagline, and Hilton sold a line of t-shirts with the slogan printed on them.

I don't know that I've ever seen a horror movie marketed on the fact that one of the non-antagonist characters dies, a minor spoiler. I don't even really know what to call it. Anti-Marketing? Death Marketing?

I suppose some may see it as cruel or hateful, and I can understand that perspective. But I see it differently. I think this is a pretty early acknowledgement of the line that horror movies walk. Because when someone goes to see *Friday the 13th*, they are not necessarily rooting for the survival of the camp counselors, with the possible exception of the final girl. They are rooting for the mayhem in the form of Jason, and they are interested to see the death sequences.

In a weird way, the villains of some franchises become a sort of hero.

You get the same thing in *Alien Versus Predator* when the Predator teams up

with a human woman in order to fight the xenomorphs for some reason, essentially warping the Predator into the movie's good guy sidekick. You can also see this in the *Jurassic World* movies when the fearsome T-Rex becomes a hero character. And in the recent *Saw* movie where Jigsaw basically becomes a scambuster. And, in a more thoughtful way, the 2021 *Candyman* movie where Candyman becomes a spirit of justifiable revenge as opposed to a ghoul assaulting children in a public bathroom.

Horror movies always struggle with the idea that their main characters are not the final girls or folks who ultimately defeat the monster, but the monsters themselves.

Sometimes, when handled badly, the result is that the monster fundamentally changes and becomes the hero.

But sometimes, when the filmmakers understand this dynamic and leans into it without trying to change it, it can work.

All these things aside, what unites *Waxwork* and *House of Wax* is that the last 15 minutes or so of both is bonkers.

In *House of Wax*, the final confrontation takes place in the House of Wax, which is made ENTIRELY of wax, and, whoops, starts burning/melting.



It's kind of awesome to see this giant house melting down into a molten puddle, and there's a pretty nice mix of practical effects going on. Again, it's a movie that is kind of boring and by-the-numbers up to this point, but the last 15 minutes are worth it. Eh, almost worth it.

And then we roll credits to My Chemical Romance's "Helena," which is both totally inappropriate and the only logical choice. This is the point at which I stood up and clapped.

WAX UP

I wanted to wrap this part up with the best, most exciting stuff so that the article paralleled the way the movies work, but how can I hope to compare to

the greatness that is the end of a wax-based movie?

However, I do have one more trick up my sleeve, along with a bunch of cleverly-concealed Scrabble tiles in a pouch I sewed myself:

If you want to get in on the waxy action, sure, you could watch Waxwork or House of Wax, OR you could buy this full-sized wax dummy on eBay for just under \$5,000 bucks.



I HAVE to assume the horror punch of these Waxquels is greatly increased if this fellow is hanging around your house at night.

HPLD CULT MOVIE VAULT PRESENTS: FROZEN (NOT THAT ONE)

This edition of HPLD's Cult Movie Vault is partially about the movie *Frozen*, and partially about changing its name, officially, to the full title: *Frozen: Not That One*.

For those who don't know, *Frozen: Not That One* is a horror movie about 3 youths who are trapped on a ski lift in a blizzard. With no help coming and the ski resort closed for the week, they have to make some desperate decisions in order to not be...Frozen (Not That One).

~

Let's get this out of the way: *Frozen: Not That One*, came out three years BEFORE *Frozen* (working subtitle: Yes, *That One*), and the two have nothing

to do with each other than creating a confusing situation, especially if one were to look up *Frozen: Not That One* by mistake, and see Kane Hodder, the man who played Jason Voorhees, in the credits. Which role could he possibly play in a magical Disney animated film? A terrifying, ice-axe-wielding snow monster of some kind?

You might be wondering how it's possible for two movies to have the same title. Well, it turns out that this is not only legal, but pretty common.

There are obvious cases. When you call a move "Possession," you can kind of expect that'll be reused.

There are also incidents that are probably no accident, like when a low-budget movie titled "Wanted" comes out a year after the big budget Angelina Jolie movie of the same name.

There are two *Broken Arrows*, one being



about a conflict between cowboys and Native Americans, the other being about John Travolta stealing a nuclear weapon or a stealth bomber or a train or... something? Definitely not a case where someone is trying to create confusion for profit.

Apparently, the deal is that you can use the same name for two different movies provided the name isn't super, incredibly unique. "The Girl Next Door" is such a common phrase that you can't trademark it as a movie title.

So here's a hot tip: If you want to trademark your movie's title, call it something like, "The Maddening Fraptabjulosity of Dr. Goober McToober." However, if your movie is shaping up to be a pile of junk, it might be to your advantage to use an already-used, sneaky title in order to potentially trick people into watching your movie. They probably won't be pleased with your "Exorcist," but I guess you have to take what you can get.

While we're this far off on a tangent, explain this to me, Hollywood: You won't let two actors be credited with the same

name, yet two movies can have the same title. As if a production is going to accidentally hire the wrong "Patrick Stewart," only realizing their error when a 12 year-old kid with a syrupy Mississippi accent shows up on set to play King Lear.

Anyhow, back to *Frozen: Not That One*.

Frozen: Not That One kicks off with three very 2010 protagonists at a ski resort, and they're trying to get on a ski lift without buying a lift ticket.

We have:

A guy we'll call Zac Efron because he DOES look quite a bit like 2010's Zac Efron, before Zac got super ripped and broke a cardinal rule: you can be super handsome, but if you're super handsome, you have to leave being shredded to the rest of us. It's the only way we can walk the same streets, man!

We have: ICEMAN FROM X-MEN!? Ho, how ironic that what was once his lifeblood in an older movie is now his undoing!

We have: Girl, portrayed by Emma Bell, who you will probably mistake for another

actor from another thing, but you'll be wrong UNLESS the thing you were thinking of is the music video for "New Romance" by Miles Fisher, in which Bell, well, I'll let the wiki describe it:

Falls to her death through the window, after falling facefirst into her desk and getting stabbed in the face by pencils. (Played for comic effect.)

(I took a moment to watch this video. It's a *Saved by the Bell* parody, but with horrific deaths. Imagine *Final Destination* happening at Bayside High. 10 out of 10)



The plan here is that Zac has sweet talked a woman working the ski lift into letting our three heroes on the lift without a ticket. This tracks, again, he's Zac Efron's double. Even if I knew he wasn't actually Zac Efron, I would

risk my job to let his doppelganger get away with stuff. In my case, I guess that would be renewing his books over and over.

However, dun dun duNNN! This plan is thwarted when a gentleman takes up the post at the lift, the woman Zac is wooing being nowhere in sight.

The trio decide that Girl should try and sweettalk this gentleman into letting them go up the mountain for free...or, at least, for a reduced price.

What might seem shocking is that Zac has \$200 of bribe money to get on the lift. How is slipping someone \$200 a savings? But you've got to remember, this is for 3 people, and legitimate pass purchase would cost...

...OH MY LAND, \$219 dollars *per person*! That's TWICE what it costs to get into Disney! Even looking back at prices from about 2010, a \$200 dollar bribe would STILL be a major cost savings.
<https://www.snowboarder.com/transworld-snowboarding-archive/when-did-ski-resort-lift-tickets-become-so-expensive>

How does anyone afford skiing? How much

do you all get paid to write library newsletter articles about silly movies?

Girl pays the lift guy, the trio hits the slopes, and as we get towards the end of the day, the lift is being shut down because bad weather is coming in. Which seems a little odd, what's usually "bad weather" for us in town is kind of ideal weather for a ski resort, right? But, whatever, what do I know? I'm still reeling from the price tag on a lift ticket.

The trio talks the lift guy into letting them take one last run, they get on the chair, and head up.

Now, through a series of characters replacing the ski lift operators at the top and bottom, each replacement seemingly more stoned and irresponsible than the last, the ski lift shuts down, our heroes are stuck on the ski lift about halfway up the mountain, and they realize they ain't going nowhere.

They're stuck, and not just for a few hours. They're trapped over the entire week, this being a ski resort that's only open on weekends.

Brief Pause: First we have the bribery, then the skiing at a weekend-only resort. Keep these two factors in mind, we'll come back to them.

Unpause.

Of course, the answer most of us would consider to this problem is: Well, I guess we'll have to jump.

Unfortunately, this lift is SUPER high up, and the fall from that distance is definitely going to cause some damage. The snow underneath is hardpack, more like hitting a very slick cement floor than falling into a fluffy pile of powder.

I was always curious why ski lifts had to be so high. It seems a bit excessive, to me. Couldn't we achieve the same thing, I don't know, 10 feet off the ground? A very survivable fall?

Some responses online said that the problem with a lower ski lift is that people would just jump off whenever if it was safe to do so, to which I have to ask: So what? For \$219 dollars, I feel that maybe I should have some customization options, know what I mean? At a \$219 dollar dinner, I would think I

could order a steak to whatever level of doneness I prefer. If I want to get off a ski lift halfway, doesn't \$219 dollars buy me some leeway?

Anyway, we're now into the core of *Frozen: Not That One*: "We're all stuck on this ski lift, now what?"

It's kind of brilliant in terms of making a low budget movie. You only need one location, really, and very little in terms of other sets and actors and things. But it's tough in terms of screenwriting because once they're trapped...then what?

Frozen: Not That One's answer is that it kind of turns into a Kevin Smith movie where the bulk of the movie is the three characters talking about stuff, the difference being that instead of punctuating the talk with a convenience store customer or a hockey game on the roof, the chatter is interrupted by some horror, gore, and eventually, yes, wolves.

It's a genre I call Chatter/Splatter, a movie type where the horror setup is more a scaffolding for dialogue.

I'm not sure it works quite as well on a ski slope as it does in a convenience store, though.

On a ski lift,
in the freezing
night, you're
kind of on
a ticking
clock. It's
not a jovial
atmosphere, so
talking about
Star Wars
doesn't quite
hit the same.



And it doesn't really work on a horror
level, either.

Watching Jason or Freddy stalk a young
adult is filled with tension, but
watching that same young adult be very
cold is just kinda...well, unpleasant.
It doesn't feel harrowing, know what I
mean? I was cold yesterday. This isn't a
new dimension of terror, like Pinhead in
space or Leprechaun in space or Jason in
space or Michael Myers in Haddonfield.

When are we going to get Mikey in space?

~

Frozen: Not That One is an entry into the canon of movies where people find themselves trapped within a leisure activity. See also: *Open Water*, the movie where scuba divers on an excursion are left in Open Water by the boat that was supposed to pick them up. See Also: one of those movies where they're exploring a house or a cave underwater and get stuck or find a ghost or something. See also: The one where the two ladies climb a very tall tower in the desert and then get stuck. See also: *The Descent*, where a spelunking party turns into a situation with...demons? Gremlins? Descentemons?

These are all cautionary tales to a greater or lesser degree. I don't think you have to tell most people that climbing a wind farm tower is a terrible idea, but I assume most of us think these other activities are relatively safe. Most people survive scuba diving (999,999 out of every million), most of us can handle some light cave exploration, and skiing is fairly safe, at least the chairlift part, despite what *Frozen: Not That One*, would lead us to believe.

According to a whole bunch of science stuff, there were only 3 chairlift fatalities between 2004 and 2016, and 86% of non-fatal chairlift accidents are attributable to "rider error."

Now, let's be real, a good chunk of that 86% is probably better categorized as "sucks at skiing," as opposed to "rider error." I mean, when the intended function of the chairlift is to dump you off onto a slippery slope that you'll slide down on two metal tracks, while standing upright...is it fair to say that someone who falls over while attempting this "made an error?"

But, whatever, there were 57 skiing deaths during the 2021-2022 ski season, so it seems like the real danger is on the slopes, and maybe being high above them, mostly immobilized, is a lot safer than being on the ground. You're probably better off on the lift than you are on your own two skis.

If there's not much danger to riding a ski lift, what are we being cautioned against, here?

Remember how I told you to note the ski lift scam and the going to a resort that

is only open on weekends?

My theory about *Frozen: Not That One* is that this is a ski industry propaganda film.

Think about it: This film underlines and bolds the point that not buying a lift ticket is a bad idea that may, MAY result in a slow and really unpleasant death.

This film subtly suggests that skiing at a lesser resort, one that is only open on weekends, could result in a suboptimal experience, such as eating lousy pizza (this also happens in the movie) or being torn apart by packs of wolves.

In fact, after writing it out, I'm at the point where I view *Frozen: Not That One* as a direct threat from the ski industry, a shot across the bow to anyone who would dare to try and cheat the system or, gasp, ski at a "lesser" resort.

We're right at the edge of exposing the sinister underbelly of this corrupt industry. What could be scarier than that?

~

This is usually the part where I promote library services, say something like, "If you want to be able to afford a day of skiing, use your library!" But, oof, with a price tag like \$219, I don't know if the library is going to be enough.

So instead, I'm going to tell you how to get the most out of *Frozen: Not That One*.

1. Get the movie for free from your library.
2. Dress up in ski clothes. If you don't have ski clothes, just dress in warm clothes, and then 3D print a pair of plastic boots that are mega uncomfortable. That'll get you there.
3. Turn your TV so it faces out a window.
4. Go outside and watch the movie, using either subtitles or, if you're fancy, Bluetooth headphones.

See, cold is a hard thing to express in movies. It's like having a movie where there's a really unpleasant smell: things that aren't visual or auditory just don't carry as much weight in

movies.

You could make this an annual event and invite friends. I once watched *Jaws* on an inflatable tube in a giant lake, and it was WAY better than usual. Which is saying something with *Jaws*.

Maybe you can convince a ski resort to let you screen this on the slopes at night. Ha, I bet they'd LOVE it. An event that brings people to the mountain AND drives home the point that one should NEVER, EVER neglect to pay for lift tickets? What more could they want!?