An Ars roundup of the many trailers unveiled this weekend during Comic-Con@Home

Enlarge / Several studios unveiled new teasers and trailers for their 2020 fall series during Comic-Con@Home
Sean Carroll (AMC/Hulu/HBO/Fox/Amazon)

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People might not be able to flock to San Diego Comic Con this year in person, but the virtual convention, Comic-Con@Home, has been running all weekend, with countless panels, sneak peeks, and teasers and trailers for upcoming TV shows—but not many films, because let's be honest: it's not looking so good for major theatrical film releases in the fall. On Thursday alone, we got the full trailer for *Bill and Ted Face the Music*, a teaser for the Simon Pegg/Nick Frost horror comedy *Truth Seekers*, and the first trailer for S2 of HBO's *His Dark Materials*. Rather than continue to cover each individually, we decided to compile the remaining trailers of interest into a single roundup post.

[embedded content]
HBO dropped the final trailer for *Lovecraft Country*, debuting August 16.
***Lovecraft Country* (HBO)**

HBO unveiled the final trailer for its upcoming horror series, *Lovecraft Country*, along with an official release date: August

16. It’s based on the 2016 dark fantasy/horror novel of the same name by Matt Ruff, which deals explicitly with the horrors of racism in the 1950s, along with other, more supernatural Lovecraftian-inspired issues. Per the official synopsis:

> *The series follows Atticus (Jonathan Majors) as he joins up with his friend Letitia (Jurnee Smollett-Bell) and his Uncle George (Courtney B. Vance) to embark on a road trip across 1950s Jim Crow America in search of his missing father (Michael Kenneth Williams). This begins a struggle to survive and overcome both the racist terrors of white America and the terrifying monsters that could be ripped from a Lovecraft paperback.*

HBO released a teaser in May, followed by a full trailer in June. This latest trailer combines some of that prior footage, but gives us a few more hints of the story arc: namely, that Atticus’ search involves a “secret birthright” relating to a rich family’s estate deep in the titular Lovecraft Country, and that he ignores repeated warnings to stay away. Prior sneak peeks have focused on the human monsters spawned by racism; now the Lovecraftian creatures are finally ready for their closeup. This new trailer makes us even more eager for the series premiere next month.

[embedded content]
John Cusack stars in *Utopia*, a reboot of the controversial British dark comedy/thriller.

***Utopia* (Amazon Prime)**

This new Amazon Prime series is a reboot (adapted by *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* author Gillian Flynn) of the controversial 2013-2014 British black comedy/conspiracy thriller about online fans of a dystopian graphic novel called *Utopia* that seems to have the power to predict the real-world future. They are obsessed with tracking down the sequel (which supposedly also predicts future world events). This makes them

targets of a secret organization called The Network. The British version received critical praise for its originality and visual style, offset by strong reservations about its extreme violence, which struck many as unnecessarily gratuitous. (The most famous scene involved a torturer using a spoon to gouge out a victim's eye).

It remains to be seen if Amazon's *Utopia* will match the same scale of violence, although I'd wager anyone who sat through the extended torture scenes in the first season of *Altered Carbon* should be handle to handle it. Per the official premise: "When the conspiracy in the elusive comic *Utopia* is real, a group of young fans come together to embark on a high-stakes twisted adventure to use what they uncover to save themselves, each other and ultimately humanity." The cast includes John Cusack (*Grosse Pointe Blank*) as Dr. Kevin Christie, Rainn Wilson (*The Office*) as Michael Stearns, and Sasha Lane (2019's *Hellboy*) as Jessica Hyde.

[embedded content]
A sentient AI runs amok and tries to wipe out the human race in new Fox series *NeXT*.

***NeXT* (Fox)**

"It's not paranoia if the threat is real." That's the tagline for *NeXT*, an upcoming techno-thriller starring John Slattery (*Mad Men, Spotlight*). Per the official synopsis:

> *NeXT is a fact-based thriller about the emergence of a deadly, rogue artificial intelligence that combines action with an examination of how technology is invading our lives and transforming us in ways we don't yet understand. Slattery stars as a Silicon Valley pioneer, who discovers that one of his own creations—a powerful A.I.—might spell global catastrophe and teams up with a cybercrime agent, played by The First's Fernanda Andrade, to fight a villain.*

The trailer opens with a TED-like talk by Silicon Valley

entrepreneur Paul LeBlanc (Slattery) warning of the dangers of human-level AI. Cut to an Alexis-like AI assistant, Eliza, carrying on a conversation with a young boy. “Eliza doesn’t ask questions, she just answers them,” the boy’s father says, but in this case, he’s wrong. LeBlanc’s rantings sound increasingly paranoid, as we see nods to facial recognition, self-driving cars, and various electronic systems (including medical devices) that all seem to come under the control of a new AI called NeXT that isn’t as benign as its creators assume. Honestly, it reminds me of the 1993 *The X-Files* episode “Ghost in the Machine“—especially the death-by-elevator scene—only with more overt espionage elements. That’s not surprising: the series was created by Manny Coto (*24: Legacy*).

[embedded content]
Hulu’s *Helstrom* was meant to the be part of a now defunct horror-tinged corner of the Marvel TV universe.
***Helstrom* (Hulu)**

In 2019, Hulu announced the development of two new Marvel-centric series, *Ghost Rider* (with Gabriel Luna reprising his role from *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) and *Helstrom*, intended to kick off a standalone “Adventure Into Fear” franchise that would bring a chilling horror element to the Marvel formula. *Ghost Rider* soon fell by the wayside, and by December 2019, Marvel Television was shut down. That makes *Helstrom* the sole survivor of the planned fear-based franchise.

The series focuses on two characters from Marvel Comics: Daimon Hellstrom, the son of Satan, introduced in *Ghost Rider* #1 (1973), who eventually became a recurring character in *The Defenders*. His sister, Satana (Ana in the TV adaptation) embraces the occult and her paternal heritage, but Daimon chooses to defend humanity. Per the official premise: “The world isn’t ready for a Helstrom family reunion. As the son and daughter of a mysterious and powerful serial killer, Helstrom follows Daimon (Tom Austen) and Ana Helstrom (Sydney

Lemmon), and their complicated dynamic, as they track down the worst of humanity – each with their own attitude and skills."

Tonally, the trailer is in line with the oft-delayed *The New Mutants*, another attempt to bring elements of horror to the superhero genre. In addition to Austen (*The Royals, Grantchester*) and Lemmon (*Velvet Buzzsaw, Fear the Walking Dead*), the series will feature Elizabeth Marvel (*Homeland, House of Cards*) as Daimon and Ana's mother, Victoria, who has been institutionalized for 20 years; Robert Wisdom (*The Wire*) as Caretaker, a demon-fighting guardian of the occult; June Carryl (*Mindhunter*) as Lousie Hastings, head of the psychiatric institution housing Victoria; and Ariana Guerra (*Raising Dion*) as Vatican agent Gabriella Rossetti.

[embedded content]
The New Mutants is still slated for an August 28th theatrical release and debuted a new trailer.
***The New Mutants* (20th Century)**

Speaking of *The New Mutants*, apparently it's still scheduled for an August 28 theatrical release. In addition to showing the opening few minutes, 20th Century debuted a new trailer for director Josh Boone's horror-inspired film, originally developed as part of the *The X-Men* franchise. Per the official synopsis: "Five young mutants, just discovering their abilities while held in a secret facility against their will, fight to escape their past sins and save themselves."

Rahne (*Game of Thrones*' Maisie Williams), aka Wolfsbane, can turn into a wolf, which clashes mightily with her religious beliefs. Sam (*Stranger Things*' Charlie Heaton), aka Cannonball, is invulnerable when he propels himself into the air. Roberto (Henry Zaga), aka Sunspot, has the ability to manipulate solar energy, and his inability to control that power seems to have led to the demise of his girlfriend. Illyana (Anya Taylor-Joy), aka Magik, can teleport and is sister to X-Man Colossus. Finally there is Dani (Blu Hunt) ,

aka Mirage, who has the “power to create illusions drawn from the fears and desires of a person’s mind.”

Those powers, especially Dani’s, are of keen interest to Dr. Cecilia Reyes (Alice Braga), who runs what is supposed to be a therapeutic support group in the hospital. But each of the young mutants is haunted by strange nightmares and visions, and soon realize they are actually prisoners, They resolve to combine their powers to escape. It’s anyone’s guess as to whether the film is any good after all the studio tinkering and reshoots, but I’m hoping to be pleasantly surprised.

[embedded content]
The titular dysfunctional spy finally awakens from his coma in the *Archer* season 11 trailer.
***Archer S11* (FXX)**

This hilariously irreverent, very meta James Bond spoof about the exploits of a dysfunctional intelligence agency has been a delight ever since it premiered way back in 2009. It’s taken on a bit of the anthology format for the past few seasons—mostly because its main protagonist, Sterling Archer (voiced by H. Jon Benjamin), has been in a coma, with the seasons’ events all taking place in his subconscious. So S8 was known as *Archer Dreamland*, with the core cast becoming characters in a 1947-era Los Angeles *noir* setting, while S9, *Archer: Danger Island*, took place around 1939 on a remote South Pacific island. S10, *Archer: 1999*, took everyone into outer space, battling bounty hunters and intergalactic pirates.

Archer finally woke up in the S10 finale, paving the way for return to normal operations—except the world has moved on without Archer during his coma and he’s going to have to learn to cope. Per the official synopsis: “Archer is awake….and he needs a drink. Sterling Archer is ready to return to the spy world after a three-year coma. While many things changed during his absence, Archer is confident it will take just a

little time for him to reset things back to the old ways. The problem: does the rest of the team want that? The others may not be ready for his return to throw a wrench in their well-oiled machine."

[embedded content]
AMC's *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* is a new spinoff set 10 years after the zombie apocalypse.
***The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (AMC)**

Confession: I lost track of *The Walking Dead* after S2, but the zombie drama is still going strong and becoming a bona fide franchise, with a successful spinoff series and three films purportedly in the works. AMC debuted a sneak peek of the extended opening of the S10 finale, airing October 4, as well as a teaser for S6 of *Fear The Walking Dead*, premiering October 6. October 4 will also be the premiere of a third spinoff series, *The Walking Dead: World Beyond*, designed to be a two-season limited run. And judging by the trailer, it looks like a genuinely fresh take within this fictional world. Set in Nebraska ten years after the zombie apocalypse, the plot focuses on two sisters who came of age in this new era. Per the official synopsis:

> *The Walking Dead: World Beyond delves into a new mythology and story that follows the first generation raised in a surviving civilization of the post-apocalyptic world. Two sisters along with two friends leave a place of safety and comfort to brave dangers, known and unknown, living and undead on an important quest. Pursued by those who wish to protect them and those who wish to harm them, a tale of growing up and transformation unfurls across dangerous terrain, challenging everything they know about the world, themselves and each other. Some will become heroes. Some will become villains. But all of them will find the truths they seek.*

"We're ten years in now, and the dead still have this world,"

our young protagonist says in the trailer. The surviving humans appear to be holed up in walled-off communities, while the undead hordes roam the ruins of human civilization outside. And like all teens, the sisters and their friends want a better future. Plus, it seems their father is in danger. “We have to be brave in this life we have, simply to exist now,” a voiceover says as we see the foursome venture outside the walls of their safe haven for the first time. There are still zombie confrontations and plenty of action, but the overall tone is almost elegiac, even hopeful, as the teens try to “make our lives count, not because we’re the last generation—but because we’re the beginning.”

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