Nothing is what it seems in taut and twisty horror film You Should Have Left

Enlarge / Kevin Bacon reunited with *Stir of Echoes* director David Koepp for the new horror film *You Should Have Left*

reader comments

6 with 6 posters participating

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Kevin Bacon stars as a middle-aged man forced to face his demons in *You Should Have Left*, a dark psychological horror film from Universal, about a mysterious house in Wales that doesn't seem to want to let its occupants leave. Tonally, it's in a similar vein to *The Others* (2001) and *The Shining* (1980), with a dash of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) for good measure.

(Some minor spoilers below, but no major reveals.)

Co-produced by Jason Blum and Blumhouse Productions, the film is adapted from a 2017 German novella of the same name by bestselling author Daniel Kehlman. It's written in the first-person style of a diary belonging to an unnamed screenwriter attempting to write a sequel to an earlier hit film. With the studio pressuring him for a draft, he rents a house and takes his wife—an aging actress for whom work is becoming scarce—and four-year-old daughter on a long vacation in hopes of finishing the script.

As the screenplay develops, so do strange occurrences in the house, with the narrator reporting harrowing nightmares.

Eventually the narrator finds it difficult to determine whether he is still dreaming or awake and finds a message in his handwriting telling him to "get away." His wife (who has been having an affair) denies having written it, and the narrator soon realizes he is trapped in the house. Whenever he tries to leave the living room, for instance, the door he goes through always leads him right back there. Can he figure out how to escape with his family to ensure their safety?

You Should Have Left Director David Koepp had worked with Bacon before on *Stir of Echoes* (1999), an unjustly ignored supernatural thriller/murder mystery adapted from a novel by Richard Matheson. (It remains one of Bacon's strongest performances, over his long and illustrious career.) The two remained friends, periodically casting about for a new project on which to collaborate. Bacon was interested in doing a "scary movie" focused on a deteriorating marriage between a man and his much younger wife—a common trope in Hollywood. (Bacon is 27 years older than his co-star in this film, Amanda Seyfried.)

Koepp liked the idea of exploring the inevitable tensions in such a coupling, having always been a fan of what he terms "domestic horror," citing *Rosemary's Baby* as one of his all-time favorites. As they were discussing the possibility, Bacon stumbled across Kehlman's novella, telling Koepp, "You're not going to believe this, but this [novella] is like our story." So they optioned the rights and began adapting it for the screen.

One significant departure from the book is that Bacon's character, Theo Conroy, is a wealthy finance professional in Koepp's film, rather than a screenwriter. "I just didn't want to write about a screenwriter," Koepp told Ars. "I also think a writer in a remote house possibly losing his grip on reality is a story we've seen numerous times before. I wanted to mix things up a bit." He also didn't want to make "a bad guy with a knife" movie, opting for a film that subtly elicits a sense

of panic and disorientation in the viewer, along with a growing dread that something is not quite right—without being able to put a finger on what, precisely, that threat might be.

That man in the mirror

- Theo (Kevin Bacon) and Susanna (Amanda Seyfried) decide it’s time for an extended family getaway.
- Theo struggles with jealousy over his much-young actress wife.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- “Are we there yet?” Avery Essex plays their young daughter Ella.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Looks like a beautiful home.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- The interior makes a good impression too.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Theo notices something odd.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- The interior is bigger than the exterior.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Susanna and Ella take a walk in the woods.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Susanna has her secrets
- Theo finds a warning scrawled in his journal.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Neither one of them likes this house anymore.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Maybe this local dude can shed some light on the house’s history. (There’s always a local dude.)
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- That face in the mirror….
- The warning becomes a threat.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Creepy Polaroids line the creepy hallway.

YouTube/Universal Pictures

- Amanda is anxious.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- How can this be happening?
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- A vision of a murdered woman in a tub.
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Does Theo have a dark secret?
  YouTube/Universal Pictures
- Theo will protect Ella all all costs.
  Blumhouse Productions

Theo struggles with jealousy concerning his much-younger actress wife, Susannah (Seyfried). Visiting the set of her latest film on the day she's shooting an explicit sex scene doesn't help matters, despite her insistence that she "pretends for a living." He convinces her to take an extended family getaway to a remote house in Wales with their young daughter Ella (Avery Essex). At first glance, it seems like the right choice. The scenery is gorgeous, and the house is large and has some very nice high-end finishes. Theo particularly appreciates the quiet.

But the weirdness soon sets in, starting with Ella noticing a moving shadow when she's trying to play shadow puppets in bed one night. And as Theo starts exploring the house, he notices some oddities. There are a puzzlingly large number of light switches, and the living room is five feet longer on the inside than on the outside. The locals are far from welcoming, making cryptic remarks whenever they encounter Theo in the village. One day he finds a warning scrawled in his journal: "Go now," followed the next day by an even more ominous message: "You should have left. Now it's too late." It seems the house holds its own sinister secrets—or is Theo just losing his mind?

Translating a novella written in a first-person diary format, focused heavily on the interior psychological landscape of an

increasingly unreliable narrator, proved to be a bit of a challenge. “I think it’s a miracle that books get made into movies at all, because they’re primarily about what people are thinking and feeling,” said Koepp. “Movies, of course, don’t have access to that unless there is somebody narrating.” So Koepp employs recurrent mirror imagery, dream states, and sudden shifts in time and space as a way to externalize Theo’s fracturing internal state.

“People have always stayed in that house. Some don’t leave.”

Both Bacon and Seyfried are terrific in this, but Avery Essex gives an equally powerful performance as Ella, despite her tender age. “I would love to take credit for it, but Avery is just an incredibly natural actor,” Koepp said. “She would be a normal kid, bouncing around on the set like kids do, and then you’d say ‘Action!’ and she just locked in and became her character.” As a father himself, Koepp also took pains to ensure Essex was prepared for some of the film’s scarier moments, carefully talking it through whenever she got scared or anxious by those darker elements.

In one such sequence, Ella disappears somewhere inside the house, calling for her father in terror as an increasingly desperate and panicked Theo searches for her, with doors appearing and disappearing, and hallways constantly shifting. (The sequence was partially inspired by a famous *The Twilight Zone* episode, “Little Girl Lost,” which in turn inspired a similar plot twist in the 1982 classic horror film *Poltergeist*.) In one shot, Theo walks through a ten-foot hallway, only to look back and see it is now a good 75 feet long. Some of this was just creative shooting, but Koepp maintained a spreadsheet of the eight different hallways built on the set to keep track of them all.

As for that amazing house in Wales, it’s real, although Koepp added a second story via CGI. It proved to be the perfect framework in which to explore the film’s themes of guilt and

punishment, purgatory and retribution. “People have always stayed in that house,” a local grocer tells Theo shortly after the family’s arrival. “Some don’t leave. The right ones usually find the place. Or maybe it’s the other way round. The place finds them.” We eventually learn a little bit more about the history of the house, but overall, Koepp is content to keep the details vague, so that “we’re not quite sure what the house has in mind” until the final twist.

You Should Have Left is currently available on VOD.

[embedded content]
You Should Have Left: A Look Inside.
https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685335

Black Angel review: Run your own tabletop “generation ship”

reader comments

14 with 12 posters participating

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Welcome to Ars Cardboard, our weekend look at tabletop games! Check out our complete board gaming coverage at cardboard.arstechnica.com.
Black Angel reminds me of a pocket watch I once had. (This

isn’t the setup to a bad joke.) You see, the watch was broken. A memento from my time in Germany, the watch broke during shipping and never kept good time, made a weird grinding noise when I wound it, and had an unsightly crack across its face. I still keep it around, though. With its open face and back, you can see the inner workings—gears, flywheels, jeweled pivots. The craftsmanship is breathtaking, even if it loses a minute every half hour.

Let’s back up. The board game *Black Angel*, designed by Sébastien Dujardin, Xavier Georges, and Alain Orban, is something of a spiritual successor to their previous collaboration, a well-known game by the name of *Troyes*. Like *Troyes*, *Black Angel* is a dice game in the loosest sense, tasking players with utilizing pools of dice in ways that are almost entirely novel. It also resembles a busted clockwork—lots of ideas working in sync—just not quite in sync enough to keep regular time.

Its first hurdle is the setting. Where *Troyes* was set in its namesake city and saw you overseeing the tried and tested (if overdone) theme of medieval tradespeople doing medieval things, *Black Angel* sets its sights somewhat higher. Literally. You’re located aboard a generation ship, see, on a 3,000-year voyage, right, and you’re one of a handful of competing artificial intelligences, OK, trying to be the best steward of the ship so you can become the only AI of the colony mankind will eventually settle, got it?

Huh. Cool, but huh.

Before you think that overseeing a generation ship for three millennia sounds tedious—all hydroponics metering and nitrogen adjustments—it turns out that space is crammed full of aliens who can relieve the tedium. Some of them want to trade with you. The ones that look like evil bugs want to attack you. And everyone has something you can use to secure the success of your mission.

What does gameplay look like? For the most part, it looks like picking up a die and taking an action with it. This seemingly straightforward process is more burdened with caveats and phases than it first sounds, but we'll return to that in a bit. For now, your main worry is whether your chosen die has the right color and number. Colors correspond with different segments of the ship, while numbers increase the power of your

action, letting you repair extra damage or research more technology. If you've rolled lots of stars—the game's fancy way of dulling the edge of a fistful of zeroes—hopefully you have lots of minerals for buying dice from other players or for repurposed debris that lets you flip your dice to their opposite side. If you're out of both dice and the means to purchase more, you'll likely take a reset turn to gain more dice, clear off your personal board, and fly the *Black Angel* a little closer to its final destination.

Everything else in *Black Angel* is about taking this straight line of a concept firmly in hand, looping some bunny ears through a slipknot, and then winding the cord back and forth until you have three-quarters of a Gordian knot. The result doesn't require Alexander the Great's razor wit to untangle, but it's snarled enough that you can expect to hear the occasional exasperated sigh.

Here's an example. As the *Black Angel* passes through space, its trajectory takes you past myriad opportunities that are conveniently color coded to the dice on your ship. Let's say you want to send out a drone to meet with some aliens. In order to do this, you begin running the preflight checklist. The right die, check. Sufficient droids—one to pilot the ship and one to undertake the mission—check. Speaking of which, a droid ship, check. Proper distance to an alien world, check. Remembering to add techs to the tech track and suffer additional evil-bug attacks on the *Black Angel*, because someone will absolutely forget to do this at some point, check. With all of these criteria ticked off, you can now doodle your droid ship over to an alien world, earn some points or resources, and perhaps set up some additional gains for later.

Best-laid plans

The trouble is, any number of things can go wrong along this

path. Here are some possibilities.

One: somebody claims the die you need right before your turn.

Two: you buy somebody else's die. This means they need to take a reset turn earlier than planned, which dumps the mission you just undertook off the edge of the board before you have a chance to trigger its benefits.

Three: you need a three-pip die but only two pips are available, so you use a card to activate one of the techs on your personal board to fly a little farther. Except now you realize you just spent the mission you wanted to undertake in order to undertake the mission, which is cool because it's a sort of game-systems paradox, but very uncool because you can't do the mission you've been hoarding all those debris cubes for.

Four: somebody has a die you could pay to flip to its three-pip side, but it's illegal to both pay a mineral to buy a die and a debris cube to flip a die, because Dujardin, Georges, and Orban have constructed this clockwork universe so they can masquerade as cruel gods.

Five: you haven't found any missions that are enticing. Plenty of them aren't. Further, the need to constantly adjust your strategy based on not only the changing dice economy but also the temperamental nature of your cards tends to cause more start-and-stop than a traffic jam.

Six: as you move your droid ship to its destination, your friend Geoff remembers that he forgot to add evil bugs to the board. Turns out, the action you intended to take was assaulted by said evil bugs; your die's three pips are actually two pips, and you need to lock a droid before you can access that action, but you only have the requisite two droids, and now you're shouting "what the hell?" at Geoff. And rightfully so.

In practice, *Black Angel* does produce climactic turns. It's just that they're rare. Far more often, this is a game of building action, building action, sudden setbacks, building action, and then a slide whistle. Every so often, a bike horn tootles in the distance. Then it's back to the slow churn of semi-optimal moves and incremental point gains.

This isn't to say *Black Angel* can't be gratifying. At its best, you'll activate a string of technologies all at once, buy a die to clean up the ship or blast off on some lucrative mission, and then insert what you've gained back into your personal engine to unlock more stuff or endgame bonuses. When *Black Angel*'s interlocking parts slide into place, you feel like a watchmaker hunched over a workbench, forceps laying components into their proper places just so, a master of your craft, and surely Bürgermeister Glashütte will take notice of you at the annual clock fair!

Sadly, that's the exception. There's some elegance to the way all those segments interlock—expeditions and resources and evil-bug attacks and the dice economy—all feeding into one another. More's the pity that they don't fit more smoothly, that the game's processes are counterintuitive and riddled with clarifications, that these gears grind rather than running as though on gravity alone. In the end, like my broken pocket watch, *Black Angel* is easier to respect than to enjoy.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685013

Bot mafias have wreaked havoc

in World of Warcraft Classic

Enlarge / For months, clusters of bot-driven accounts have trawled around high-level zones, attacking monsters with uncanny precision before rotating toward their next target in robotic 90° angles.

reader comments

81 with 56 posters participating

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Bots are terrorizing *World of Warcraft Classic* servers, stealing precious resources, monopolizing rare monsters, and inflating the virtual economy with truckloads of illicitly earned gold. Today, *WoW Classic* developer Blizzard Entertainment announced it has suspended or closed over 74,000 *WoW Classic* accounts over the last month, many of which were automating gameplay with bots.

For months, clusters of bot-driven accounts have trawled around high-level zones, attacking monsters with uncanny precision before rotating toward their next target in robotic 90-degree angles. These in-game characters are operated by scripts, programmed to optimally kill monsters and obtain rare, valuable items that drop from them. Lately, they've been targeting the sought-after Black Lotus, a necessary item for some competitive, high-level play.

World of Warcraft Classic is a punishing game by design, a harkening-back to the early days of *World of Warcraft*. It boasts little of the expediency that defines modern massively multiplayer online role-playing games; everything is an intentionally slow grind. To obtain a Black Lotus, players had

to identify the specific spots where they spawn and camp there for between 45 and 75 minutes, waiting and warding off any competitors. For the last several months, when human-run characters attempted to muscle their way into the mix, coordinated groups of bots threatened them or closed ranks around the flower. So in late May, Loknar—who plays a healing priest in *WoW Classic* but still tries to kill bots whenever he sees them—decided to hold an anti-bot protest in the in-game city of Orgrimmar.

"There were over 50 people doing a line walk and yelling," says Loknar. He was trying to draw attention to the issue, asking passersby not to buy the Black Lotuses that bots put on the auction house at an inflated 300 gold. (The normal price on most servers, he says, is about half that.) Loknar made a racket, but the mafia knew how to shut him up. The bots mass-reported him to publisher Blizzard for "abusive chat." Blizzard muted Loknar's account, and those of other protest participants, for 24 hours. In the meantime, the bots got their Black Lotuses to the auction houses, where they maintained their monopoly.

"Whether they're a mafia, whether they're a crime mob, whether they are a syndicate, whether they're an Illuminati; whatever metaphor you want to use for them, the end result is the players are getting fucked," says *World of Warcraft* Twitch streamer Asmongold. "They're completely arrogant about it. . . they advertise the services that they're going to do and they're hacking while they perform the services."

Dozens of websites easily found on Google sell code or services that automate the *World of Warcraft Classic* experience. Some individual players pay to hand their accounts over to a bot to level up their characters in the slow, meditative game while they're at their day jobs or snoozing. Others turn a profit by automating groups of accounts that kill specific monsters and farm specific resources to earn mass amounts of in-game gold. Some use game-breaking

techniques to gain an edge, like flying in the air and massacring rare monsters that can’t fight back. (Characters cannot fly in-game.) Then, they round up the goods.

[embedded content]
Bots attack the integrity of *WoW Classic*, a game built on time investment and patience. (In an interview with WIRED, Asmongold compared it to earning a four-year college degree just moments before your college started giving them out for free.) They also undermine the game’s economy. Gold has less buying power when it’s obtained with no labor or time cost.

“There’s no limit to money creation,” says Michael Morrison, an Edinboro University of Pennsylvania economics professor who wrote his dissertation on the *World of Warcraft*economy. “In the real world, money is created through a federal reserve. Historically, the limit was how much gold was in the ground. In *World of Warcraft*, currency continues to grow with play. The more people play, the more hours played, the more money is in the system and the more inflation you see.” More organized botters sell the in-game money or high-level characters they obtain to players in exchange for cash on third-party websites. On Loknar’s server, 100 gold goes for $4.79, while 1,000 gold goes for $47.73. (No bot-makers or gold sellers agreed to an on-the-record interview for this article.)

Inflation

The influx of bots and bot mafias has had a complicated impact on the *WoW Classic* economy. Some items are worth less because bots are working 24/7 to achieve them; others are worth more because bot mafias have hogged goods. Tarek Beutler from NexusHub.co, a site that collects analytics from *World of Warcraft*, crunched the numbers across different *WoW Classic* servers’ auction houses. The price of a Black Lotus jumped 600 percent over six months, he says, until Blizzard added more Black Lotus spawns in an attempt to fix the problem. He

estimates that inflation rates over the last six months have averaged 2.26 percent for US servers and nearly 7 percent for EU servers.

“Black Lotus for example is a scarce resource and can only be up on a few spawn points in the world at the same time. It’s pretty easy for botters to control these spawns and gauge the prices, so they go up,” Beutler says. Other resources that spawn in dungeons—which may be disconnected from the shared experience of other landscapes—don’t have that restriction. Botters can speed through these dungeons, gather rare resources and dump their wares onto the auction house, which artificially lowers their value.

“On a macroeconomic scale, some of these activities are a driving factor in gold inflation, while others are moving gold around the economy. All of them are harmful to ordinary players who are trying to trade goods and services within the game economy,” says a spokesperson for the *WoW Classic* development team. “The presence of bots has a strictly negative impact on the game experience, and we are completely aligned with our players in a desire to eliminate them.”

Desperate times

That tie to real-life economics can breed desperation. On Blizzard’s *WoW Classic* forums, one player complained about another who allegedly operates 15 bots controlling the Eastern Plagueland for 12 to 14 hours a day. Anyone who kills the bots is subject to “obscene language and various kinds of threats,” says the poster. Two other sources described chat restrictions and threats they say they received from accounts that utilize bots.

Despite Blizzard’s recent crackdown, players have criticized how slow the studio has been to stomp out botting in *WoW Classic*. Unstrategic, too. Blizzard recently adjusted the drop rate on the Black Lotus so that it’s less rare, and ideally,

less easily monopolized. The value crashed across servers, but unfortunately, players say, that just means more flowers for bots. “They would sell them at an inflated price and purchase anyone who tried to undercut and resell the item for the higher price,” says Loknar.

In a blog post today, Blizzard explained why it’s been slow to act: after using automated systems to determine if an suspect account is in fact a bot, official moderators must manually gather evidence, a “time consuming and complex” process. “While today’s suspensions were applied in a batch (often referred to as a “banwave”), it is a top priority for us to identify accounts that are botting and remove them,” the company wrote. “Our team works around the clock, every day of the week, and many of the suspensions and account closures over the last few months have gone out in the middle of the night, or on weekends.”

Although Blizzard recently erased tens of thousands of bots from the game, players are concerned that more will easily crop up to replace the old ones. Between banwaves, bots are leveling themselves up. It’s Whac-A-Mole. “People using bots are going for months without getting banned,” says Asmongold. “Blizzard isn’t fixing it because they’re so set on the way they solve problems that they’re unable to adapt to the way things have changed.”

One player, Tpyo, says he quit over the bots. They messed with the economy. They made it hard for him to get materials for high-level raids. And they intimidated him when he spoke out, earning him a chat restriction. “The world is full (of bots) and feels entirely empty when you’re in it,” he says. “It kinda killed the community feeling that kept me in the game.”

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685095

Skip The Help. Celebrate Juneteenth by watching a few of these 25 films.

Enlarge / These 25 films, spanning the last 100 years, showcase just how far black representation in film has come—and how far we still need to go.
Aurich Lawson

reader comments

85 with 51 posters participating

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Today we are celebrating Juneteenth—the day in 1865 when Union Army General Gordon Granger read federal orders in Galveston, Texas, declaring that all slaves in the United States were now free. And what better way for the Ars Technica culture desk to mark the occasion than by offering a sampling of 25 films from the last 100 years, produced by, directed by, written, and/or starring leading black professionals in the entertainment industry?

This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive overview or a definitive list. I've just picked a few films to highlight from different time periods, spanning several different genres: everything from early "race films," jazz musicals, and blaxploitation, to buddy-cop action, ensemble comedies, superhero films, historical dramas, quirky indie films, gritty urban dramas, and so forth.

There are far more titles from 2000 on. That’s partly because so much of film history has been effectively “whitewashed;” partly because the studio system that dominated the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood put a chokehold on diversity for decades; and partly because there are now so many more such films to choose from. More than ever, black producers, directors, writers, and actors are finding the means to tell their own stories—and finding a receptive, enthusiastic audience for those stories.

Laying these films out chronologically conveys a sense of how broad cultural shifts get reflected in the medium. It also makes abundantly clear what black filmmakers have been saying for ages: representation matters, at all levels of production, but particularly at the top, because that’s where it’s decided which films ultimately get made—and who gets to make them. (Similarly, the dearth of black representation in Oscar nominations and wins reflects the longstanding lack of diversity among the members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.) There has been a great deal of progress. But as recent comments to the Los Angeles Times, from nearly two dozen black professionals in the entertainment industry, should make abundantly clear, we still have a long way to go.

(Some spoilers below.)

Enlarge / *Within Our Gates* is the oldest-known surviving film from the “race films” genre. Director Oscar Micheaux didn’t flinch from depicting lynchings.
YouTube/Library of Congress

***Within Our Gates* (1920)**

This is the oldest-known surviving film from the “race films” era and the second of more than 40 such films directed by Oscar Micheaux. *Within Our Gates* tells the story of a young black woman named Sylvia (Evelyn Preer) who travels north to raise money to build a school for rural black children in the Deep South. She finds love with a handsome doctor named V. Vivian (Charles D. Lucas) and eventually learns she is of mixed race; her father was the wealthy white landlord who had financed her education.

Film historians generally view *Within Our Gates* as a blistering response to D.W. Griffith’s pro-Ku Klux Klan silent film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), given its frank depiction of attempted rape and lynchings. In fact, the film had trouble gaining approval by Chicago’s Board of Censors, largely because the city feared reigniting the Chicago Race Riot of

1919. Other cities also either blocked screenings or demanded certain scenes be cut. The controversy actually boosted interest in the film, which attracted fairly large audiences in Chicago.

Within Our Gates was presumed lost until the 1970s, when a single print was found in Spain with Spanish intertitles and a short middle sequence missing. The Library of Congress restored the film as close to the original as possible in 1993, including English intertitles and a frame summarizing what had happened in the missing sequence. You can watch the entire film online, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Enlarge / Bill Robinson as Bill Williamson, Lena Horne as Selina Rogers, and Cab Calloway as himself in the 1943 film *Stormy Weather.*
20th Century Fox

***Stormy Weather* (1943)**

Bill “Bojangles” Robinson starred in this classic Hollywood musical based on his own experiences trying to break into show business after serving in World War I. *Stormy Weather* was a rare musical that featured a largely black cast, in an era

when lead roles generally went to white actors and actresses. Some of the top musicians of that era are featured, including Lena Horne—who plays aspiring singer Selina Rogers and performs the title tune—Fats Waller (performing “Ain’t Misbehavin'”), and Cab Calloway, among others. The fabulous dancing duo the Nicholas Brothers also appear, along with Katherine Dunham and her dance troupe. Fred Astaire declared the dance sequence performed to Calloway’s “Jumpin’ Jive”—in which the Nicholas Brothers descend a staircase by leaping over each other into full splits, among other jaw-dropping moves—the “greatest movie musical number” he’d ever seen.

Enlarge / Sidney Poitier, Katharine Houghton, Katharine Hepburn, and Spencer Tracy starred in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*

***Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967)**

Sidney Poitier was arguably the first mainstream black movie star, winning a Best Actor Oscar for *Lilies of the Field* (1963) for his portrayal of a handyman who helps a group of nuns build a chapel. He was only the second black actor to be so honored, following Hattie McDaniel‘s Best Supporting

Actress win for playing Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). While he certainly played his share of "stereotypical" roles in Hollywood, he is best known for evincing a suave, sophisticated Cary Grant vibe, and nowhere is that more apparent than in his seminal portrayal of Dr. John Prentice in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.*

Young Joanna Drayton (Katharine Houghton) returns from a vacation and presents her white liberal parents—newspaper publisher Matt Drayton (Spencer Tracy) and his wife, art gallery owner Christina (Katharine Hepburn)—with her new fiancé, Poitier's John Prentice. John's parents fly in for dinner as well, and both sets of parents struggle mightily with their children entering into an interracial marriage, given the degree of prejudice against such unions. The entire film is just a series of conversations, as the characters offer arguments and counterarguments, moderated by family friend Monsignor Mike Ryan (Cecil Kellaway). One highlight: John telling his father that while the father thinks of himself "as a colored man… I think of myself as a man."

The film ultimately came down strongly on the side of interracial marriage (love is love) and was thus a harbinger of major changes to come. Just days after Tracy shot his final scene, the US Supreme Court handed down its unanimous decision in *Loving v. Virginia* striking down any state laws banning interracial marriage. Alas, Tracy was very ill during the entire shoot and died 17 days after it ended. Hepburn was so heartbroken she could never bring herself to watch the final film.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1684379

Uppity: The Willy T Ribbs Story is racing history more people should know

reader comments

27 with 21 posters participating, including story author

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- Willy T. Ribbs in victory lane at Daytona International Speedway after winning the Paul Revere 250 SCCA Trans-Am race, July 3, 1984.
  ISC Images Archives via Getty Images
- In 1984 (L-R) Tom Gloy, Greg Pickett and Willy T. Ribbs drove Mercury Capris for car owner Jack Roush during the SCCA Trans-AM season. The trio combined for 11 total wins during the year.
  ISC Images Archives via Getty Images
- Ribbs had the talent but never the equipment to win in IndyCar. In 1990 he ran a partial season, starting with Long Beach Grand Prix.
  Al Bello/Getty Images
- In 2001, Ribbs ran 23 races in the NASCAR truck series.
  Robert Laberge/Allsport/Getty Images

Even in 2020, motor racing is a sport with all-too little diversity. Six-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is the only black F1 driver I've seen compete in the 25+ years I've been watching the sport. NASCAR's Bubba Wallace similarly stands out in a field of more than 40 full-time Cup series racers.

But before either of them turned a wheel in anger, Willy T. Ribbs was blazing a trail in the sport. His is a story that deserves to be more widely known, and if you have a couple of hours free you can do just that by watching *Uppity: The Willy T. Ribbs Story*, an engaging documentary that's streaming on Netflix.

The product of a successful Californian plumbing family, Ribbs eschewed college after graduating high school in 1975, instead taking his tuition money to Europe to compete in the highly competitive Formula Ford series. His talent was obvious, and in 1977 he won the Dunlop/Autosport Star of Tomorrow award (along with six out of 11 races that year), but like so many other young racers lacked the funds to continue up the ladder.

Returning to the US the following year, he set his sights on IndyCar, but quickly found a much-less welcoming racing community than the one he left in Europe. Ribbs and even promotor Humpy Wheeler got death threats after trying to run him in NASCAR that year, and it took another three years before he was able to secure the backing to return to racing, competing in Formula Atlantic (the feeder series for IndyCar).

Again his talent was obvious, standing out even in a field with names like Al Unser, Jr and Michael Andretti. By 1983 he was racing in the Trans-Am sports car series with sponsorship from Budweiser, at which point the wins started coming in. But it still wasn't easy, and there was plenty of friction with his team-mate, David Hobbs, who won that year's championship following team orders instructing Ribbs to play second fiddle to the British veteran.

In 1986 he became the first black driver to test a Formula 1 car, 21 years before Lewis Hamilton when F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone gave him a test with the Brabham team. That same year he competed twice in NASCAR's Cup series. And he made several Indy 500 starts in the 1990s, never with sufficient

funding to run competitively or for a full season.

Throughout it all, he remained a complicated figure. He was highly outspoken, and his self-confidence and cocky nature alienated potential sponsors. Racing is a sport where you need resources to compete at the highest level; sheer talent has never been enough. And that's a pity, because with the right breaks, Ribbs may well have had found glory at Indianapolis or Monaco.

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https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685320

Review: Dave Chappelle's 8:46 lends catharsis, insight, and some laughs

reader comments

47 with 31 posters participating, including story author

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[embedded content]
Dave Chappelle's *8:46*.
In Dave Chappelle's latest impromptu performance, distributed by Netflix via YouTube, Chappelle responds to those calling for his voice during America's current racial reckoning. In particular, he addresses a call-out by CNN anchor Don Lemon who demanded during a broadcast that Chappelle and other African-American celebrities speak out on the killings and

protests taking place in the country and around the world.

This call comes in an era where celebrities and companies can immediately and directly reach millions of people—and some have done so more effectively than others, with each degree of response receiving its own backlash. In Chappelle's case, his material has always met the issue of race in America head-on with equal parts analysis and hilarity—typically with blue jokes sprinkled throughout. It's what made his Comedy Central show a paradigm-shifting success and why, after decades in the business, his commentary is still highly sought after, as rare as it has been in recent years.

Chappelle says he didn't want to "step in front of the streets and talk over the work these people are doing." But in formulating *8:46*, his personal connections to George Floyd, John Crawford, and a slave-born black bishop from South Carolina (among others) reminded him, and all of us, that no one has the luxury of saying "this isn't about me."

My palms are sweating

Tuning into *8:46* for the first time, I had palpable anxiety from the outset. This wasn't helped by an opening scene of masked audience members getting their temperatures checked and quietly filling the socially distanced outdoor seating. It's a stark reminder that while you're watching *8:46* for Chappelle's commentary on one deadly plague, we're still in the firm grip of another one. Chappelle later notes that this is, in fact, the first concert gathering (not in cars) in the US since most of the country went into lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic.

- An audience member gets his temperature checked
  YouTube/Netflix
- Audience members are socially distanced.
  YouTube/Netflix
- Chappelle lightens the mood.

YouTube/Netflx

- Chappelle cracking jokes.

A Grammy award-winning comedian, Dave Chappelle has made a uniquely successful career out of turning the toughest and thorniest topics into thought-provoking meditations while reliably making people laugh. *8:46* leans heavily toward the tough and thorny side, while still provoking laughter during a few bright spots. There are joyful moments, but as Chappelle points out early in his 26-minute set, his personal thoughts and celebrity aren't what's needed right now. "You kids are excellent drivers," he says, referencing the protesters. "I'm comfortable in the back seat of the car, so carry on, young ones."

He later declares, "It's hard to figure out what to say about George Floyd, so I'm not gonna say it yet," ostensibly preparing us—and perhaps himself—for the heavy truths he's about to tackle. Chappelle's comedy has always had a supremely casual feel. His sets effortlessly portray his likability, even through the touchiest subjects. He exudes a calmness, confidence, and playful nonchalance that's equal parts comforting and mesmerizing. In his brief effort to avoid diving directly into the pain and anger of *8:46*, his likability and poise don't waver. He strikes up a short back-and-forth with an audience member and delivers a few quips before facing the subject at hand.

To shift one's perspective

This portion begins with the story of what he calls the scariest 35 seconds in his life. It was his first time experiencing an earthquake, specifically the Northridge Earthquake of 1994, which killed 60 people and injured 9,000 more. Calmly, he recounts the details of what went through his mind during the 35 seconds he thought he wouldn't live to tell about. Then he pulls out another figurative stopwatch.

“This man kneeled on a man’s neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds! Can you imagine that?” Chappelle yells. His voice reaches a rare level of rage. Momentarily, his regard for the audience’s comfort dissolves, and the anger of millions is personified through his own. “He knew he was gonna die,” Chappelle continues. “He called for his dead mother. I’ve only seen that once before in my life: my father on his deathbed called for his grandmother.”

Enlarge / Chappelle checking his reference notes.
YouTube/Netflix

He then brings up another reference point for the special’s titular number: Chappelle himself was born at 8:46 am. His voice tightens, as though holding back tears, betraying briefly the immense sadness that underpins the short narrative. This tense release is followed by a succession of

off-the-cuff one-liners. A defense mechanism, maybe, but a welcome one.

He sits back down, his head bowed. He reads his journal for reference, takes a deep breath, and continues.

> *“We saw ourselves like you see yourself.”*

He then tells the story of Christopher Dorner, a black former U.S. Marine and LAPD officer who, after witnessing and reporting an instance of police brutality from his partner, was fired from the police force and denied rehiring through the formal appeals process. Soon thereafter, Dorner vowed to wage “unconventional and asymmetric warfare” on the LAPD, killing four people, including police officers and their family members. He was killed in a standoff with police who located him in a San Bernardino cabin. Multiple misidentifications of Dorner’s truck were made in the manhunt, leaving an elderly woman, her daughter, and a white man injured in two separate hails of mistargeted gunfire.

“One of their own was murdered,” Chappelle explains of the police’s hunger for Hammurabian justice. “So how the fuck can’t they understand what’s going on in these streets? We saw ourselves like you see yourself.”

Enlarge / Socially-distanced seating.
YouTube/Netflix

Throughout the next few minutes, Dave paints a vivid picture of America today. Masterfully and respectfully, he lays out a succession of stories with a mesmerizing cadence—though neither Chappelle's rhythmic retelling nor text on a screen could ever do justice to the lives lost.

The murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, John Crawford, and the mass shooting of nine black churchgoers in South Carolina all took place after Dorner's police killings. All but two were perpetrated by police, and only mass-murderer Dylann Roof was indicted on murder charges. In the absence of legal consequences for these murders, lethal retaliation was once again leveled against police officers—twice—each time at the

hands of black former US Marines.

“What are they doing? Why would our guys do that—black people from the military? Because they believed, just like they did when they were [joining the military] that they were fighting acts of terror,” Dave explains.

Chappelle recalls this being the first time he thought he needed to leave the country. “[They] will never understand,” he realized. “I’m tired of explaining to these people something that’s so goddamn obvious.”

These words echo in my head all too clearly; it’s the same sentiment I and many others are currently struggling with. But Dave says the only thing that kept him from falling into abject despair was watching Kobe Bryant’s last game in the NBA—a moment that appears to have been a valuable reminder of how much his own talents can lift up others.

The beauty and the tragedy

In wrapping up, he tells one more personal anecdote. The night after the election of Donald Trump, Chappelle hosted *Saturday Night Live*, where he delivered a rather hopeful monologue, wishing Donald Trump luck and expressing that he’d give Trump a chance, demanding that he give them, “the historically disenfranchised,” a chance too. Oh, the simpler times of late 2016.

“Here’s what I said on *Saturday Night Live* that I got completely wrong,” he says with a long exhale. As I mentally prepare for the obligatory, “I was wrong about Trump,” he instead corrects a historical inaccuracy. He says his statement, which noted that no other black people had been invited to the White House since Frederick Douglas until Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidency, was incorrect.

“It happened one other time before that: Woodrow Wilson,” he

explained. In 1918, after the lynching of a wealthy black man in South Carolina, President Woodrow Wilson accepted a delegation of black residents from the state, lead by Bishop William David Chappelle. “It’s where I get my name—he’s my great-grandfather who was a slave when he was born,” Chappelle continues, “These things are not old. This is not a long time ago. It’s *today*. That man’s wife was the woman that my father called on, on his deathbed. And they were slaves!”

“And [they] say, ‘Why isn’t David Chappelle saying anything?’ Because David Chappelle understands what he is seeing. These streets will speak for themselves, whether I am alive, or dead. I trust you guys, I love you guys,” he says, concluding the special. He leaves the stage where our eyes, hearts, and minds are transfixed, and we’re left to turn back to the world, where a funny familiar face isn’t explaining and empathizing with all that you see. It’s a tough reality to go back to, but he’s right. We’ll speak for ourselves. But, wow, isn’t it nice to have an intelligent and sympathetic shoulder to rest on, even for 26 fleeting minutes?

Enlarge / Bishop William David Chappelle, Dave’s great grandfather, who lead a black delegation to Woodrow Wilson’s White House

Archive.org/Project Gutenberg
The beauty of Dave Chappelle's comedy is that it never takes him long to arrive at a thoughtful, neatly tied-together narrative or anecdote that ultimately makes a sharp point or gut-busting joke. He'd previously held the record for longest stand-up set at six hours and 12 minutes of joke telling, and this special was taped only two weeks after George Floyd's murder. His speed, stamina, and accuracy are unparalleled. The tragedy of this special is that he didn't have to do much to link his life to that of George Floyd, nor for the reality or context of it to pierce us as sharply as it penetrated him.

I can't say Dave Chappelle has never let me down. In recent years he's expressed views on the LGBTQ+ community, particularly those persons identifying as transgendered, that I fully oppose—and he's been stubborn to change them. Previous to this, for an almost unheard-of period of time, it seemed he simply couldn't miss. And in *8:46* he nails it again. This track record plays no small part in his singular ability to set up an impromptu live show in the middle of a pandemic, have it taped and distributed by the two largest video platforms in existence, and garner tens of millions of views in a few days.

And who else could do *all of that* to speak about *this?*

Dave lamented calls for him to speak up when so many other voices need to be heard. But in sharing his personal experience, through pain and laughter, he once again holds up the mirror to America—only this time the reflection is changing.

Listing image by YouTube/Netflix

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685159

Spike Lee’s Da 5 Bloods is a hard watch, but an easy Netflix recommendation

Enlarge / *Da 5 Bloods*, now playing on Netflix.

reader comments

41 with 26 posters participating, including story author

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31 years ago, Spike Lee’s breakout film *Do The Right Thing* forced audiences around the world to confront the realities of police injustice perpetrated upon African Americans. The fictional film chronicled a full day in New York City’s Bed-Stuy neighborhood and ended with a police officer choking a black man to death in front of the entire neighborhood.

It was a statement Spike Lee film for many reasons, and one was its ability to weave real-life trauma into the story, whether by flashing back to stock footage of atrocities or by having characters call out African-American leaders’ quotes and philosophies. Lee’s work takes particular care to make sure truth and fiction never stray far from each other—and if that 1989 film seems painfully relevant now, remember that it was firm in calling out decades of all-too-familiar headlines back then, too.

While Lee’s latest film, the Netflix exclusive *Da 5 Bloods*, takes its story half a world away from America, its shadow of

oppression remains as pronounced, affecting, and complicated as in any of Lee's most acclaimed works—and takes advantage of Netflix's platform to do so in particularly uncompromising fashion.

No age-defying CGI to be found

The film, which is equal parts heist, war story, and bloody reckoning, follows four black US Army veterans who had a particular Vietnam War tour in common. During the war, they stumbled upon an incredible fortune, though one of their unit's members didn't make it back. The public explanation for their trip is to find, recover, and bury their friend. They're quieter about the vault of gold bars that they found in the '70s—and believe they've finally tracked again, thanks in part to satellite imaging.

- The remaining members of the original Five Bloods return to Vietnam with a guide.
- One of many flashback sequences.
- Chadwick Boseman is not effing around.
- As good as Boseman is in this film, he's surpassed handily by Delroy Lindo in a career-defining role as a conflicted, Trump-supporting vet.
- The film opens with a montage about black activists speaking out about initiatives like the Vietnam War and the moon landing.
- The film includes plenty of subtle and organic reminders that black lives matter. This not-so-subtle nod is fine by us, as well.

Lee wastes no time making the most of Netflix's loose handling of an "R" rating. *Da 5 Bloods*' montage summary of the Vietnam War includes newsreel footage of American protests—and the violence inflicted upon protesters by police—along with real-life footage of immolation and a Viet Cong captain being executed. This sequence, and the entire film, begins with

Muhammad Ali asking why he'd help white Americans in killing the Vietnamese—"They never called me 'nigger,' they never lynched me"—and this attitude rings true for the soldiers in question when they stumble upon gold.

"We've been dying for this country from the very get, hoping one day they'll give us our rightful place," Chadwick Boseman says in a '70s flashback, alluding specifically to Crispus Attucks being the first person to die at the Boston Massacre. "All they give us is a foot up our black asses." Thus, the heist is set, with the titular Five Bloods resolved to "repossess" the gold bars and redistribute that wealth to their brothers and sisters back home, should they survive and ever return to Vietnam.

While Boseman's character only exists in flashbacks, the other four soldiers (played by Delroy Lindo, Clarke Peters, Norm Lewis, and Isiah Whitlock Jr.) flash back and forth in time between modern-day Vietnam and their wartime tour. Interestingly, Lee opts to not copy another famous director's Netflix turn and leaves the cast untouched by CGI when they rewind to the '70s, except for a single end-of-film photograph. It's a credit to Lee how he pulls this off, in terms of shootouts and running sequences that use creative camera angles. When the '70s characters have long conversations that focus on their face, the only visible difference is a mild application of make-up and hair dye, and the results are less weird than the uncanny valley of CGI. Well done, Lee.

A welcome kind of "ratio" in 2020

The filmmakers also opt to employ a few screen ratios: a TV-friendly 16:9 ratio when the heist is truly on, a 4:3 ratio for flashback and newsreel footage, and an ultra-wide, 3:2 ratio for earlier in the film, when the surviving Bloods reunite in modern-day Vietnam. Sadly, despite Lee's knack for

stunning cinematography, the throwback ’70s sequences appear to suffer from a digital facsimile of a filmic effect, rather than the subtle, striking contrast you might expect from pure filmstock.

But that’s a mild nitpick of a film that is otherwise given particular freedom to play with screen ratios whenever it sees fit—arguably a result of building a film for straight-to-TV enjoyment. If you’ve ever seen a film receive a partial Imax treatment, where certain scenes play out in 3:2 format and the others appear in an ultra-tall, screen-filling mode, you know what to expect, but Lee and crew are ultimately careful about applying this, as opposed to making the frame wax and wane too often like a poor man’s version of a 3D television. (Lee uses this more often in the film’s first half, anyway, and it’s introduced by having the opening newsreel sequence make way for modern-day Vietnam.)

And Lee’s eye for gorgeous and striking cinematography remains intact in this HDTV-minded film. One scene sees the veterans dance through a nightclub while a harsh, glowing *Apocalypse Now* sign glitters behind a DJ in the distance—the kind of neon-lit scar that Lee often uses to highlight the duality of a given scene. And when certain characters face brutal reckonings, Lee is keen on filling the entire screen with a single character and careful applications of harsh shadow and light. Also, for one of Lee’s most gun-filled films, he’s careful to make death and combat feel slow and ugly, and he gives his actors opportunities to mock Hollywood’s Rambo-ization of the Vietnam War along the way.

The story of these Vietnam vets is among Lee’s best.

Da 5 Bloods‘ Netflix difference in many ways is less about specific, technical elements, and more about access. 31 years ago, American film critics and theater managers spoke plainly about their concerns with *Do The Right Thing*, and those same concerns were floated again and again as predominately black

films found their way to theaters through the ’90s and beyond. Would there be real-life riots or violence? Should those films open on a Wednesday night instead of a Friday? Headlines like that took center stage, and that crowded out the more crucial conversation about the importance of black filmmakers’ work (a battle that Lee’s own *oeuvre* all-too-often lost both in popular opinion and in major awards ceremonies).

Fast forward to a modern, streaming world, and Lee’s latest film is that much easier to access. As in, it’s just one click away. What’s more, its frank talk about heightened racial consciousness fits neatly into conversations you’re likely already having (or at least seeing in the news a lot more often). It’s also helped by a conceit that at times nearly feels like Lee’s version of the Adam Sandler comedy vehicle *Grown-Ups*, at least in terms of “getting the band back together”—even if that band of vets is connected through hardships and PTSD.

The story of these Vietnam vets is among Lee’s best in juggling humor, anger, and a cast of characters wrestling their own imperfect demons. Other than a few particularly stark moments of violence—which are absolutely appropriate, given the scope of Vietnam’s lasting wound on America—it’s an easy film to recommend tapping on your favorite smart TV or smartphone app.

And while its story mostly takes place on the other side of the globe, it’s decidedly relevant to the African-American experience on our own shores. “Every time I walk out my front door, I see cops patrolling my neighborhood like it’s some kind of police state,” Boseman’s character says with a gun shaking in his hand, miles away from home yet somehow still there. “And I can feel just how much I ain’t worth.”

[embedded content]
Da 5 Bloods official trailer
https://arstechnica.com/?p=1685029

Evercade’s retro portable made me fall out of love with game cartridges

reader comments

77 with 49 posters participating, including story author

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- As budget-priced retro hardware goes, you could do much worse than the Evercade.
- *Pac-Man* never looked so good, except on some of its other countless re-releases.
- Displaying 4:3 games on a widescreen display results in a decent amount of wasted space.
- A good-sized portable for good-sized hands.
- Those shoulder buttons don’t move very much when you press them, but they give a satisfying click.

Gamers of a certain age will always have a special place in their hearts for the humble video game cartridge. There’s something about sliding a thick piece of plastic into a slot before playing that evokes the simple joy of gaming as it was when we were kids. Optical discs, flash-based cards, and game downloads may have won the technological battle in the end, but the nostalgic appeal of cartridges has never faded for some.

That appeal seems to be central to the idea of the Evercade, a portable system from the UK's Blaze Entertainment. Besides the portable form factor—and the ability to emulate multiple classic consoles out of the box—the $80 Evercade differentiates itself from other recent plug-and-play retro devices in its expandability through various $20 cartridges. Each proprietary cartridge carries anywhere from six to 20 games, grouped by developer and licensed from companies like Namco, Atari, Interplay, Technos, and Data East, with more to come.

I've spent the last few weeks tinkering with the Evercade, swapping through dozens of well-known and obscure games on its initial selection of 10 cartridges. In that time, though, I've found my annoyance at the inconvenience of swapping those cartridges has overwhelmed my nostalgia. At this point, I think I'm finally ready to leave my nostalgia behind and keep cartridges in the dustbin of gaming history.

Solid hardware

As retro hardware goes, the Evercade itself is a functional if bare-bones example of the form. The internal processor does an able job of accurately emulating consoles ranging from the Atari 2600 and NES to the Super NES and Sega Genesis (arcade titles aren't supported in the initial lineup but should be available later). The games look great on a bright, sharp, 4.3-inch, 480 x 272 screen, though a lot of that widescreen real estate is wasted for the 4:3 retro titles available here.

Each emulator supports basic save states but not more advanced functions like virtual scanlines, slow-motion, rewind, or button remapping. And while the on-cartridge menus don't provide any instructions or real historical context for the games themselves, each cartridge comes with a fully illustrated booklet that provides some of this basic information.

The Evercade unit itself is light enough and fits in a pants pocket relatively comfortably, but it doesn’t feel flimsy in the hand. The buttons are suitably springy and comfortable, and the built-in stereo speakers are functional, if a bit tinny. A rechargeable battery delivers an uninspiring three to five hours of play on a full charge, and an HDMI output lets you share your games to a big-screen display at 720p. The only major missing feature is a total lack of support for multiplayer games.

[embedded content]
All in all, the Evercade is a basic but solid budget-focused retro machine. If you’re looking for a way to play officially licensed versions of a small selection of retro titles, purchased a few at a time, you could do worse.

But I can’t help but feel it would all be a bit better without the cartridges.

The good old days weren’t always good

Most games on the Evercade are the kind you might play for a few minutes before moving on to another title. If that next title is contained on the same cartridge, then you’re fine. If it’s not, then changing games mean turning off the system, sliding the cartridge out, fishing another cartridge out of your bag (or maybe getting up and retrieving it from the other side of the room), sliding the new cartridge in, turning on the system, waiting a few seconds for it to power up, and then loading your game from the menu.

This cartridge-swapping process, which takes less than 60 seconds, may seem like a minor inconvenience. But at this point in the history of portable technology, I’ve been spoiled by years of using pocket-sized devices that can store multiple gigabytes of media and switch between them in less than a

second. Going back to the bad old days of switching between cartridges just isn't that appealing anymore.

- Oh great, more little bits of plastic to lose.
- Portable gaming, now with mountains of physical crap to keep track of!
- Stick it in, baby.
- The curved cartridges sit nice and flush when inserted, making for some pleasant lines.
- Just relax with a cup of coffee and a table full of boxes.
- If you're really hankering to buy a portable version of *Earthworm Jim* in 2020, the Evercade has you covered.

Yes, swapping cartridges might be more "authentic" to the original experience of these retro games. But that authenticity only goes so far. Blaze Entertainment seems to realize this, to some extent, because it packs multiple games on to every Evercade cartridge. To be truly authentic to the original console experience, of course, each cartridge should house a single game, as they usually did through the 20th century.

Of course, single-game cartridges would be both more inconvenient and less economical. Yet multi-game cartridges are also less convenient and less economical than simply downloading ROMs onto an SD card (a la Amazon's digital MP3 sales). Evercade's half-measure here doesn't go far enough.

Physical media has a different place

We can hear the physical media defenders amassing in the comments section even as we write this. And we get it. Some people just like the idea of having a tangible, physical product to hold, complete with a box to put on the shelf. Using physical cartridges means not having to worry about

backing up downloadable files or stressing over potential problems with online DRM (if applicable). A physical cartridge will likely work just as well in two decades as it does today.

I'm somewhat sympathetic to those arguments, especially when it comes to my collection of actual retro cartridges for classic consoles. I can even understand why people buy physical versions of modern games that they hope to preserve for the future, share with friends, or resell when they're done.

But when it comes to portable re-releases of retro games, I'll take the convenience and easy portability of a downloadable ROM file any day of the week. These are titles that have already existed in an "authentic" physical form for decades, after all. I don't see a great need for a new, proprietary cartridge format just to put such games on a new portable console.

Let's extend the analogy to the music world. There, plenty of people fondly remember the Walkman and the cassette tapes that made music easily portable. But soon after the iPod hit the scene in 2001, the appeal of carrying thousands of songs in a single device, without the need to juggle a bunch of bulky physical media, easily won out over cassettes and CDs (the ability to easily play all manner of pirated music likely helped, but we won't get into that here).

There's still enough nostalgia for cassette tapes, in fact, that some modern releases still use the format. In the gaming space, some publishers are re-releasing games on actual Super NES cartridges for similar reasons.

But let's imagine someone created a new portable music player, the RetroMan. Say the RetroMan used a new, proprietary micro-cassette format that could store 300 minutes of audio per tape. Say the RetroMan's launch included a few "greatest hits" collections from popular bands but was fully incompatible with

the massive library of classic cassette tapes from decades past.

As powerful as cassette nostalgia is, I think I would just stick with the music downloads and streams that I'm used to. By the same token, I'm not too eager to buy into a totally new proprietary cartridge format just to collect a bunch of games that are already on other cartridge-based hardware.

The Evercade could have been the game industry's cheap, retro-focused version of the iPod—a single portable unit that could carry hundreds of legitimately purchased games and switch between them at a moment's notice. Instead, I'm stuck juggling a bunch of new cartridges that don't even plug the nostalgic hole in my heart.

Listing image by Evercade

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1684858

Guinness reinstates Billy Mitchell's Donkey Kong, Pac-Man records [Updated]

reader comments

79 with 67 posters participating, including story author

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[embedded content]
Guinness World Records Editor-in-Chief Craig Glenday announces

the reversal of its decision on Billy Mitchell's records. Guinness World Records has reinstated a number of classic video game world records held by Billy Mitchell.

The move comes just over two years after Mitchell's records were expunged following an investigation by Twin Galaxies International Scoreboard, which partners with Guinness to adjudicate video game records.

That investigation found that recordings of some of Mitchell's record performances on *Donkey Kong* were not achieved on legitimate arcade hardware, based on extensive video analysis that showed signs of emulator use. Twin Galaxies has not changed its position on Mitchell's records, resulting in a split between the two record-tracking organizations.

Guinness now once again recognizes Mitchell as the first player to achieve a perfect *Pac-Man* score of 3,333,360 points in 1999 and the first player to reach 1 million points in *Donkey Kong* in 2005.

"It's been a long time coming," Mitchell said in an interview with Ars Technica.

The evidence

In a video announcing the decision, Guinness World Records Editor-in-Chief Craig Glenday said the organization "review[ed] both the existing evidence and newly sourced eyewitness testimony, plus some new expert gameplay analyses and hardware verification. In the end, we found that there just wasn't sufficient evidence to support the disqualification across the board."

"In cases such as this where there is debate, we would typically defer to the original contemporaneous adjudication, and this is the case here," Glenday continued.

Speaking to Ars Technica, Mitchell said Guinness relied on the

expert analysis of Robbie Lakeman, who currently holds the *Donkey Kong* record of 1,260,070 points. Lakeman's analysis was also included in a massive evidentiary package Mitchell released publicly last year.

"After reviewing Billy's gameplay and reproducing similar games myself, I can honestly say that this is legitimate gameplay," Lakeman said in a statement. "I do not see a reason why Billy would need to even use MAME or save states to film both games with this style of play."

Mitchell added to Ars that his scores "occurred in live public venues under the observation of numerous referees and third-party eyewitnesses. In the 1,050,200 world record, I played on hardware verified by the senior engineer at Nintendo.

"To this day, I still possess the box used to ship the hardware, with his name and Nintendo's UPS account number. Those are the facts."

Twin Galaxies founder Walter Day said in Guinness' video that he is "very pleased to see this happen, and I had faith it would turn out this way. All of those people who were part of the old days who played the old games and saw Billy Mitchell play—they knew that he was completely capable of getting these records, and they also knew that there was no MAME capable of being played on back in the golden age."

Enlarge / Billy Mitchell competes at a (presumably authentic) *Donkey Kong* cabinet.

In a written statement, Day also cites “industry veteran Todd Tuckey,” in saying that “what Twin Galaxies’ [new owners] assert about Billy Mitchell’s score is simply not possible. There has never and will never be an emulsion [sic] board that plugs into a *Donkey Kong* machine. It is simply impossible for anything but legitimate hardware to have been inside Billy Mitchell’s machine.”

[**Update:** Putting emulation hardware inside cabinets that look standard from the outside has been relatively common for years. Ars regrets not including this context in the original piece.]

“Everybody’s really going to embrace this situation because they know Billy Mitchell is a tremendous player and his scores are legitimate,” Day added, perhaps underestimating the controversy that has surrounded Mitchell throughout his game playing career.

Legal maneuvering?

Mitchell told Ars he has known about the results of Guinness' investigation since December but that today's announcement was delayed because "we had to wrap up the legal agreement." Mitchell wouldn't comment any further on that, saying he was bound by a confidentiality agreement.

While Mitchell last year threatened to sue Guinness World Records over his score removal, he told Ars that this legal threat had been previously rendered moot and did not play into Guinness' decision.

"We had no chance to beat [Guinness] in court, because we could not prove it acted with actual malice… that it knew its statements were false or they had a reckless disregard for truth or falsity," he said. "You must prove this to win a defamation case. GWR made [today's] decision because it was true and correct. Those are their values… At best, I feel that the legal sphere simply got their attention."

Earlier this year, Mitchell moved forward with a defamation lawsuit against Twin Galaxies in Los Angeles county court, first reported publicly by Ars Technica. Mitchell tells Ars his lawyers have "sent [Twin Galaxies] a second retraction demand. We plan to either receive a retraction or proceed to a jury trial."

A hearing in the Twin Galaxies trial is set for July 6. Twin Galaxies representatives were not immediately available for comment on Guinness' decision.

"Unfortunately, in 2018 I became the subject of false allegations," Mitchell said in summary in the Guinness video. "I just shook my head as to how this would happen. I didn't shake my head long. My support system simply wouldn't let me."

[**Update:** Reached for comment by Ars Technica, Twin Galaxies

owner and CEO Jace Hall sent the following meme as an image, which he said could serve as his quote on the matter:

Mitchell, meanwhile, has released a fuller video statement, where he says he first got in touch with Guinness last September. Mitchell uses the opportunity to praise Guinness' reputation and says it was "very refreshing dealing with them" as they conducted their own investigation.]

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Everything we know—and don't—about Tom Cruise's plans to film a movie in

space

Enlarge / Tom Cruise, at center, poses with NASA astronauts at the 2002 premiere of the IMAX film *Space Station 3D* at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC. From left to right: Robert Curbeam, Marsha Ivins, Koichi Wakata, Scott Altman, Nancy Currie-Gregg, Bill Shepherd, Susan Helms, IMAX producer Toni Myers, James Voss, Yuri Usachov, Yuri Lonchakov, Jim Newman and Brian Duffy.
collectSPACE.com

reader comments

116 with 67 posters participating

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For some in the space community, it sounded like the rehash of an old rumor: “Tom Cruise Plots Movie To Shoot In Space…” read the headline of a Deadline Hollywood article published last month.

The “exclusive”—all three paragraphs of it—was short on details, but the mention of Cruise and space was all that was needed for other publications to want to run with the story and for social media to light up with the news.

But this was not the first time that had happened.

Four years ago, almost to the day, a British tabloid claimed that Cruise had been training for a flight on the space shuttle and could have been among the astronauts who died on board the orbiter *Columbia* in 2003. The Daily Star’s report of the actor’s previous “top secret mission” quickly spread across the Web until NASA stepped in and quashed the story.

Whether spurred on by that bit of “fake news” or Cruise’s

track record of trying to top his own daring stunts in each of his hit action movies, another rumor began gaining traction in 2018 that the next installment in Cruise's *Mission: Impossible* franchise would be what finally sent him off the planet. "He's not going to space, nor does he need to go to space," Director Christopher McQuarrie told Empire in February of this year.

So in light of that precedent, it was a bit of a surprise when the head of NASA, Jim Bridenstine, took to Twitter the day after that Deadline report to confirm the scoop: "NASA is excited to work with Tom Cruise on a film aboard the International Space Station!" he wrote.

Why is the idea of filming in space any different this time around? Just when the 2018 rumors about the next *Mission: Impossible* movie were starting to make the rounds, Cruise himself explained why the concept of an actor going into space was a problem.

"It is the mechanics of getting it there," Cruise said in an August 2018 interview with Collider. "How do you build a sequence there, and how long can we have that sequence? Because if I went up … how do you put that into the structure of a screenplay of a 'Mission?'

"It's just not there yet," he concluded.

Barely two years later, why Cruise reportedly changed his mind might have to do with the second half of Deadline's May 4 headline: "…With Elon Musk's SpaceX."

In 2018, SpaceX was still two years away from launching its first crew—a feat the company finally achieved on May 30 with the flight of NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley to the space station. While that launch was primarily focused on demonstrating to NASA that SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule was ready to safely fly astronauts to and from Earth orbit, it also marked the beginning of a new commercial era of US human spaceflight.

“NASA doesn’t want to be the owner and operator of the hardware. We also don’t want to be the only customer,” said Bridenstine after SpaceX’s history-making launch. “We want SpaceX and others to go get customers that are not us.”

And today, Hollywood still qualifies as “not NASA.”

Enlarge / Tom Cruise wears a space shuttle-era Advanced Crew Escape Suit (ACES) pressure garment during a visit to the Jake Garn Simulator Facility at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, in September 2002. Pictured with Cruise (left to right): astronaut Charlie Precourt, Bill Todd, Sharon McDougle, and George Brittingham.
NASA/Sharon McDougle

Seats for sale

Tasked by the White House to return astronauts to the Moon by 2024, NASA has sought to free up resources by turning over its activities in low-Earth orbit to commercial partners. To that

end, in June 2019, the space agency announced it was making the space station available for commercial opportunities and "marketing these opportunities like we have never done before."

"We're announcing the ability for private astronauts to visit the space station on US vehicles and for companies to engage in profit-making opportunities," said NASA's then-chief financial officer, Jeff DeWit.

Seven months later, the agency entered negotiations with Axiom Space, a space services company based in Houston, to attach at least one new module to the station as a precursor to Axiom establishing its own commercial outpost. Led by Michael Suffredini, NASA's space station program manager from 2005 to 2015, Axiom is targeting 2024 to begin launching its "Axiom Segment."

Before then, the company plans to begin launching customers for short stays on the station using SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft. A first mission with three passengers—including a veteran astronaut as a guide—is slated for the fall of 2021.

Since SpaceX's Demo-2 launch, "everybody's starting to wonder where their place in line is," Suffredini told The Associated Press on June 4. "That's a really, really cool position to be in now."

Axiom has not said if it is involved in Cruise's plans, but Bridenstine confirmed the company's involvement in an interview with the Off-Nominal podcast posted online on June 15: "Axiom is working with Tom Cruise in the making of a movie," he said.

In addition to offering the seats to launch to the space station, Axiom is also set up to provide the training that a project like this would require using the same team that has prepared NASA astronauts for the journey.

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