

# Warner Bros. Sends 2021 Film Slate Simultaneously to Theaters and HBO Max

Warner Bros. will release its entire 2021 theatrical slate of films on streamer HBO Max the same day those films premiere in theaters, the company said today.

The extraordinary decision means an expected 17 films from the studio will simultaneously debut on the silver screen and the small screen next year, including high-profile sequels such as *Godzilla vs. Kong*, *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*, *Space Jam: A New Legacy*, *The Suicide Squad* and *Matrix 4*, as well as *Sopranos* prequel movie *The Many Saints of Newark* and the science-fiction thriller *Dune*, adapted from the Frank Herbert novels.

The films will be available for one month on HBO Max in the U.S. before reverting back to a traditional theatrical-only window.

WarnerMedia Studios and Networks Group chair and CEO Ann Sarnoff described the decision as a “one-year plan” to help support the suffering movie business, but it is nonetheless a seismic shift that stands to forever change the theater industry.

“No one wants films back on the big screen more than we do,” Sarnoff said in a statement. “We know new content is the lifeblood of theatrical exhibition, but we have to balance this with the reality that most theaters in the U.S. will likely operate at reduced capacity throughout 2021. With this unique one-year plan, we can support our partners in

exhibition with a steady pipeline of world-class films, while also giving moviegoers who may not have access to theaters or aren't quite ready to go back to the movies the chance to see our amazing 2021 films."

The decision comes shortly after HBO Max opted to move Wonder Woman 1984, the anticipated sequel to the 2017 film Wonder Woman, to the same release schedule, debuting both on HBO Max and in theaters on Dec. 25. At the time, the move was seen as a one-off aimed at extending an olive branch to struggling theaters while also helping bolster HBO Max's lineup of exclusive programming that was minimal this year due to production delays.

It also comes in the wake of Warner Bros.' ill-fated decision to release the Christopher Nolan thriller Tenet in September, whose lukewarm \$350 million in box office revenue over two months mostly came from overseas. "I can't say we walked away from the Tenet experience thinking it was a home run," John Stankey, CEO of WarnerMedia's parent company, AT&T, told investors last month.

In a statement, WarnerMedia CEO Jason Kilar said the decision came "after considering all available options and the projected state of moviegoing throughout 2021."

"Our content is extremely valuable, unless it's sitting on a shelf not being seen by anyone," Kilar said. "We believe this approach serves our fans, supports exhibitors and filmmakers, and enhances the HBO Max experience, creating value for all."

The move will almost certainly bolster the profile of fledgling streamer HBO Max, which debuted in May and has suffered from some brand confusion and distribution challenges. In October, the company told investors total domestic HBO and HBO Max subscribers had cleared 38 million in the U.S., and that 8.6 million subscribers had activated HBO Max accounts directly; a month later, the company inked a

distribution deal with Amazon Fire TV, which will likely help expand the service's footprint further.

Pandemic-driven business decisions like Warner Bros.' move have continued to put pressure on the traditional 90-day theatrical window that had prior to the pandemic been commonplace. It began in March with NBCUniversal, which moved to make theatrical releases available to rent within weeks of their theatrical releases in a then-unprecedented move. And while theaters have seemed more on board with having the option to show films, it may also mark a point of no return for the business as consumers become used to watching new movies from the comfort—and safety—of their living rooms.

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