

# FILM CENTRAL

## DETECTIVE PIKACHU

A WEIRDLY GENIUS  
LAUNCH FOR SUCH AN  
EPIC FRANCHISE



THE VERDICT ON

## MARY POPPINS

A SEQUEL THAT LIVES  
UP TO ITS PREDECESSOR

## SPIDER-MAN

INTO THE  
SPIDER-VERSE:  
A BRILLIANT  
LEAP INTO  
EXPERIMENTAL  
TERRITORY  
FOR THE  
WEB-SLINGER

JASON MOMOA'S

# AQUAMAN

JUST CROSSED \$1 BILLION!

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# FILM CENTRAL

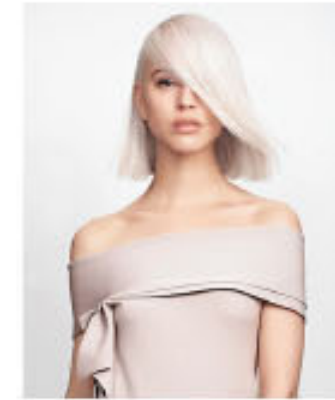


We are so pleased and excited to bring you the very first comeback issue of Film Central Magazine. We are all about promoting promising and upcoming actors from all over the world. In the broader picture, Film Central is for anyone who is passionate about the acting and entertainment industry and would like to be kept informed about those issues that are most pertinent to continued success.

Here at Film Central we like to have fun for sure. But, there's a consciousness and an ethical slant that drives the stories we wish to present. In this edition you will find a splash of industry tips amongst our profile pieces. There are also some great advice pages and career tips. It's a must-read for any aspiring actor or entertainer.

So, if you like movies and TV shows you will certainly love Film Central Magazine.

Alex A  
Editor-in-chief



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EMERGING ACTORS TO WATCH OUT FOR IN 2019

## LAUREN GRIMSON

For someone who has been in the entertainment industry for a few years now, finding time to still wash the dishes may be a bit of a job but believe it or not, this is what keeps Lauren Grimson's feet on the ground. Landing on Star Central Magazine's page as the Actress of the Month for the month of October 2014, Grimson first tasted her dream when she was five. It seems like limelight had chased her after she was requested to star in a real estate commercial which was facilitated by her dad who worked in the industry at the time. From then on, a star was discovered.

Unlike any other aspiring actresses, Lauren did not have to exhaust herself from the usually long and tiring audition process. Instead, acting gigs come through her agent while some are being sourced from her early establishment of connection among friends in the industry, word of mouth and hard work.

Being an experience actress does not necessarily prepare a perfect, rose-tinted stardom. It is a world that accepts nothing less than the glitz and glamour. In the industry that concentrates on the outward characteristics, she reckons that she will always be besieged by constant rejection. As cruel as it can be sometimes, Grimson shared to us that the world of acting is the most freeing thing that challenges her to confront her fears and insecurities. It also drives her to overcome them. She thinks that it is a special experience to be part of a storytelling process that affects people and move them to change the way they see themselves and interact with the world. "Criticism will always be a part of it all but you have to remember not to take it personally. After all, it often comes down to things beyond your control....too talk, too short, too similar to another cast member in appearance, not similar enough, etc. You just have to let it go". She remarks.





So far, Lauren's journey has taken her to the Hollywood landscape where she met the generous and humble Larry Moss who is Hollywood's internationally renowned acting coach. Mingling with interesting people like Moss is not all the perks she can get. Lauren also got to audition for a pilot for NBC and with her acting prowess that never disappoints, she did secure a role for her first major feature film.

"You've got to work hard and network as much as possible. Also be kind to one another! Remember that we're all in this together."

As an actress who is traipsing her way towards success, Lauren hopes to pass on the knowledge that she learned on her way up to help new actors and actresses. She wants to remind them to look out for themselves and colleagues as some people prey on the innocence and goodwill of budding career actors. She also added that building a strong network in this industry would go a long way when coupled with talent.

Lauren's acting success is equated with an overflowing amount of love from her wonderfully supportive family and in-laws. Our Actress of the

Month is also engaged to her long-time partner, Brad Teodoruk who is also an actor. They have been together for 10 years and while she plans to make a stable living working in film and TV, Lauren also aims to travel more and live a better and healthy life with the man she loves.

At her young age of 26, Lauren Grimson, an only child, is yet to reap all the accomplishments that have been waiting for her to pick. She is an Australian, based in Sydney who has a degree in Bachelor of Arts which easily dictates her multi-talented persona (she can write, sing, and dance). When not acting, Lauren can be found spending time with her loved ones, lazing in the sun and of course, seeing plays and films.

Indeed, Lauren is well-cushioned against all the negativity that her current world may bring her. It doesn't matter if her external personality may be judged and criticised because she holds a weapon that will shield her like no other. "My dad has always told me that you become like the people you spend most of your time with, so I've always made a conscious effort to surround myself with good people," she quipped. All hail Film Central's rising star of the month!





EMERGING ACTORS TO WATCH OUT FOR IN 2019

## DENAI GRACIE

For StarCentral Magazine's Most Promising Actresses of the month, Denai Gracie, the world of acting opened up for her in primary school when she won the lead role in the school musical. But it was in high school when she first started to seriously consider it as more of a career path. "If I had to pinpoint the moment I was 'discovered', I'd say it was when I won a national acting competition, was flown to Melbourne for acting workshops and secured my first agent. From there, I studied acting both in Australia and in the USA under some of the most influential and inspiring performance coaches in the business."

Denai's love for the art form is fueled by the fact that "no two days are the same" and that the possibility of being called to be outside your comfort zone is a wonderful chance to discover what more she could do. "I love the challenge of preparing for roles where I get to explore emotions and experiences...there's something truly thrilling about pushing emotional limits in confronting or sometimes dangerous situations, all the while knowing you're totally safe. It's freedom."

It's a brutal industry and a livelihood where one has to be ready for the long haul and "hearing the word 'no!' A lot!" But while there are lows and lulls, there are high points that make it worth the journey. One such experience for Denai (who is also an accomplished horse rider and instructor) is being cast as Grace Wilkins in the full-length feature film, 'Forbidden Ground' (known as 'Battle Ground' in the US and Germany). Set in WW1, the film, directed by Johan Earl and Adrian Powers, tells that story of 3 British soldiers who find themselves stranded in No Man's Land after a failed charge on the German trenches. "It was my first feature in a leading role and playing a character in a period piece was such a terrific learning curve, particularly researching women's rights from that era. The wardrobe totally transported me to the time, and stepping onto set felt so effortless, like I truly belonged in that moment in history. It was such an incredible first feature project and I felt so blessed to have been part of it."

Another facet of the industry that makes the ride interesting are the unforgettable personalities one meets along the way. Denai talks of Charles Waterstreet, a Sydney-based barrister upon whose life the show, 'Rake' (Fox, ABC Network) is based. "I can attest that the storylines of that show are dead on accurate! I worked for him for several years, and saw it all firsthand...the fans of the show watch it because it's got great appeal...I bet most don't know that what they think are just fabulously creative storylines are actually real-life events!"



There is no doubt that passion is an essential part of being an actor. Without that passion, one cannot endure "eating two minute noodles and living in older decor apartments whilst you continue to audition for that perfect role." Being passionate about the craft also means having the heart to devote every day to improve your skills. "You can't just be a weekend actor – no athlete can get to the top by only training two days a week! If acting is going to be a career, you have to treat it like a career!"

So much of the film industry is not only based on one's skills but appearances can also tip the scales between success and failure. It "has a real superficial façade to it, there's no denying it." For Denai, her parents have been instrumental in keeping her feet on the ground ("...some of the advice...I received from my parents wasn't always what I wanted to hear, it was support nonetheless.") as well as her work with horses. "To wrap on a job and head home to stables full of manure that need to be cleaned daily...is enough to keep anyone grounded!"

Fully supported by her family, Denai plans to be in the film industry for a long time. "Acting will always be my number one passion..." With a Bachelor's Degree in Communications, she has recently discovered a love for screenwriting and would one day love to not only see one of her scripts on the big screen, but to maybe have a role in it as well! But wherever she goes, "home for me isn't where I live, but rather who I live with... so long as I'm surrounded by my family and my beloved horses, I'm happy."

#### **'LIGHTNING FAST' Round:**

- 1. Last good movie I've seen?** 'Star Wars – The Force Awakens'
- 2. What do you consider beautiful and why?** The innocent mind of a child; untainted by the world, believe they can do anything and be anything, and are capable of asking questions not even the wisest adult can answer!
- 3. What haven't you done yet that you wish you could?** Fly
- 4. Complete this sentence: "If I had no fear, I'd..."** become a bounty hunter and take care of all the monsters in the world!
- 5. What is the one "flaw" you wouldn't change about yourself?** My workaholic mentality!





## RIISING STAR SPOTLIGHT: GET TO KNOW NELL NAKKAN

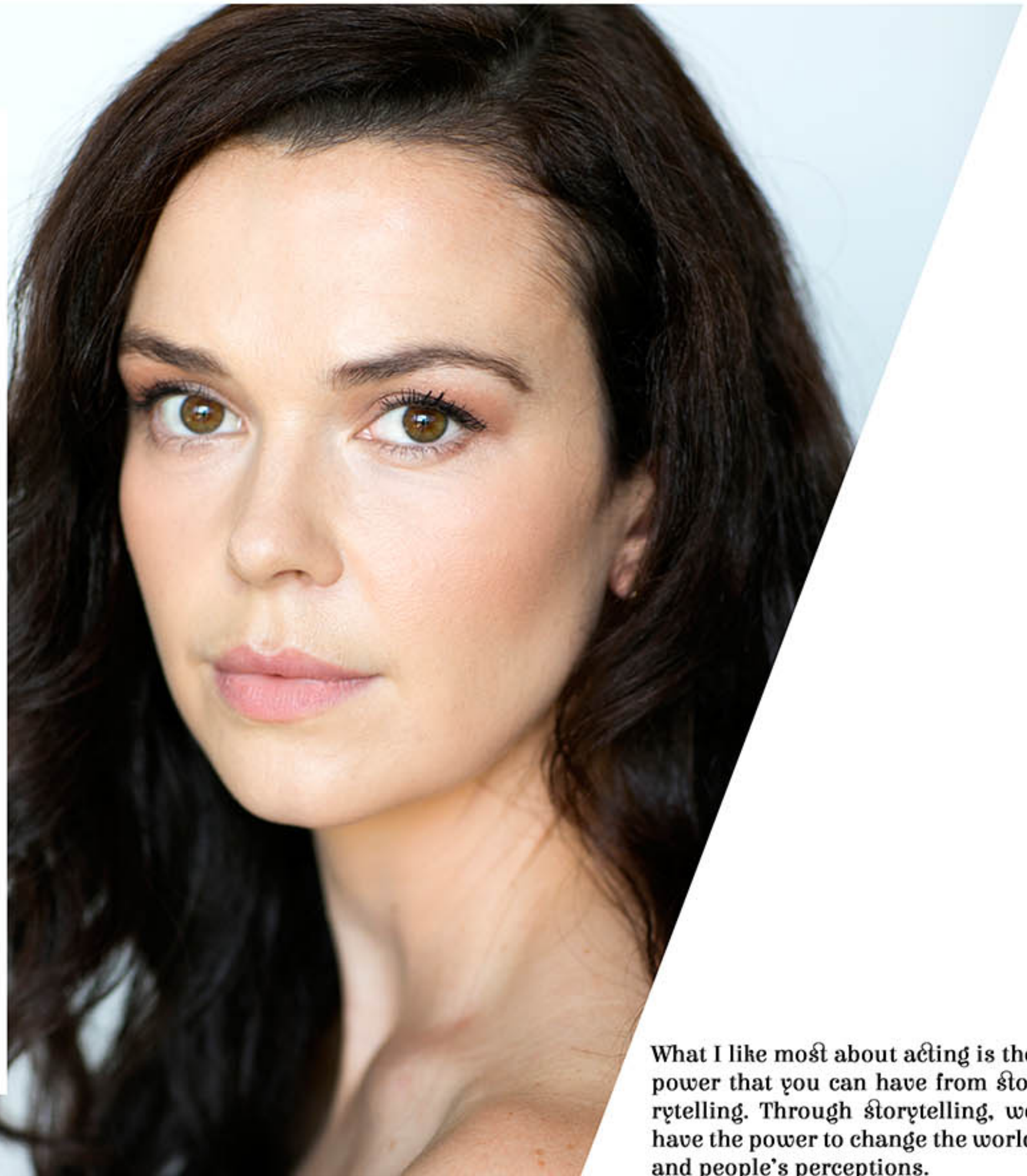
Danielle Kate Nakkan or Nell Nakkan for short is a stunning writer, actress, director, and a producer, who hails from Sydney, Australia and who's currently on the rise.

Nell actually got into the entertainment industry when she found an article in the newspaper about a talent agency workshop. She decided to attend this workshop, and this led her to be accepted into a child casting agency which became her starting point in the industry. She says that what she likes most about acting is the power that you can have from storytelling. She reveals that through storytelling, we have the power to change the world and people's perceptions. Although she loves being part of the entertainment industry, she confesses that it can be a very difficult industry to be involved in because it's hard to plan for what you're going to be doing next since things can change from one minute to the next minute.

Her extensive training includes being trained at the Atlantic theatre company located in New York City, Screenwise, ACTT, Academy of Dramatic Arts in Los Angeles, and at RADA in London. She also has a varied and extensive resume which covers everything from film projects to classical Theatre, and she's been working in the industry for over ten years which is probably one of the reasons why her acting chops earned her the "best actor" award at the Cause Film Festival. Her first major break was playing the role of Sheila in the Australian series A Place to Call Home. The show starred Marta Dusseldorp and Noni Hazelhurst.

She indicates that the most memorable experience of her career has been working on Foxtel's A Place to Call Home. She's been working with some of the best talents both on and off the camera and it has been an amazing experience for her. She also says that one of the most interesting people that she's met so far in the industry is Simon Baker - she revealed that she enjoys watching him work because he's such a talented star. She further revealed that one of the most valuable lessons she has learned working in the industry is that you are in control of what you bring to the acting table and that everything else you do is going to be up to someone else.

Nell says that while her family does support her career, this can be both up and down at times. They are still quite proud of her work, and she has a great support network that helps her through any difficult times. Her current plans include more of A Place to Call Home which is in production for the 6th season. Later in the year in the United States, she will be shooting a feature called Giant Void and Director Michael Reisinger will be involved. This movie is a story of a software engineer named Chloe who works at the world's leading technology company. The company is doing an important job, but this job is top secret. The goal of the movie is to push the boundaries about what we understand artificial intelligence to be. She has a lot of passion for this project and she thinks that it touches on very relevant themes and questions in today's world. With so much talent under her belt, the road to the bright lights of stardom is only beginning for this promising thespian, Nell Nakkan.



What I like most about acting is the power that you can have from storytelling. Through storytelling, we have the power to change the world and people's perceptions.





Photo by Suki Foster Photography



Photo by Suki Foster Photography



## SPIDERMAN: INTO THE SPIDER - VERSE



Editorial credit: Faiz Zaki / Shutterstock.com

## MOVIE REVIEW

Spider-man is one of those everlasting superhero characters that can appeal to anyone, anytime in any day and age because he feels and acts like the everyday guy given superpowers who is just trying to keep his life put together and we can all identify with that struggle. Peter Parker is the everyday person the late great Stan Lee knew we could all relate to. But what about the lesser known Spider-men and Spider-women of Marvel comics, how does one incorporate alternate reality versions of the web-slinger without tripping over the toes of Marvel's cinematic incarnation? Simple, you create a one of a kind animated movie experience and call it "Into the Spider-Verse."

Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) is an awkward, bumbling, easily embarrassed teenager who just happens to be destined to become Spider-man. He learns this the hard way when 5 other alternate reality versions of Spider-man including Peter B. Parker (Jake Johnson), Spider-Gwen (Hailee Stanfield) and Spider-man Noir (Nicolas Cage) end up crashing into Miles world thanks to some reality manipulation from the crime boss Kingpin (Liev Schreiber). Now Miles has to whip this team into shape and come to grips with his own unique powers and role as a future Spider-man and prevent all of reality from tearing itself apart and ending the lives of everyone in every universe.

I've heard of Miles Morales in the comics before but never saw why the character was such a big deal or how he was so likable. After seeing this film, I have to admit, I'm starting to appreciate the creativity alternate versions of superheroes can provide. "Into Spider-Verse" feels like a living, breathing, ink and paper in motion comic book; pulling out all the stops and using its unique vivid imagination and colorful flares to tell a story that is informative, relatable, exciting and introduces a variety of new characters that casual and experienced comic/Spider-man fans can absorb with minimal difficulty or confusion. This is an idea that could never fly in a live action film and the effort being put into the hilariously creative narrative and story compilation brings it to life in a way only a quality animated film like this could deliver.

I loved the contrast between Miles inspirational first meeting with Spider-man, to the absurdly lazy and lackadaisical second Spider-man he ends up working under. Miles story and performance doesn't feel like another Peter Parker copy, he feels like his own kid with his own world, own issues and keeping his transformation on the backburner on the climax wisely gives the audience enough time to get to know him and enjoy the other Spider-cast in their full glory before putting on the mask himself. The unusual casting with Nic Cage as Spider-man Noir and John Mulaney as Spider-ham elevate the humor and wackiness to new levels of entertainment.

The speedy pacing and upbeat vibe with the music and color coordination with all the fight scenes and emotional movements kept this movie moving but never without emotion or purpose. Everything felt like it had chemistry, an artistic flow that felt like a natural part of this universe and it was a refreshing take on a well-known origin story. My only criticism would be that Miles himself doesn't exactly live up to the hype that was built around him (both by the fans and the movie itself). There's this feeling that he is going to be the role that everyone will adore and get behind and that seeing him on the big screen as a Spider-man incarnation is a big accomplishment, a big deal we are supposed to acknowledge...but I just don't see it.

Miles is by no means a weak, disappointing or poorly written character, but I just don't feel he ever truly encapsulated the hype and intensity his role was supposed to invoke. Overall, "Spider-man: Into the Spider-verse" was a brilliant leap into experimental territory for the web-slinger. The cast is electrifying with life, color, energy, and variety; it's an easy ride that anyone can get on board and enjoy without being longtime fans. The comic book style animation is wonderful to admire and watch; as is the rest of this film. Here's hoping we get more successful creative ventures like this one for our beloved Marvel characters in the future.

WHERE TO WATCH: AMAZON PRIME | RATING: 3/5 STARS



## MARY POPPINS RETURNS



Editorial credit: Tinseltown / Shutterstock.com

## MOVIE REVIEW

Sequels are a tricky beast to tame. Creating something lasting enough to carry on for several more films only works if you have a very solid and stable foundation film, but you don't want to have a foundation movie that is TOO good because then nothing can ever compare to the original, which is the problem anyone would have trying to follow up "Mary Poppins." The Julie Andrews led classic is an immaculate piece of cinematic perfection with effects, music, and writing that still holds up to this day 60 years later. Now Disney and Rob Marshall try to do the impossible and continue PL Travers iconic character in a sequel simply titled "Mary Poppins returns."

Set during London during the depression era, Michael and Jane Banks (Ben Whishaw and Emily Mortimer) are all grown up and have children of their own but are facing intense financial and emotional difficulties due to Michael losing his wife. Out of the sky, drops once again the mysterious Mary Poppins (Emily Blunt); come back to use her magic and wits to help the Banks family and with the aid of her lamp lighter friend Jack (Lin Manuel-Miranda), restore the joy and wonder Michael and Jane seemed to have lost during all these years.

To hear talk of a sequel to a movie like "Mary Poppins" is like hearing were going to colonize the sun: it just doesn't sound possible. But let it not be said that Disney does anything half-ass; they never do and this film is no exception. "Mary Poppins Returns" manages to capture everything that made the first film a classic: the colors, the music, the dancing, the imagination; it's all here and then some. It's like someone took the original film and brightened all the colors and visual pieces and slapped a few new faces over it, in other words, it still has the look and feel despite being made 60 years later and with a (mostly) new cast. Rob Marshall knew that this kind of legacy needs care and effort put into it and he did not disappoint on any aspect on any part.

The film features a completely original soundtrack with no rehashed versions of old beloved songs; just pure original new songs belted out by a fantastically talented cast. While no one doubts the genius musical talents of Lin Manuel-Miranda, its Emily Blunt's take on the beloved character that faced the most difficulties winning people over. Needless to say, it didn't take long for her to win this reviewer over. Blunt acts like she is possessed by the spirit of Julie Andrews. Her mannerisms, personality, and choreography are flawless, absolutely flawless. I've never seen someone embody someone else's character so naturally.

The magic and enchantment I felt as a child when I watched the original is here and that is a very hard thing to accomplish nowadays in a sequel. The beauty of the animated sequences and the phenomenal dancing sequences have such life and creativity in them that you almost feel like the film shouldn't be this good considering what it's following...and yet it is and it just keeps on getting better. I love the idea of seeing the Banks children growing up with families and problems of their own. Sure, some of them deal with the usual financial troubles the first film dealt with but most of it deals with the heart-wrenching pain Michael is going through with the loss of his wife. His brief but touching song about missing her is my absolute favorite number in the whole film.

The only component that feels out of place is the need for a villain in the form of Colin Firth's character Wilkins. Disney has always made excellent and memorable villains, but "Mary Poppins" was one of those films that worked without needing some mustache-twirling big bad to cause trouble; it was just a film about family and magic. He doesn't do a bad job playing a bad guy he just feels a bit too corny and doesn't really blend with the natural charms the original handled so well. Overall, "Mary Poppins Returns" is a true accomplishment in every sense of the word. The music, the talent, the visuals, the directing; everything lives up to the previous film's glory without missing a single beat or step. This is a sequel that lives up to its acclaimed original and should not be missed but SHOULD be enjoyed and watched for years to come; just like its processor.

WHERE TO WATCH: DISNEY PLUS | RATING: 4/5 STARS





Editorial credit: Kathy Hutchins / Shutterstock.com

# AQUAMAN

## CROSSES A BILLION DOLLARS

It's official: Warner Bros. Pictures' "Aquaman" has taken over the box office this year raking in more than \$1 billion worldwide in just over one month.

Ron Sanders, President of Worldwide Distribution, Warner Bros. Pictures Group and Warner Bros. Home Entertainment made the announcement today. He said: "We're thrilled audiences around the world have embraced 'Aquaman' in such a big, big way... Jason, the filmmakers and the team at DC have delivered a film that people love, and we are so appreciative of their support."

Director James Wan also said, "Firstly, Massive LOVE and THANK YOU to the fans and audiences around the world. Humbled by the way you've embraced 'Aquaman' and how it has resonated on a global scale. I'll forever be indebted to Jason for turning Aquaman into one of the coolest, cinematic Super Heroes ever and becoming the gold standard for this character for generations to come. Huge thank you to the amazing cast—Amber, Patrick, Nicole, Yahya, Willem, Temuera, Dolph, Ludi—for breathing life into our beloved characters. And, of course, this movie wouldn't be what it is without the incredible achievement of everyone involved, from the heads of department to every single crew member, who demanded utmost excellence in helping design and create this cinematic experience."

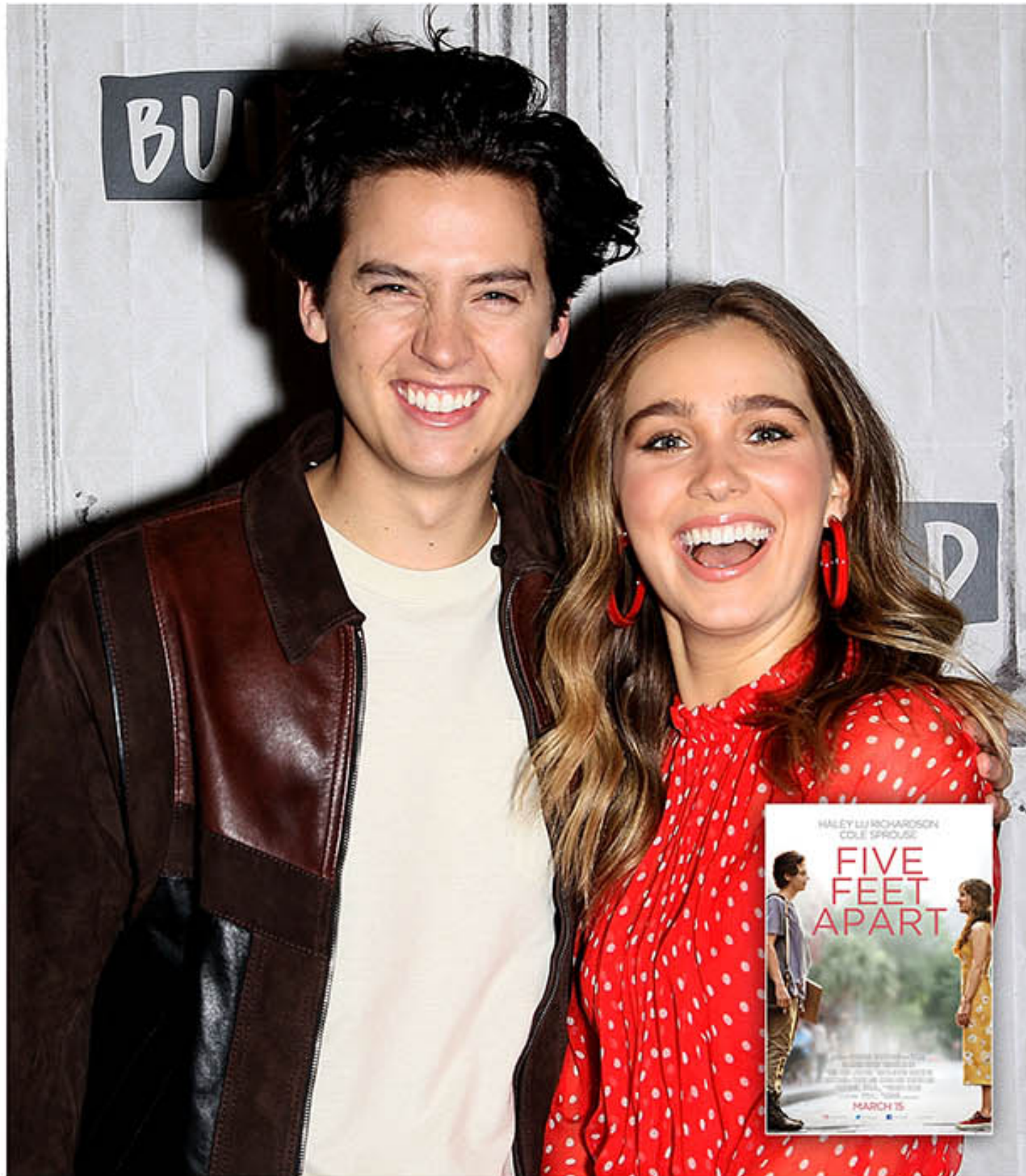
Besides crossing the \$1 billion mark, Aquaman is also the #2 DC film ever worldwide, right behind "The Dark Knight Rises," which raked in \$1.08 billion during its time. "Aquaman" has apparently raked in \$287.9 million domestically, and currently the second highest grossing Warner Bros. film of all time internationally, with a whopping \$732.4 million to date; the biggest DC film of all time internationally; and the highest grossing Warner Bros. film ever in China, with \$287.3 million.

The film stars Jason Momoa as Aquaman as well as Amber Heard as Mera, a fierce warrior and Aquaman's ally throughout his journey; Oscar nominee Willem Dafoe ("The Florida Project") as Vulko, counsel to the Atlantean throne; Patrick Wilson as Orm, the present King of Atlantis; Dolph Lundgren as Nereus, King of the Atlantean tribe Xebel; Yahya Abdul-Mateen II as the revenge-seeking Black Manta; and Oscar winner Nicole Kidman ("The Hours") as Arthur's mom, Atlanna. Also featured are Ludi Lin as Captain Murk, an Atlantean Commando, and Temuera Morrison as Arthur's dad, Tom Curry.

The film has been released in 3D and 2D and IMAX, and is distributed by Roadshow Films in Australia and New Zealand.



## FIVE FEET APART



Editorial credit: SD Mack / Shutterstock.com

## MOVIE REVIEW

I expected to be moved by Baldoni's drama, *Five Feet Apart*. However, I wasn't prepared for the deluge of tears that fell from my eyes.

*Five Feet Apart* is a romantic, light-hearted comedy film that follows the journey of a cystic fibrosis (CF) patient "Stella Grant" (Haley Lu Richardson). Richardson is known for her past roles as Claire Benoit in *Split* and as Krista in *The Edge of Seventeen*.

Stella uses an online media platform to open up about her life as a CF patient. She shares the rollercoaster of daily tasks that she has to undergo, her day to day routines and also how to live as ordinarily as she can, despite her illness. Stella has become resilient throughout the obstacles that she has had to face and through it all, she maintains a brave face.

Everything is calm and collective in Stella's life ... well, until a charming young man moves a couple of doors down in the cystic fibrosis ward.

Cole Sprouse, who is famously known for his current role as Jughead Jones in *Riverdale*, plays the role of Stella's love interest, "Will Newman". Will is also a young patient who sorrowfully suffers from cystic fibrosis; however, he has been transferred to Stella's residential hospital for a medical drug trial. The medical professionals who are in charge of Will's treatments, aim to destroy the rapid growing bacteria which are currently inhabiting within his lungs.

Poe (Moises Arias), Stella's best friend and also another CF patient within the ward, declares cheekily that there is a spark between Stella and Will, and that is where the twist reveals.

Cystic fibrosis is an incurable disease that is genetically inherited. A spokesperson from Cystic Fibrosis Australia states that: "People with CF are not encouraged to socialize with each other. The risk of cross-infection and exacerbation of lung conditions is too great. That means CF can be a lonely existence."

The phrase 'opposites attract' seems to be a popular theme within teen romances and this little love story is not at all different. Will is the carefree rebel, whereas Stella is a ball of organized positivity. Will's lack of 'following the rules' begins to drive Stella absolutely crazy and this leads to a deal between the two – Will listens to Stella's set hospital and health rules and in return, Will is allowed to have the opportunity to sketch Stella.

As the pair begin to love deeply, Stella and Will take the audience on an emotional journey of struggle, pain and the excitement that young love can bring to one's life.

*Five Feet Apart* explores the struggles that real life cystic fibrosis patients endure every single day and the hardships of not being able to reach out to anyone with the same deadly disease. It was saddening to see the lonely reality that the terminal disease of cystic fibrosis can have towards a patient's life. Yet, despite the sorrow, it was heartwarming to have a glimpse of the positive impact that the medical professionals and nurses have on their patients. It was truly the silver lining throughout the melancholy.

WHERE TO WATCH: AMAZON PRIME | RATING: 3/5 STARS



## DETECTIVE PIKACHU



Editorial credit: s\_bukley / Shutterstock.com

## MOVIE REVIEW

"Pokémon" needs no introduction. Ever since the games and anime exploded into US culture in the late '90s, it's become a phenomenon that refuses to die and continues to expand year after year with more games, more anime, more toys and now; its own live action movie. While the idea of a live action Pokémon movie is nothing new, no one knew how to launch the property in a way that would appeal to mass audiences without needing to be mega fans prior to seeing it. "Pokémon: Detective Pikachu" is a bizarre, whimsical enough launch point that just might be so silly and so weird that it just might work the way everyone is hoping it can.

Tim Goodman (Justice Smith) learns that his father has gone missing and is presumed dead. While looking through his apartment, he comes across Detective Pikachu (Ryan Reynolds), a smart-mouthed, coffee addicted nuisance who is suffering from amnesia and is somehow able to speak clearly to Tim and no one else. The two become an unlikely pair; set out to investigate the harmonious Ryme city, where Pokémon and humans co-exist peacefully and uncover the truth behind Tim's father, Pikachu's memories and a dark secret that threatens Pokémon and humans alike if not stopped.

Capitalizing on the success and popularity of Ryan Reynolds thanks to his work as "Deadpool," this approach to a live-action Pokémon movie manages to strike all the right chords needed to deliver just what I was hoping it'd be: a damn good time. This movie is here to have fun and bring you along with the ride; never getting too dark, too serious or too silly to lose its way. The Pokémon themselves are brought to adorable, vivid colorful life through beautifully rendered digital effects that give the creatures distinct personalities and powers that are spectacles for all ages to enjoy and appreciate. That's another great thing about this film's story approach; it's an easy introduction to new fans about what the Pokémon universe feels like.

We learn how the world works, how battles operate, the Pokeball system; all by brilliantly having the Pokémon live side by side with humans in a modern "Roger Rabbit" kind of approach. Justice Smith is perfectly paired with Reynolds snarky wit and witty one-liners. After his cliché nerd character in "Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom," I wasn't sure if Smith had the strength to carry this film but he sure proved me wrong. He's funny, likable, and enthusiastically reactive; plus he feels like a self-insert character audience can easily resonate with which again is attributed to his comedic skill and energy.

I adored his budding relationship with Kathryn Newton's character, but most of all, I loved his chemistry with Pikachu/Reynolds. His sharp wit is family friendlier but still razor sharp and dead on with his comedic chemistry with Justice Smith. It's a great introduction to a loveable character because it allows him something more so say than "Pika, pika" and emphasizes the importance of partnership; rather than rehashing the need for battling that was oxymoronically handled in Pokémon's first cinematic outing with "Pokémon: the first movie." Both human and Pokémon characters play off each other greatly and evenly and it helps make the world feel more natural.

There was also a great deal of genuinely surprising twists, far more expertly crafted than I was expecting in a film aimed at younger audiences. If I had to pry at any cracks in this film's adorably fuzzy armor, it would be the slight underutilization of its higher named supporting actors; Bill Nighy and Ken Watanabe. They serve their roles well and don't feel like their half-assing anything. I just felt they weren't used to their best abilities and spend too much time in their Pokémon partner's shadows.

Overall, "Detective Pikachu" is a weirdly genius launch for such an epic and lovable franchise being brought onto the big screen. The characters and actors are perfect fits (if a bit underused), the effects are amazing, the story is definitely above average and overall; it's just a fun time with a fun movie that knows how to really deliver what it's offering.

WHERE TO WATCH: NETFLIX | RATING: 3/5 STARS



## DEAD ANT



Editorial credit: DFree / Shutterstock.com

## MOVIE REVIEW

Sometimes the dumber the plot or the title, the greater the interest is attached to the movie. From the likes of "Snakes on a plane" and "Death bed: the bed that eats people", bad movies with goofy names and premises have suckered people in with their on-the-nose weird concepts and at the very least; people are going to see these films whether they are schlocky fun or just heaping piles of garbage. "Dead Ant" is a film that grabbed my interest with its weird and obviously cheap tongue-in-cheek plot right off the bat. I knew it sounded stupid, I knew it looked stupid but god help me I just could not stop thinking about how such a movie would turn out.

When a burnt out, 80's rock group called "Sonic Grave" ventures to Coachella to try and spark a comeback, they make a pit stop to pick up some "special" peyote to help inspire them before the show. Things take a wrong turn when they piss off nature (literally and figuratively) and incur the wrath of giant man-eating ants that are coming after the band and everyone in their path. Now Sonic Grave and their crew are held up inside their van; trying to fight off the murderous insects long enough to escape to the concert before their career and their lives end permanently.

It seems kind of hypocritical to complain about the cheesiness and crappiness of a second rate B movie like this for its bad effects and plot, but even knowing what I was signing up for, there is a good way to do a bad movie and then there's...this way. The effects are Syfy channel original movie level bad, which isn't good but it's clear the budget went to the star power behind the film which is the true saving grace but not successful enough to make this THAT memorable. The film seesaws between being balls-to-the-wall goofy to being too serious or too discombobulated to know what direction it wants to take everything. The band and the cast are loads of fun and seeing them struggling to fight off ants with guitars and idiotic plans were absolutely worth it.

But then, to keep switching back to this off-putting Native American gun nut subplot and how their peyote is responsible for bringing these ants out just...kind of stalls the film. They take it way too seriously and assume it's badass looking because it acknowledges the goofiness of the plot so that makes it work; it doesn't. As I said before, the casting department picked a perfect bunch of stars for this misfit, one-hit-wonder band: Sean Astin, Jake Busey, Tom Arnold, Leisha Hailey, and Rhys Coiro are a great team and produce comedic home runs more often than not.

Surprisingly enough, Tom Arnold is the one who really steals the show here. He is rampantly hilarious and is so crazed and ridiculous, you never know what he's going to say next and it just keeps on getting funnier every time. I love Jake Busey's hippie base player persona and even when things get gory and bodies start piling; this crew still knows how to get a few laughs out of me. The key word in that last sentence is "few." Try as it might, "Dead Ant" can never keep up its humor, its horror or its momentum. It's too serious at times to fit the big bug plot and never goes far enough with its absurd origins to take full advantage of the B movie tropes.

The R rating is well warranted but not well delivered. The use of nudity and sex at times is uncomfortable and feels like something you'd see in a "Friday the 13th" movie and not here. The bad movie idea was not handled in a well enough way to be considered a good/bad movie and that's because the movie either went too far or too little with its tones and it leaves the film uneven and also messy, not a good mix for a film trying to be so bad it's good.

Overall, "Dead Ant" knew what it was doing with its cast; Tom Arnold is a scene-stealing riot and the plot had so much goofiness gold going for it, but it never fully made the B movie grade like it wanted to. The graphics are atrociously bad, its tone is all over the place and it wasted its best assets in exchange for its worst ones.

WHERE TO WATCH: NETFLIX | RATING: 1/5 STARS



## SEX EDUCATION



Editorial credit: Featureflash Photo Agency / Shutterstock.com

## TV REVIEW

Much like HBO, Netflix knows how to take full advantage of highly mature, uncensored content and create deep, rich, comical and even sexually mature stories through their original programming. While plenty of programs have tackled the subject of sex, they usually end up going overboard with the sexual content and tend to let the nudity speak for itself rather than the story. "Sex Education" is a witty, slick, unusual flashback to teen dramas/comedies by using a unique solution to a very relatable and common problem and helping people in high school process it with dignity as well as dark humor.

Otis Milburn (Asa Butterfield) has enough trouble fitting in just by being himself, it's worsened by the fact his mother (Gillian Anderson) is a well-known sex therapist and living with her teachings have left him unusually well versed with sexual dysfunctions. When a girl he's crushed on (Emma Mackey) discovers this unique talent, she creates a business with Otis by secretly helping out high school peers with their sexual problems discretely in exchange for money. Now Otis and his would-be girlfriend have to traverse through the twisted troppings of their classmates' unusual sex problems, while still struggling to understand and deal with their own.

Most teenaged comedies dealing with sex usually treat it with over the top, excessive comical nudity or inappropriate questions that make everyone laugh and giggle as if their children. Characters react with over exaggerated responses to minor problems that fail to be actually relatable and usually deal with an incompetent misunderstanding that serves as the spiking source of drama throughout the story. "Sex Education" is unapologetically brutal with its reality check and it is a far better and brainier series for doing so. All the teenagers suffer from real sexual problems, usually in relation to an accurate social conflict that kids today suffer through (like nasty rumors about performances in bed, hinting someone's gay or blaming someone for an STD and telling everyone just to shame them).

"Sex Education" is probably the most realistic portrayal of a high school environment I've seen put to film. The simplistic savagery of these students' actions leaves little to the darkest of imaginations; hazing everyone from every gender and class and creating all kinds of drama and rich development from start to finish. Even the bullies themselves are given depth and a comprehensive background; they are not limited to cartoonish brainless thugs and it shines a light on the dangerous ignorance today's youth possesses when it comes to understanding sex.

Butterfield is a face I've seen in many films before and like before, he fits the awkward male lead very well. Truth be told though, much of his screen time is shared and often feels outshined by most of his co-stars. Emma Mackey is a perfect mix of the good and bad guy roughly blended into one compelling female lead. She feels so out of place with Butterfield and yet perfectly so at the same time. Her rough exterior comes off as natural but soft enough to feel a connection as a viewer and as a character. There's a great side story involving Butterfield's best friend (who happens to be gay) that flashes extensive light on the cruel treatment of gay teens.

One of the best characters in the show actually falls into one of the weaker components of the story: Gillian Anderson. She's an absolute delight every time she's onscreen. Her unusual bluntness when discussing sex with her son is hilarious and her boundaries are non-existent; creating even more and more unusual interactions to enjoy. However, she's not used nearly as much as she should be considering her comedy chops. The series also suffers from some predictable high school drama clichés and while at times it's unavoidable, it's not excusable. Overall, "Sex Education" is a great high concept show with an excellent sense of humor and a brilliantly dark use of real-life situations reactions. Aside from needing to use its star trump card a bit more, this is an excellent series to get hooked on and season 2 cannot come soon enough.

WHERE TO WATCH: NETFLIX | RATING: 4/5 STARS



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