

The Chariot

New Years Edition

January 2021

Reflecting On Christmas Memories By Katie Schadler

Right around my sixth Christmas, I watched the 1983 classic *A Christmas Story* for the first time. You know, the movie with the kid who sticks his tongue to the pole and winds up getting stuck there. Dumb kid. I wish I could provide a better summary for you, but I don't remember much about that movie, considering that right around that scene, I decided to stick a foam sticker up my nose. For the life of me, I can't give you a good reason as to why I did what I did. Or why, like a genius, out of all of the possible stickers in my infinite childhood collection, I would choose the three-dimensional circular sticker, meaning that every time I plunged my finger up yonder, I would push the sticker farther up my nose. And not only was I stupid but I was stubborn. So of course, as I continued to further obstruct my airways, I did so in silence, not telling my mother and father who sat beside me so intently watching little Ralphie stick his tongue to a pole that I so smoothly stuck a sticker up my nose. Eventually, I had to tell my parents what I had done. And to slap the icing all over the god-forsaken cake, there was a snow storm outside. So good going Katie. Way to be just as sharp as little



Ralphie. So rather than our annual light ride, we spent that holiday season riding to the hospital and having my dad blow into my mouth per doctors orders so my nose would make like a cannon and shoot the sticker right out of there. These are the father-daughter moments that you hold close to your heart.

I hold out hope that this year will be better, praying that it doesn't end in tears and hospital rooms. I'm definitely not an expert on Christmas, judging by my tendency to bring chaos to a joyous occasion but I will leave you with one piece of advice to consider during this unconventional holiday season: hold onto the truth and the people around you who make these memories what they are. And as a forewarning, stay away from stickers if possible.

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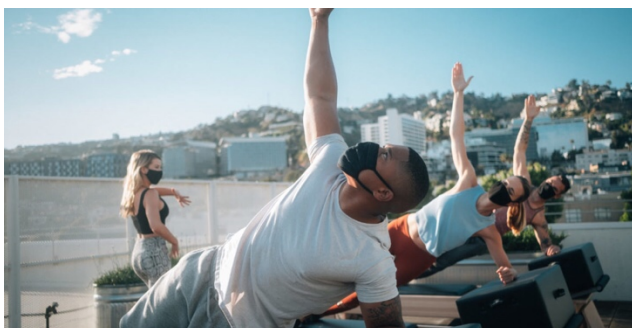
How To Keep Yourself In Shape This Winter

By Anneka Gernert

Because of the suspension of winter sports, many athletes are struggling to stay in shape until the season resumes. I hope these tips will help you stay active during this break in sports.

1- Find Friends. If possible, it is wise to get a buddy who will workout with you. This person can hold you responsible for your workouts, and you have to be committed because the other person is counting on you being there for workouts. When exercising outside, it's easy to social distance while still meeting in person. You can run, do strength training, biking, and more. For an even more "Covid friendly" option, you could simply FaceTime a friend or group of friends and chat while you workout together. You're still committing to plans, but it's also fun and safe. With this option, you can workout anywhere with just your device with you.

2-Get Good Gear. In the words of Mr. Hetrich "There's never bad weather, only bad gear." So, if you want to enjoy the fresh air and beautiful scenery outside, you must be prepared. Some gear I recommend buying would be a sturdy pair of shoes, a warm raincoat, a thick hat, and gloves. I've also learned that layers are key. Start off with many thin layers of clothes, and then throughout the workout you can always take off layers. It's better to be overdressed than underdressed because you can always remove layers in the middle of a workout,



but not add on. Another part of this step is investing in home workout equipment. It's wise to have a backup plan if you can't get outside. Some basic equipment that can enhance your workout is a set of weights (even light ones), a yoga mat, resistance bands or TRX machine, a pull-up bar, and other sport-specific equipment.

3-Cultivate Consistency. You should carve a scheduled time in your day for working out. I usually workout at the same time as practice would normally be so that I'm not changing my schedule. Pick a time that works for you and stick to it. Also, you should workout regularly throughout the week. Everyone's goals are different, so the number of days that you workout will be different from another person. As a runner, I run 5 to 6 days a week, and on my rest days I do stretching, strength, or other low impact exercises. To make sure you stay consistent, create a basic schedule detailing what days you will workout and what days you will rest. Your schedule can be as specific or as general as you want it to be.

4-Enjoy Exercise. It's important to find the types of workouts you enjoy so that you don't grow to hate working out. When you like to exercise, you will develop healthy habits that will help you stay in shape in the future. I love to run, but I also discovered that I love to do strength training with weights because I can see my own progress and create goals. Some types of exercises that you could try are running, walking, biking, pilates, yoga, body weight training, resistance training, weight lifting, HIIT/tabata, and boxing. You can find something you like and tailor it to each day, or choose different types of workouts for different days. Switching the types of workouts from day to day challenges your body and prevents boredom.

5-Chose Challenges. Challenging yourself is difficult, yet crucial for progress. Our bodies are capable of so much, but you can't really understand that until you test it out for yourself. Some ways of making workouts more challenging are by increasing the weights you're lifting, running for a longer amount of time, or doing more reps. Soreness after an intense workout is another sign that you are pushing yourself. Along with challenging yourself, you also need to give your body time to recover. In one week, you should do one to three intense workouts and the other days should be less intense days with effective stretching.

New Year's Resolutions **By Grace Diehl**

The new year is finally here, and with it comes everyone's New Year's resolutions, an event so anticipated that produce companies rely on an increase in sales due to New Year's diets every year. The running joke with most New Year's resolutions is that they rarely last past the first month of the new year; statistically, about 80% of New Year's resolutions fail by February. There's a reason for the phenomenon that is abandoning New Year's resolutions: New Year's resolutions are often too ambitious and don't allow for realistic goal setting.

About 38% of New Year's resolutions are based on weight loss or improved health. Whether the resolution is to lose a certain amount of weight, gain a certain amount of muscle, or simply look a certain way, there's a good chance that the individual working toward their resolution will feel discouraged by the odds they've presented themselves with and drop the resolution entirely. This is because so many people cut themselves off cold turkey and set intense, unattainable goals for themselves such as exercising every day



right off the bat or changing their diet drastically and suddenly. When it is made evident that these goals are not possible, many people simply give up.

The same mentality can be applied to almost any resolution: quit smoking, reducing caffeine intake, increasing meditation time, etc. Regardless of the resolution, the majority of people tend to dive straight into their strict routine on January 1st and only realize they never gave themselves any room to adjust once the routine has become too difficult to maintain and they feel as though they have failed. The simple solution to this dilemma is to work your way toward a New Year's resolution rather than starting full throttle on January 1st. If your goal is to improve your health, begin by making small adjustments to your diet and exercise schedule and slowly increase as your body adjusts. If your goal is to quit an addiction to nicotine or caffeine, ease your way into it by slowly decreasing your intake. Most importantly, remember to be kind to yourself and set reasonable goals that will help you improve your state of living this new year.

NBA 2020-2021 Storylines **By Harry Weiss**

After a chaotic finish to the 2019-2020 NBA Season in the Orlando Bubble which crowned the Los Angeles Lakers champions over the Miami Heat, the NBA faced many questions regarding the



upcoming season. What to do with draft, the length of the season, and how preseason games would work and training camp? After a few weeks of discussion, commissioner Adam Silver and the NBPA decided to shorten the season to 72 games rather than the standard 82. Also, they formed an in-season Play-In Tournament which will crown the winners of the No. 7 and No. 8 seeds in both the East and West conferences.

While we're only about two weeks into the season, the NBA has already faced major questions surrounding the health and safety protocols regarding COVID-19. So far, the Philadelphia 76ers had to play the Denver Nuggets with only seven healthy players and the most recent game between the Miami Heat and Boston Celtics has been postponed due to a Heat player's test returning inconclusive. The NBA will most likely face future postponements with contact tracing spreading from team to team as All-Star Jayson Tatum is one of the many stars who has already been forced to quarantine for 10-14 days.

One of the highlights so far has been the emergence of rookies such as the Golden State Warriors' big man James Wiseman, Charlotte Hornets point guard Lamelo Ball, and Tyrese Haliburton of the Sacramento Kings. While Ball and Haliburton have been coming off the bench, Wiseman has been performing extremely well in Draymond Green's absence. Philadelphia

76ers center Tyrese Maxey and Boston Celtics point guard Payton Pritchard have also been major spark plugs for their teams, balling day in and day out in their respective roles as Pritchard even hit a game winner against the Heat last week. So far, this year's draft look like it has potential to be one of the best draft classes from the lottery to the back-end of the first round.

However, some teams are already dealing with conflicts. The Sacramento Kings are facing a questionable situation with their power forward, former No. 2 overall pick, Marvin Bagley III whose father infamously tweeted at the team to trade his son. The drama only began this weekend, while the Houston Rockets are facing a dilemma with their All-NBA superstar James Harden who requested a trade late in the offseason even after the team traded All-Star point guard Russell Westbrook for John Wall. Right now, there doesn't look like a clear winner for this trade as the Wizards struggles have continued even with Bradley Beal playing the best he ever has in his career. While it is way too early to tell, I still firmly believe that Beal could be traded by the time the 2021-2022 season comes around.

So far, the Lakers and 76ers have dominated their respective conferences but unsurprisingly the Phoenix Suns, now led by future Hall-of-Famer Chris Paul are playing extremely well with the Los Angeles Clippers and Utah Jazz performing well in the West. Whereas in the East the Boston Celtics are of course neck and neck with the 76ers but both the Indiana Pacers and Milwaukee Bucks are playing exceptionally well. Surprisingly the Orlando Magic, New York Knicks, and the Cleveland Cavaliers have been winning and seem like potential dark horse contenders for lower seeds as teams like the Toronto Raptors who are currently 2-8 are struggling to find their balance as they play in Tampa due to

COVID-19 regulations in Canada. However, the Magic just lost improving point guard Markelle Fultz to a torn ACL and are now turning to UNC rookie Cole Anthony to help lead the floor.

Although the Lakers were champions last season, I expect them to retain their crown once again this year and defeat either the Celtics or the 76ers out of the east. Unfortunately it is way too early to predict the future playoff bracket and the awards, but I am prepared to make some bold predictions. I believe that after a failed season where the Rockets miss the playoffs, Harden forces his way out of town to Brooklyn where the next super team of KD, Kyrie, and now Harden attempt to take over the NBA in 2022. The Pelicans, Warriors (even without Klay), and Thunder all make the playoffs in the West while the Timberwolves, who reloaded in the offseason with No. 1 overall pick Anthony Edwards from Georgia, and Spurs miss the playoffs along with the Rockets. In the East, the Raptors also miss the playoffs but the Atlanta Hawks and the Cleveland Cavaliers also sneak in as the 8th seed. My dark horse final candidates in both conferences are the Indianapolis Pacers in the East and the Golden State Warriors out west.

With a long season ahead, it will be interesting to see how Adam Silver controls the regulations and standards he set in the offseason. Will we see a repeat in champions? Will Giannis' Bucks finally make the NBA Finals? Will the Golden State Warriors contend with the Clippers and Mavericks without Klay? Only time will tell, but it is gearing up to be an exciting season full of drama and spectacles in the NBA.

NFL Offseason Prediction

By Harry Weiss

While the NFL playoffs are in full swing after Super Wild Card Weekend, the

offseason has already begun for 18 other teams. Thus, come January, mock drafts are in full swing throughout the media and rumors surrounding coaching openings and general manager spots are heating up. I will review my predictions for the playoffs while sharing my opinion on the upcoming offseason.

Based off of my mid-season predictions, I had the Las Vegas Raiders, Miami Dolphins, Arizona Cardinals, and the Philadelphia Eagles all making the playoffs which they did not. Instead, the Cleveland Browns, Tennessee Titans, Washington Football Team, and the Chicago Bears all made the playoffs but only the Browns won their wild card matchup. While I had the Steelers playing the Chiefs in the AFC Championship, I now believe that the Buffalo Bills will play the Chiefs instead but Kansas City will reign victorious.

So far the main headline of the offseason has been the Deshaun Watson situation with the Houston Texans. After giving Watson a 4 year \$156,000,000 extension, the Texans had fired their Head Coach Bill O'Brien. The team promised to give Watson some leverage in both the head coaching opening and the general manager position. However, after hiring Nick Caserio as GM, the team failed to listen to their superstar. Watson was adamant that the team interview current Chiefs Offensive Coordinator Eric Bienemy who is a hot target for other openings in the league. But, of course, the Texans did not interview Bienemy which led to Watson becoming "angrier than ever," per Chris Mortensen of ESPN.

With this situation brewing in Houston, the NFL media has gone ablaze with potential trade packages for Watson and the Texans. The most likely destinations appear to be Miami and Chicago, with many other teams rumored to be interested in San Francisco and New Orleans. In my opinion,

Watson, who has a no-trade clause placed in his contract, should accept a trade if it comes along. The Texans have simply not held their end of the deal and listened to their superstar QB. Personally I think it is very likely that Watson demands a trade before the offseason is over and while I think Chicago will make the best offer, I believe that Miami will be more willing to send a haul of first round picks including Tua Tagovailoa to Houston. But, Chicago, who are apparently letting Mitch Trubisky walk, are stuck with Nick Foles who certainly cannot lead their team and GM Ryan Pace is definitely not afraid of making big moves, such as when he traded for All-Pro linebacker Khalil Mack from then Oakland Raiders.

My favorite part of the offseason are mock drafts. I find myself completing seven round mock drafts as I love the idea of drafting for my favorite team and the rest of the league. So, I will make a mini ESPN-esque mock draft with the first 10 picks (without any trades).

1. Jacksonville Jaguars: Trevor Lawrence, QB from Clemson
2. New York Jets: Justin Fields, QB from Ohio State
3. Miami Dolphins: Penei Sewell, OT from Oregon
4. Atlanta Falcons: Zach Wilson, QB from BYU
5. Cincinnati Bengals: Christian Darrisaw, OT from Virginia Tech



6. Philadelphia Eagles: Ja'Marr Chase, WR from LSU
7. Detroit Lions: Jaylen Waddle, WR from Alabama
8. Carolina Panthers: Kyle Pitts, TE from Florida
9. Denver Broncos: Kwity Paye, DE from Michigan
10. Dallas Cowboys: Patrick Surtain II, CB from Alabama

My reasoning behind each pick — The Jaguars get their undoubtedly QB of the future, a generational talent in Trevor Lawrence. The Jets, after a strong, gutsy performance in the College Football Playoffs, Justin Fields replaces Sam Darnold and leads the new core of coaching in the Big Apple. For Miami, it is a very easy pick, with a loaded free agency and draft class of wide receivers they must take their tackle for the next 15+ years to go along with Tua (or Watson...). In Atlanta, Matt Ryan is turning 36 years old and the Falcons are in cap-hell right now, it only makes sense to take their QB of the future who can sit a year behind Matty Ice. For the Bengals, they are in the same case as Miami, for a team with a good amount of money for free agency they must take a tackle here to protect Joe Burrow who already tore his ACL this year.

Meanwhile, the Eagles have the most needs of any team and at sixth overall they have a big decision to make. So, they take their WR No.1 in Ja'Marr Chase who can take some pressure off of Jalen Reagor while replacing Alshon Jeffery and helping whoever the starter is in 2021. In a situation similar to Atlantant, but with more money for spending, the Lions take a stud receiver in Jaylen Waddle to play alongside Kenny Golladay who I believe they should resign and I think next year they take a QB in the first round. Down in Carolina, the Panthers haven't had a legitimate star at tight end since Greg Olsen who struggled in his last

few years. Here, they get an absolute freak of an athlete in Kyle Pitts who can line up outside like a receiver or inside like a normal tight end. For Denver, they also have many needs and QB is definitely one of them, but I believe they are in a similar situation as Detroit and will select a QB next year. Now, they draft their edge rusher of the future as they potentially will let Von Miller walk in free agency. Lastly, at 10th, the Cowboys select the best corner in the class in Patrick Surtain II who will team up with Alabama teammate Trevon Diggs in a secondary that has shown its flashes of potential but desperately needs help.

Although the offseason is essentially a while away, there are still many questions for teams in free agency and in the draft. It certainly will be a wild finish to the NFL season as the first ever Super Wild Card Weekend was full of nail biters and heroic performances. With some seasons over, many teams now turn all their attention to the future, where they hope one day they will host the Lombardi trophy.

The Bluest Eye Review

By Emma Seley

The novel, *The Bluest Eye*, by author Toni Morrison, is a fiction story written about characters struggling in the 1970's in the years following the Great Depression. Although it may be classified as fiction, for most black girls in this time period, it was a very vivid reality. The story introduces the main character, a young black girl named Pecola Breedlove who grows up in an abusive household with her parents. The parents, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, are set up to have a detailed past in order to feel some sort of sympathy for them, yet still fail to take care of their child.

During the time period of the 70's, the busy parents of Pecola and her best friend Claudia MacTeer struggle to make ends meet for the family while the girls both grow and



experience life as black girls in a white world. Unlike Pecola, Claudia grows up in a house surrounded by loving and supportive parents who guide her along her journey. While Pecola takes a look at her surroundings she begins to notice how different she is from the majority.

When Claudia is growing up, she is gifted a doll with a white skin tone that she despises. She completely shreds it and destroys it. "Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs — all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (Morrison 20). This being said, Pecola begins to realize how the world around her normalized white as the beauty standard, and she is just not white.

People have continued talking about this book ever since. According to an online reviewer, this book can be deemed, "An excellent read - hard hitting and dares society to dismantle the misconceived notions of racial beauty." This being said, many have looked at this book in a different light as it opens people's eye up about the injustices in the black community. A second reviewer, Natasha Davis claims, "This book touched my soul. It took me to a time and

place that although I had never been there I felt like a part of my spirit use to roam there.” Clearly, this novel brings out meaningful messages to people in order to feel like they belong.

Almost as if this book is a voice for those who need guidance in this society, like Pecola needed. Many can argue that the reason Pecola was never directly speaking to us, was because she was mysterious and secret-keeping just like the audience of the book.

For Pecola’s whole life she grows up with no support system to guide her, giving her absolutely no future outlook on a positive life. She struggles to fit in with the people around her, since her skin color puts her in danger, and her eye color is just not right. With blue eyes, Pecola could have conquered the world, but since she is a black girl with brown eyes, she is lost and never to be remembered.

***Sweet Magnolias* Review**

By: Alex Hoffman

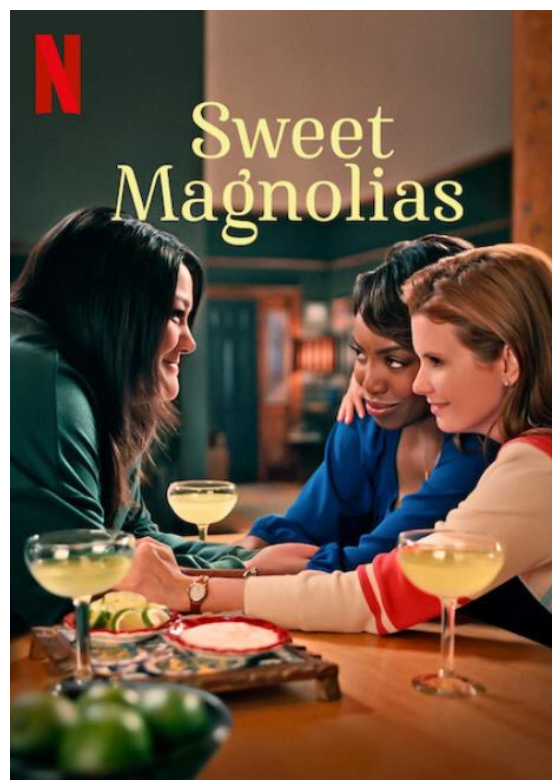
A delightfully Southern television show called *Sweet Magnolias* was released on Netflix on May 19, 2020. The stars include JoAnna Garcia, Brooke Elliott, Jamie Lynn Spears, Heather Headley, and Justin Bruening. Currently, one season has been released on Netflix, but they were quickly renewed for a season two.

Falling under the romance and coming-of-age genres, *Sweet Magnolias* has a lot of plot twists and love stories, making it an entertaining TV show for young adults. In the very first scene main character and mother of three, Maddie Townsend, is finalizing a divorce with her husband, Bill Townsend. The show focuses on her struggles with this big

change and her life in a small town. They live in Serenity, South Carolina in a small town where everyone knows everyone, and no business is private. At Maddie’s side through the entire show and all of her struggles are her two best friends, and towards the beginning of the show the friends want to open a luxurious spa. This spa of theirs becomes a focus of the show, but Maddie is reluctant to join another endeavor that will bring about change and new chaos to her life.

One of Maddie’s sons, Tyler, is on the baseball team, and a new coach arrives from out of town. He quickly becomes more important in Maddie’s life, also causing a disturbance with her kids and the town. Kyle, Maddie’s other son, is a performer for his school’s drama club, and he has hopes for a romance of his own. Of course, in a small town like Serenity, more trouble arises when Maddie’s ex-husband gets engaged to another woman.

The series exemplifies the ups and downs of living in a small town and follows



the Townsends and their friends. The fact that the characters live in a very small Southern town in South Carolina is a crucial element to the show because Maddie's business being on display is the cause of her main struggles. No one is safe from the prying eyes and listening ears of the Mayor's wife and the other townspeople who make it their business to know every aspect of the citizens' personal lives.

The dialect also adds to the setting as they all have a slight southern accent, thus creating a small town charm aspect that turns out to be unlike what it seems from the outside. Not only do their accents present this charm, but their costumes and houses are also a major factor of the aesthetic. Many of the characters attend church every Sunday, and they reference God frequently. The religious beliefs of the townspeople is not a major theme; however, it is prevalent throughout the show.

Personally, I watched the show twice because I felt I could relate to the younger characters, and the setting and plot were very interesting to me. While it has the cute Southern charm aesthetic, it still has its fair share of drama and plot twists. There's something enjoyable for many different age groups in the show, and the daily struggles that the main characters face seem to be very relatable.

The writers of the television series, Sherryl Woods and Sheryl J. Anderson, were very successful in creating a show that captivates the viewer into wanting more. They utilize the image of innocence in a suburban area in South Carolina, in order to show the viewers that this small town isn't as pure as it appears to be from the outside. The season ends with a major cliff hanger that leaves everyone, myself included, wanting to find out what happens next, and it leaves them itching to get a season two released. Exploring life changes, friendships, and romance, this show has

something for everyone, and it truly conveys the idea that life isn't always as it seems.

My Subjective Ranking of the Star Wars Films

By Riley Dauber

11. *The Last Jedi* (2017)

The Last Jedi had a lot going for it: Rian Johnson was slated as director and writer, many plot points looked good on paper, and the first film in the sequel trilogy - *The Force Awakens* - successful set up characters like Rey, Finn, and Poe. However, this all falls flat when being executed. The plot is paper thin: Rey spends most of the runtime training with Luke, who's a crotchety old man filled with guilt, while Finn must look for a man with Rose, who's a terribly written character. *The Last Jedi* fails because of its poorly-written characters and awful execution. The force scenes between Rey and Kylo Ren make no sense, and while Luke's character arc could've been done well, it falls flat like the rest of the film. Not to mention how out of place Laura Dern is, and the silly scenes that are sprinkled throughout the film, including the scene where Leia flies through space (because, the force?) and Rose and Finn spend almost an hour at a casino. Rian Johnson, what were you thinking? I shouldn't hate on Johnson too much - the direction in the film is well done, and the use of color is on full display in the fight scenes. But the other elements of the film, including the lackluster score and boring fight scenes, make *The Last Jedi* the worst Star Wars film (in my opinion).

10. *Solo* (2018)

This origin story for Han Solo feels the most unnecessary: why do we need to know where Han Solo comes from? *Solo* is at number ten because it's boring. Plain as that. Alden Ehrenreich is a fine Han Solo, but the real savior of this movie is Donald

Glover as Lando. He nails the character to a “T,” and he is a joy to watch. But the film fails in nearly every other department. The plot is boring and too confusing, the fight scenes are few and far between, and the characters are forgettable. I don’t even remember Woody Harrelson in this movie, and Paul Bettany as the villain disgraces all other Star Wars villains. The droid character is written to mock feminism, and the film kills off the only woman of color in the first half hour (yikes). Also, the direction is nothing special and the lighting is so terrible that you can’t see anything in the first hour.

9. *The Rise of Skywalker* (2019)

What a forgettable film. *The Rise of Skywalker* marks the end of the sequel trilogy, which follows a young Jedi named Rey as she tries to defeat the evil New Order. The end of this mediocre trilogy is forgettable and dull. Finn and Poe have little to do, and as I’m writing this article, I can’t remember anything about the plot. Basically, Palpatine is back as the big baddie for some reason, and Rey not only needs to defeat him, but also Kylo Ren, who is as boring as they come. After I finished watching *The Rise of Skywalker*, I realized I just lost two hours and thirty minutes of my life. The sequel trilogy feels like a poorly constructed group project that started strong, but fell to pieces as the deadline neared. The characters have little to do, the villains are dull, and the plot and action sequences are lackluster. This movie is not great, is what I’m saying.

8. *Rogue One* (2016)

Another origin story, *Rogue One* follows the group that steals the plans for the Death Star before *A New Hope*. To be honest, I wish I liked this movie more. My sister and dad are big fans, and I can see why. The end fight scene on the beach is very entertaining. But other than that, the film is kind of...boring (I’m noticing a trend). Felicity Jones is great as Jyn, and

Diego Luna is very charming (hot people help when the film is boring). The supporting cast has potential, but the film doesn’t spend enough time developing everyone. Mix in a few forgettable fight scenes and plot points, and I’m now remembering why I’m not a fan of this movie.

7. *The Phantom Menace* (1999)

I can hear everyone reading this article freaking out. I’m sorry, but I really like the prequels! I’d much rather watch a laughably bad movie than a boring one. *The Phantom Menace* is the first prequel film, and introduces Anakin Skywalker, who becomes Darth Vader. We also meet a young Obi-Wan (played by Ewan McGregor, who saves this series) and Padmé, who is Anakin’s love interest later in the trilogy. I can understand why people don’t like this movie - the politics make for a very boring side plot, the CGI is terrible and overwhelming at times, and Jar Jar Binks is here. But come on. You gotta enjoy the terribleness of this movie. It’s laugh out loud funny sometimes. Anyway, the pod race scene and the final lightsaber battle between Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon, and Darth



Maul save the film from being a total dumpster fire.

6. *The Force Awakens* (2015)

I think what makes the sequel trilogy not that great is the forced nostalgia for older fans of the series, and the fact that the three films feel disjointed. The storyline doesn't span the length of three films like the original trilogy and the prequels. However, I don't mind *The Force Awakens*. Yeah, it's got a lot of forced nostalgia sprinkled in to make dads and fanboys cry, but it's the only film in the sequel trilogy where the characters are given something to do. Rey is introduced as the Jedi, which is great considering how female characters have been treated in the series thus far. Poe is underused in this movie as well, but at least Finn gets to come along on the adventure. While *The Force Awakens* isn't the worst film, it's definitely not the best either. The one moment I can remember is Kylo Ren and Rey's fight in the snow, which is a pretty great fight sequence. Han Solo, Chewbacca, and Leia are introduced again, and Domhnall Gleeson is a great General Hux. I don't have much to say about this film, except for the fact that it's the best of the sequel trilogy. Too bad the other two films couldn't succeed.

5. *Attack of the Clones* (2002)

I'm prepared for people to hate me for this. Similar to my thoughts on *The Phantom Menace*, I have a genuine love for *Attack of the Clones*. Is the CGI just as terrible, if not worse? Yes. Do Hayden Christensen and Natalie Portman have zero chemistry? Also yes. But regardless of those



two facts - which even I will admit, make the movie terrible - I love this movie. Padmé is a style icon, and Obi-Wan looks the best in this film (Did I mention that Ewan McGregor saves this trilogy?) Jar Jar Binks is only in one scene, and we don't have to hear about midichlorians. Also, the score is fantastic, and the fight scene on Geonosis is entertaining. While the writing is questionable at times, this movie gifts us with some hilarious monologues ("I don't like sand" and "I killed them. I killed them all.") The plot is also an improvement from *The Phantom Menace*, where Obi-Wan must find the clone army (which flows effortlessly into the television show *The Clones War*) while Anakin is tasked with protecting Padmé, which leads to their relationship.

4. *Revenge of the Sith* (2005)

Revenge of the Sith is the third and final film in the prequel trilogy, and shows Anakin's descent into madness before becoming Darth Vader. The melodrama in this film is top-tier, especially once Obi-Wan kills the two villains of the franchise, and the attention is on Anakin. Padmé has a limited number of scenes - Natalie Portman was studying at Harvard while filming - but reveals to Anakin that she is pregnant. Obi-Wan's quest to kill the villains and Anakin's switch to the dark side both lead to the final scene between the two friends on Mustafar. I find myself quoting the dialogue from this scene almost every day; that's how iconic it is. Anakin and Obi-Wan's fight on Mustafar is probably my favorite fight scene in a Star Wars film (except for, of course, the Luke and Darth Vader fight in *The Empire Strikes Back*.) The drama and fight scenes are what make this movie, not to mention Hayden Christensen's improved acting and the way the film seamlessly leads into the original trilogy.

3. *A New Hope* (1977)

A New Hope, originally titled *Star Wars*, is the quintessential hero's journey. We're introduced to Luke, Han Solo, and Princess Leia, and the three characters are all well-developed and have great chemistry. Luke is a young teen living on Tatooine, and is tasked with finding Ben Kenobi (it's Obi-Wan from the prequels, obviously). From there, Luke learns the ways of the force while trying to rescue Princess Leia and stop Darth Vader from using his destructive weapon, the Death Star. This film has something for everybody: great fight scenes, wisecracking characters, and a by-the-books hero's journey plot line. Honestly, *A New Hope* changed the film industry, and it shouldn't be forgotten.

2. *Return of the Jedi* (1983)

So, this might be controversial, but I'm putting *Return of the Jedi* at number two. Yeah, it's not the best ending to the original trilogy, but it's got some great moments. The opening scene with Jabba the Hutt is the film's lowest point, but it only goes up from there. The scenes with the Ewoks are funny and charming, and honestly, we need this levity after the serious ending of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Luke, now that he knows he has a sister and Darth Vader is his father (if you didn't know this: Have you been living under a rock?), tries to defeat Darth Vader before it's too late. The end fight scene, where Anakin/Darth Vader gets his redemption, is a cathartic ending to the film, especially if you've seen the prequels and understand what Anakin has gone through. Also, if you watch *Return of the Jedi*, make sure you watch the version with Hayden Christensen in the end scene: I literally cried when he showed up.

1. *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)

We've made it to the end of the list, and yeah, *The Empire Strikes Back* is the best Star Wars film. I think everyone can

kinda agree that this movie is iconic? From the opening scene on Hoth, to the training scenes with Yoda on Dagobah, this film is great. The chemistry between Princess Leia and Han is palpable, and the scenes between them are a delight to watch. Also, Luke's training scenes with Yoda are so funny and entertaining. The tension in the second half of the film is high, as Darth Vader corners the group on Bespin. It's also the first film with Lando and Boba Fett, both fan favorite characters. God, this movie has everything! And I haven't even talked about the lightsaber battle between Luke and Darth Vader, which is one of the most famous scenes in film history, and for a good reason. Name a more iconic plot twist, I dare you.