



Hello!

Can someone tell me why violence is considered good clean fun?

I am so sick of movies coming out in which the world's problems are solved by a small team of murderers and then reading reviews calling it a "rollicking good time." I do not like murder. I think it is a bad thing. But I am not really upset about the violence. I am upset by the idea that this violence is somehow a light and fluffy apolitical romp. I am upset by the idea that taking these movies seriously and really looking into what they say is somehow missing the point. Because I understand that many of these movies are not made to be politically affecting, but that does not mean that they are without political content.

In fact, they often have very specific ideas about how the world works and what does and doesn't make that world a better place. If I had a nickel for every time that I saw a violent movie in which the characters calling for peace were either A) corrupt cogs in an international conspiracy only asking for peace to help the secretive cabal they work for or B) naive idiots who end up begging the big strong hero for help, I could afford Disney Plus. And don't get me started on action movies mocking characters for going to therapy or engaging in self help. If *Bullet Train* replaced the jokes making fun of therapy with any of the characters growing or developing in any way, it could have been a watchable movie.

Instead, the mantra repeats: violence now, violence always, never try anything new. Do your violent solutions need to be repeated every two years? Good! That's great for business.

This realization hit me hard one night while drunkenly watching *Mission Impossible - Rogue Nation* at home. I realized that I was watching a movie where a secret cabal controlled the government, nothing the media said could be trusted, and the only solution was to trust the most famous guy in the room and do whatever he says.

That's incredibly political.

So are the decisions about who is a good guy and who deserves to be murdered. How many times have I watched a movie where the villain is a not-particularly-masculine man from a socialist country who just needs to get beaten up by someone with an American accent? How many times is an evil corporation run by one evil person with an evil scheme rather than by a board of legitimate businesspeople who do not care about the human cost of their profits? And how many more times do I need to hear someone joke about how the *Fast and Furious* movies are about family before I see someone really dig into who does and doesn't get included in that family?¹

To be clear, I do not think that people voted for Trump or went down Qanon rabbit holes because they saw a Tom Cruise movie. But I also do not believe that you can swim in the sea without getting wet. These tropes are repeated to the point of ubiquity. And while some postmodern airheads would like to act as if their lighthearted death movies were birthed by a leather jacket and a pair of sunglasses, using genre and homage as a shield against criticism or meaning ignores the extent to which many of the "classic" action films they are referencing were made by regressive fuckwits who thought that the problem with the Vietnam War was that America wasn't violent enough.

¹ Or why so many of these action movies have a father-knows-best kink for some famous guy in his fifties who'd get his AARP ass handed to him if he actually tried to fight a bunch of henchmen in their twenties. Despite what Washington D.C. and Hollywood might have you believe, passing the torch from one generation to another is a natural fact of life. And while I commend Tom Cruise for using the back half of his career to become a slightly above average stuntman, that workout routine does not actually stop the passage of time. It's kind of embarrassing to watch dynamic actors in their twenties and thirties humbling themselves in front of their films' patriarchs whenever it is time for some big boss battle. But how much more embarrassing is it to write into your contract that you can't lose a fight!?

All of this is not to say that I don't think there should be violence in films. I just think that when there is violence in films, it should be *awful*. When someone is murdered, they do not bloodlessly collapse and disappear. That may be a comforting delusion for a country that builds as many bombs as we do, but it isn't true. So often, the discussion about violence in films focuses on gorey movies that make people feel gross, but I'm usually very on board with that. If you want a horror movie villain to stick a pitchfork through someone's eye or take out their heart with a chainsaw, I will not be the one to stop you. I am much more worried about PG-13 movies where hundreds of extras die without the characters giving it a second thought.

If it were just *Mission Impossible* movies or the *Fast and Furious* movies or the James Bond movies or the *John Wick* movies or the *Expendables* movies or *The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard*, maybe this would feel a bit like nit picking. If it were only the 33 MCU movies or the 17 DC movies from the last decade, then it would seem worth bringing up; but at least there would be a centralized spring from which the taint flowed. But there are so many of these movies at a time when studios are *making fewer movies*. And personally, I find it pretty gross that the response to so much of this violence is how *fun* it is. Have you forgotten how you have fun? Have you run out of ice cream to eat and jokes to laugh at and weed to smoke and people to kiss and songs to dance to and dogs to pet and coffee to drink?

And while I'm complaining, I have another thing to say! Why is it that we will pick apart the detailed semiotics of thoughtful movies and then act like applying any criticism to dumb films blindly regurgitating regressive poison is "missing the point?" This passes the buck on bullshit while punishing movies trying to do better. Since when was the intelligence of a film also a cap for the critic?

I'm not asking for people to stop liking dumb action movies. Just as I am not asking for the primary discussion around action movies to be the efficacy of their politics. I am just asking that when an action movie has a secret cabal controlling the government or doesn't seem to care about the dozens of on-screen deaths until one of them is a famous actor, that it is noted. As it is *notable*. I note it and still drunkenly enjoy *Mission Impossible*. And if someone else is upset because they can't note it and still enjoy the movie, then that person should jump in a lake or take a hike (or any other number of idioms that are both fun hobbies to pick up and ways of telling someone to go fuck themselves).

Sincerely,

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P.S.- I'm starting to really worry that this whole, "Everything has to be existing IP" thing isn't just cowardice. For a while, I assumed that studios just wanted to know that there would be a built-in audience whether the movie was good or bad. But you don't need to be a Hannah Arendt scholar to know that the end goal of capitalism is the destruction of everything and I'm worried that that is what is happening here. Because it's not just enough to make a movie people will buy a ticket to, you also need to limit the other options available so they have no choice but to pay the price you set.

Making everything IP limits the extent to which anyone else can succeed. How many people have taken their Marvel fame and relayed it into movie stardom success on their terms? Is it no one? It feels like no one. When *Fatal Attraction* came out, it inspired a wave of _____ out of hell movies. Different people from different studios could ask "well what if a babysitter started acting crazy" or "what if a roommate started getting obsessive." But now, it feels like people do not just want to succeed, they want to succeed in a way that will never help anyone else. And I do not think that it is over dramatic to say that it is a step in a larger process of destroying modern movie making. It is how they will get to their eventual goal of releasing three movies a year at \$70 a ticket. It is how they will create a bottleneck that breaks the unions and allows more and more of the work to be done by AI reheating and rehashing their owned and litigiously protected source materials. And I think that much of the independent film world has been so successfully corporatized and conglomerated as to be effectively toothless in the face of this challenge. They are either a tool for medium money to try and compete with big money or a branded affiliate of big money trying to sell an indie aesthetic to folks wearing Converse shoes. Who was the last exciting filmmaker with a \$7,000 festival hit? I just wish more people were prepping for disaster.

Do you agree? Please let me know.