

MONTHLY MOVIES

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Movie mayhem month apexes with ‘Barbenheimer’ weekend

By T. Rob Brown

These past 30 days included a whirlwind of globetrotting thanks to so many summer blockbusters. It was movie mayhem.

Before I reach the month’s apex with “Barbenheimer” weekend, it’s fascinating to look at this month’s cinematic travels as if they were a real journey around the globe.

In my three viewings of *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (2023), I journeyed across Europe and the U.S., as well as through time. I covered this film last issue.

Then, AMC offered a 20th anniversary showing of *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) for the Disney 100 series and my voyage set sail across the islands and waters of spices and rum.

“Why is the rum gone?” Capt. Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) asked Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley) while trapped on an abandoned island.

This classic film is quite possibly the greatest pirate film ever made—apologies to *Cutthroat Island* (1995) and *Treasure Island* (1950). I give it two thumbs up.

Next, I returned to the U.S.—but not for long—as my global trek led me to one of South America’s wonders of the world: Machu Picchu, Peru. In my second viewing of *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* (2023), I went back to Cusco and the Sacred Valley along with Optimus Prime and the rest of the Autobots. I was happy the director chose to use mostly authentic scenes from Cusco and Machu Picchu for the backgrounds and location.

This film reminded me of my early 2020 trip to the Lost City of the Inca, minus the giant sentient cybernetic lifeforms and explosions. I give it one thumb up for being one of the best Transformers films yet. This whole story was a fun ride—as a Transformers film should be.

Directed by Steven Caple Jr., *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Anthony Ramos, Dominique Fishback, and the voice talents of Ron Perlman (Optimus Primal), Michelle Yeoh (Airazor), Pete Davidson (Mirage), and of course, Peter Cullen (Optimus Prime). It runs for 2 hours and 7 minutes. It received a rotten 52% on the Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer, yet a solid 91% audience score, plus a 6.1/10 on the International Movie Database.

Next, I headed back to Europe—mostly Italy, Norway, and the U.K.—and the Middle East, for a couple viewings of *Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One* (2023). The seventh film of the Mission: Impossible franchise is touted as the most expensive film of Tom Cruise’s career, which is saying a lot since he has been in numerous major blockbusters. This film does not disappoint—it’s packed full of action, moral dilemmas, excitement, tough women, and teamwork—but mostly Ethan Hunt (Tom Cruise). I give it two thumbs up.

Directed by Christopher McQuarrie, *Mission: Impossible—Dead Reckoning Part One* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Cruise, Hayley Atwell, Ving Rhames, Simon Pegg, Rebecca Ferguson, Vanessa Kirby, Esai Morales, Pom Klementieff, Henry Czerny, and Cary Elwes. It runs for 2 hours and 43 minutes. It received a certified fresh 96% on the Tomatometer and a solid 94% audience score, plus an 8.0/10 on IMDb.

Coming back to the U.S. briefly, I then flew to China in *Joy Ride* (2023). I give it one thumb down for crude humor and an average storyline. If you’re looking for a raunchy and provocative film, this might be the one for you.

Next, I returned to the U.S. before heading to Colombia in *Sound of Freedom* (2023). I give it one thumb up for its intensity and vital moral message. This story will keep you on the edge of your seat.

In the U.K., I witnessed *The Miracle Club* (2023). I give it one thumb down for mostly boring me in terms of story, despite the wonderful performances from Kathy Bates and Maggie Smith—these women are true masters of their craft.

Finally, we’ve reached the “Barbenheimer” weekend of this tour de force. Fans and public relations officials alike unofficially named this for the release of *Barbie* (2023) and *Oppenheimer* (2023). It got so crazy online that people were creating tons of memes. My favorite is a clever fan movie poster with “Barbenheimer” in the Barbie font and shows both Margot Robbie (Barbie) and Cillian Murphy (Oppenheimer) facing one another with the subtitle: “He’s a scientist; she’s the bomb.”

I took the trip to Barbie Land and California twice to enjoy the comedic ride across Barbie history, politics, and critical theory. I give it two thumbs up for making me laugh and not being afraid to both

praise and criticize Barbie, as well as Mattel. A toy manufacturer who takes themselves too seriously, doesn't really get their core audience. It's nice to see Mattel have a sense of humor about these things.

The casting was spot-on, the jokes were plentiful, and it's a very quotable film. The entire concept was brilliant: Barbie is everything and he's just Ken. Barbie had the dream house, the dream car, the dream job, but Ken was just Ken. The only accessory, aside from clothing, was his buddy Allan (Michael Cera). The idea to have multiple Barbies and multiple Kens fit well to offer diversity, but also to reference the many versions of the toys themselves.

So, when are those Ken's Mojo Dojo Casa Houses going on sale?

Directed by Greta Gerwig, *Barbie* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Robbie, Ryan Gosling (Ken), America Ferrera, Kate McKinnon (Barbie), Issa Rae (Barbie), Rhea Perlman, Will Ferrell (Mattel CEO), John Cena (Ken), Cera, Kingsly Ben-Adir (Ken), Simu Liu (Ken), and Ncuti Gatwa (Ken). It runs for 1 hour and 54 minutes. It received a certified fresh 88% on the Tomatometer and an 84% audience score, plus a 7.4/10 on IMDb.

Next and completely changing veins, I went to the secret military location in Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Oppenheimer led a team of scientists in creating the first nuclear weapons in world history. I give it two thumbs up for artistic value, historic value, strong story, and quality acting. The only drawbacks are the film's long runtime and the brief portrayal of President Harry S Truman—the man with only the letter "S" for a middle name and the slogan, "The buck stops here." I'm sure they could have learned more about him at the Harry S Truman Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri. Part of his dialogue seemed in character and part of it seemed out of character.

This film does a great job of looking both at Oppenheimer's success as a scientist, but also at the moral implications that success would manifest. Obviously, he was a complicated man. Director Christopher Nolan precisely shows us Oppenheimer's drive, his fears, his mistakes, his opposition, his regrets, and his turmoil.

Directed by Nolan, *Oppenheimer* (2023), Rated R, stars Murphy, Emily Blunt, Robert Downey Jr., Matt Damon, Rami Malek, Florence Pugh, Benny Safdie, Michael Angarano, Josh Hartnett, Kenneth Branagh, Casey Affleck, Dane DeHaan, David Krumholtz, Matthew Modine, Jack Quaid, and Gary Oldman. It runs for 3 hours and zero minutes. It received a certified fresh 93% on the Tomatometer and a strong 91% audience score, plus an 8.7/10 on IMDb.

Alamo Drafthouse Cinema posted its "Barbenheimer" weekend results on Reddit: "We sold 53,721 chicken tenders or the equivalent of 14,820 Barbies by weight. We served 7,864 gallons of beer or the equivalent [of] almost 23 inflatable Barbie pools."

The cinema also posted, "We sold enough pizzas to cover 5 full size real-scale Barbie dreamhouses or 17,277 sq ft of pizza."

Down in the Cajun-influenced land of saints and voodoo, I entered Disney's *The Haunted Mansion* (2023) in New Orleans—twice. I give it one thumb up for being the best of the three Haunted Mansion movies—yes, aside from that weak Eddie Murphy-starring *The Haunted Mansion* (2003), there was a *Muppets Haunted Mansion* (2021) TV Special on Disney+. Despite its low Tomatometer score of 40% with critics, the audience gave it an 84% score. Just be careful, you might bring a ghost home with you.

My next stop was the streets—and sewers—of New York City with *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem* (2023) for three times in a sneak preview, an early access, and on opening night. I give it two thumbs up for being a completely fresh take on the classic animated franchise, breathing new life into what became as stagnant as some places in the New York sewers themselves.

The final destination of my cinematic journey took me to Europe and Asia for *Gran Turismo: Based on a True Story* (2023) for a special early screening for AMC stockholders. I give this film two thumbs up for being a great adaptation of a video game, but sticking to the real-world story of how a video game influenced professional motorsports. It's truly a phenomenal, exhilarating, and inspiring story.

David Harbour is as great as ever in this film, showing his range from bitter, washed-out racer to chief engineer to mentor to good friend. It's good to see Orlando Bloom (*Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, *The Lord of the Rings* franchise) back in the limelight of a major film; he has some energetic moments and represents the corporate dreamer in this film. Djimon Hounsou brings the personal touch to this film as the father of our main driver; his acting skills add drama and embodies the important father-son relationship present in the story.

I was confident all three of these silver-screen veterans would shine, but the surprise for me was U.K. actor Archie Madekwe, who plays the central viewpoint character. *Midsomar* (2019) is probably the biggest film he has been in before *Gran Turismo*, so I was unsure of his performance beforehand. The young actor has heart and charisma. He won me over with believable and sincere moments between both him and his character's father (Hounsou) as well as with his mentor (Harbour). He hit the range of emotions from joy and jubilation to sadness and heartbreak. I was happy to root for his character to succeed. He represented the dreamer in all of us. I can see why he was named a 2017 Screen International Star of Tomorrow.

Another great thing about this film was a combination of its ethnic diversity and its inclusion of people from working- to middle- to wealth-class. What's excellent about that is that all of it feels natural—never forced down your throat; the story takes you along and everything fits into place nicely.

Directed by Neill Blomkamp, *Gran Turismo: Based on a True Story* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Harbour, Bloom, Madekwe, Darren Barnet, Geri Halliwell, Hounsou, Emelia Hartford, and Takehiro Hira. It runs for 2 hours and 15 minutes. As of press time, there is no Tomatometer or audience score, but it received a 7.0/10 on IMDb.

What locations will you let the cinema take you to next?

“The show must go on.”