

# MONTHLY MOVIES

COPYRIGHT (C) T. Rob Brown

Movie Review column for *Dvino Magazine*, a monthly production of *The Laredo Morning Times*.

February 2023

Copyright © 2023 T. Rob Brown, owner TRB Photography & Writing

## Brendon Fraser returns to silver screen in ‘The Whale’

**By T. Rob Brown**

**N**ot unlike Jonah’s biblical escape from his whale, Brendan Fraser’s career appears to be back on the dry land of the silver screen. After a hiatus from films following the fallout of a press-related incident, the American-Canadian actor jumped onto the small screen for a while, almost jumped into DC Comics films—not once but twice, and ended up finally returning as a lead in *The Whale*.

As an emerging actor in the early 1990s, Fraser brought us a mix of comedy, drama, and action roles. In a recent interview with Howard Stern he said he strived to be in a variety of roles and types of films to keep his career diverse. He went on to say that during the early 2000s, then-screenwriter J.J. Abrams was selected to pen a *Superman* story and Fraser was one of the potential Supermen before the project was canned. Fraser told Stern that if he had been offered the role of the Man of Steel, it would have been a difficult career decision to make. He said that’s the type of thing they put on actors’ tombstones. He cited “studio politics” as the reason he didn’t end up in that role.

Around 2003, an incident allegedly occurred involving Fraser and Philip Berk, a former Hollywood Foreign Press Association president. Fraser later alleged in a 2018 GQ interview that he was assaulted by Berk at the Beverly Hills Hotel. He said he had been “blacklisted” in Hollywood.

Fraser also almost got a second chance to be in DC films as the villain Firefly in what would have been the new *Batgirl* film set to release in 2022 before Warner Bros. decided to can it after the whole thing was shot, Fraser told Stern. Apparently, there is a director's cut of the film that was never released; Fraser said he never got to see it, but some of his colleagues had. Reportedly, Michael Keaton returned as Batman for this film.

Back in 2016, I was able to catch a live play version of *The Whale* in Kansas City, Missouri, directed by Sidonie Garrett at the Unicorn Theatre. Initially going into it, I thought the title was a bit on the nose; as a larger man myself, I would consider it quite rude to call a human being a whale. But upon watching the play, I realized it was used as a metaphor—specifically a literary allusion—for the infamous whale of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851). I had no idea then that less than a decade later I would be watching it at the cinema.

Let alone, it stars Fraser in a comeback role for his career.

He may not be exciting audiences with daring escapes or by firing a shotgun at the undead from the back of a speeding bus as Richard "Rick Ricochet" O'Connell from the *Mummy* films (1999-2008), but he certainly fires up the waterworks for some of us in the powerful role of a morbidly obese college professor who teaches online English courses. It's a study in depression and trauma from the loss of a loved one. It's also a study in the life choices we make.

This film is one of the most serious roles I've seen Fraser take on to date. It's far from the Tarzan-style yells of *George of the Jungle* (1997) or the wacky antics of *Encino Man* (1992). It's still a trip from the fantasy and action of *Bedazzled* (2000) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (2008). While he may be better known for his comedic and action roles, Fraser is no stranger to the dramatic roles which led up to this one.

I saw the film over at the Alamo Drafthouse. Unfortunately, the woman behind me apparently thought it was a comedy because she talked with her friend and laughed through all the serious deep emotional moments. I think some people just need to stick to watching comedy films and stay away from dramas.

For me, the film was compelling and deeply saddening. As a larger man, I felt I could somewhat relate to Charlie (Fraser). While my life has been different from his, we all have regrets or things we wish we handled differently.

The screenplay was written by the same author of the stage play: Samuel D. Hunter.

Directed by Darren Aronofsky, *The Whale* (2022), Rated R, stars Fraser, Sadie Sink (of *Stranger Things* fame), Hong Chau, Ty Simpkins, and Samantha Morton. At 1 hour and 57 minutes, this psychological drama received 66% on the Tomatometer and a solid 91% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus an 8.0/10 on the International Movie Database. The difference between the critics' score and the audience score says a lot about this film. I give it two thumbs up for making me cry in the cinema. I had tears flowing down both cheeks.

In other recent films, I watched *Plane*, *Missing*, and *80 for Brady*.

For all of you passengers, your captain has turned on the seat belt light and asks you to stay seated—we might be experiencing some turbulence.

This was a nice Girard Butler-led action romp film. I enjoyed it, but it's nothing too special. There are some fun moments and exciting scenes. I was also happy to see Mike Colter of Marvel's Luke Cage in an important role for this film. The sledgehammer scenes were ... um, solid—they kind of reminded me of Santa's sledgehammer sequence of scenes from *Violent Night* (2022).

*Plane* (2023), Rated R, directed by Jean-Francois Richet, stars Butler, Colter, and Tony Goldwyn. At 1 hour and 47 minutes, it received a certified fresh 77% on the Tomatometer and a 94% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 6.6/10 at IMDb. I give it one thumb up for lots of great action.

What would you do if your loved ones never made it home safely from an international trip? How far would you go to research what happened and find justice or their safe return?

*Missing* looks at this very concept.

An older teenager, June (Storm Reid), is left at home while her mom goes off on a romantic trip with a man she recently started seeing. This film takes us on a journey across nations, but without ever leaving the comfort zone of modern technology. In other words, most of the scenes in this film are of computer screens, wearable devices, portable devices, etc. We see the events unfold through security camera feeds, voice chat programs, laptop and phone cameras, and much more.

One digital clue leads to another, and the verdict shifts from person to person as the daughter tries to figure out what happened to her mom. This film is filled with mystery, problem solving and suspense.

My favorite character in the story is ground sleuth-for-hire Javi (Joaquim de Almeida). He helps June find some of the clues, while she finds some on her own with her electronic devices and the internet.

*Missing* (2023), Rated PG-13, a mystery thriller directed by Will Merrick and Nicholas D. Johnson, stars Reid, Joaquim de Almeida, Ken Leung, Amy Landecker, Daniel Henney, Nia Long, and Tim Griffin. At 1 hour and 51 minutes, it received a certified fresh 85% on the Tomatometer and a 90% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 7.4/10 at IMDb. I give it one thumb up. Though a second thumb is tempting.

With the upcoming Super Bowl on my mind as I write this article, it certainly was a great time to bring out a football-related comedy film. Obviously, some film executive said, "What if we took the Golden Girls to the Super Bowl?" You can imagine someone else responding, "What do we do without the late great Betty White?" And another exec says, "What if it's a group of famous, but elderly actresses?" You can even imagine a brief cameo where Anthony Mackie (Captain America, Falcon) pops his head into that hypothetical meeting and yells, "Cut the check!"

All kidding aside, this was a pretty funny movie. Sure, it's a bit silly at times, but it also hit home with some deep emotional feels. Honestly, there aren't enough movies that feature elderly antics out there. What I like is that it kind of helps break some stereotypes where elderly women sit around the house and knit, cook, babysit, or other traditional roles. Instead, these women are into a male-dominated sport and headed on the road trip of their life. It wouldn't pass the Bechdel Test—also known as the Bechdel-Wallace Test, though, since they're constantly talking about Tom Brady and other members of the New England Patriots team—and sometimes even in provocative ways. It only fulfills two of the three requirements for the test.

Also, let's not forget: Go Chiefs!

*80 for Brady* (2023), Rated PG-13, directed by Kyle Marvin, stars Rita Moreno, Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda, Sally Field, and Brady. At 1 hour and 38 minutes, it received a 62% on the Tomatometer and a 90% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 6.0/10 at IMDb. I give it two thumbs up—one for the comedy and one for the drama.

“The show must go on.”