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India's anime scene has been having a moment. Once the preserve of a handful of devoted *otakus* (anime enthusiasts) and childhoods replete with dubbed classics, anime has steadily turned itself into the nation's favourite binge and is experiencing a full-blown cultural coup. The beloved hand-drawn style of animation has leapt from the obscure to the ubiquitous, turning screens of all shapes and sizes into sanctuaries of escapism. Rocket-fuelled by a potent blend of passionate die-hards, mushrooming corporate enthusiasm, and the indisputable charm of epic Japanese storytelling, we are living through a cultural renaissance for anime in India. But what fuels this fervour? Akshat Sahu, senior director, Marketing for APAC at Crunchyroll, has some insights. "The dynamic and visually stunning animation style, coupled with deep, multi-genre storytelling, resonates with a wide audience," he explains. Much like the rest of the world, India has been a fertile ground for pirated anime sites, thriving in the absence of legal alternatives—until Crunchyroll sauntered onto the scene.

Since its Indian debut, Crunchyroll has been a major player in anime streaming. Sahu reveals, "We currently have over 80 shows dubbed in Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu, contributing to over 65% of total viewership for dubbed content." This localisation strategy has been a game-changer and has led to nearly four times the increase in total watch time, demonstrating the importance of regional language dubs in engaging the diverse Indian audience.

Anime's multi-generational appeal has always been a key factor to its success. "Nostalgic connections with anime from the 90s and 2010s bridge generational gaps, while the growth of streaming platforms and online communities has made anime more accessible than ever before," Sahu adds.

Plenty to choose from

The sudden surge of anime-only platforms and channels like Anime Times, Sony YAY, and Anime Booth over the course of this year alone, has only strengthened the genre's resolve for its growing popularity. With streaming platforms doling out anime like candy, anyone with an Internet connection can dive in. "When there is more anime available to fans, it's only a good thing for the anime ecosystem and, of course, the fans," Sahu remarks.

With this plethora of streaming platforms offering a smorgasbord of anime, the barrier to entry has never been lower. And let's be honest, when your friendly neighbourhood weeb (a reclaimed pejorative for a person obsessed with anime) is buzzing about the latest episode of *One Piece*, resistance seems futile.

For Jatin Varma, founder, Comic Con India, the surge in anime interest is part of a broader trend. "There has been an overall increase in interest in anime/manga worldwide," he remarks. "The pandemic certainly gave fans more time to discover new content. This trend is true in India as well. It coincides with easier access to the content, be it popular series on streaming services and access to manga via e-commerce, everything delivered right to your home."

But the anime wave has not restricted itself to streaming. Sanjeev Kumar Bijli, executive director, PVR INOX, says, "We've observed the meteoric rise of anime in India,

As streaming platforms offer a smorgasbord of anime, and a grassroots movement brings major titles to the big screen, anime is here to stay

The Indian anime coup



especially with the launch of several anime-only platforms," he notes. "While these platforms have significantly increased the availability of anime content, we have found that the demand for anime screenings in theatres is robust and continues to grow."

Evidently, the cinematic landscape for anime in India has seen titanic shifts. *Suzume*, directed by Makoto

Shinkai, shattered box office records in India, raking in over 10 crores. Shinkai's visit to India certainly fuelled the film's success.

Theatres have since embraced this wave, from *Demon Slayer* and *Haikyuu!!* to Studio Ghibli's *The Boy and the Heron* packing in whopping crowds. Market forecasts are predicting a brisk 13.4% annual growth through 2030 – a fairly decisive indicator that India's anime affair is here to stay. "Anime releases at the cinemas have become more



"Anime releases at the cinemas have become more than just movie showings; they are special events that bring fans together to celebrate their favourite titles

SANJEEV KUMAR BIJLI

Stills from (left) *Suzume* and (bottom) *Sousou no Frieren*; and (below) the Delhi Anime Club organises a watch party. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND DELHI ANIME CLUB



than just movie showings; they are special events that bring fans together to celebrate their favourite titles," Bijli says. "These screenings and fan meet-ups create a sense of community and excitement that streaming platforms cannot replicate."

Indeed, anime's secret sauce for success has always boiled down to one key ingredient: community. The surge in anime's popularity has cultivated a fervent fan base eager to experience their favourite shows in communal settings. Deven from the Delhi Anime Club succinctly captures this phenomenon: "Anime used to be a niche interest, but now it's a cultural movement. The turning point was when *Dragon Ball Super*:

Broly was released, and we saw an outpouring of excitement and support."

The role of community events cannot be overstated. "Exclusive events, screenings, and experiences go a long way in building the fan community," Varma says. "For any fandom to establish itself in a community, easy access to content and merch is essential". Comic Con India's yearly convergence of geeks in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and more, has become a sanctuary for the otaku community. Here, weeb can revel in their fandom, surrounded by kindred spirits, free from the shadow of judgement or the weight of inhibition.


Cosplay, of course, has become an

essential part of the anime experience. "Cosplay at anime film releases transforms our theatres into lively, colourful gatherings where fans come together to celebrate their favourite characters and stories," Bijli says. "This level of involvement is often more intense and widespread than what we observe with other film genres."

As the wave continues to surge, it is clear that these fan efforts have been instrumental. "Our community has grown exponentially," says Deven. The Delhi Anime Club is just one of many across the country that has evolved from casual meet-ups to organising large-scale events, fostering an eclectic community of fans through screenings, quizzes, cosplay contests, and collaborations with colleges and Japanese organisations, promoting anime culture across India.

Sahu says, "Projections indicate that India will drive 60% of the global increase in anime interest over the coming years."

Ultimately, the anime surge in India is the result of a perfect trifecta of accessibility, community, and capitalising on the ceaseless bounties that Japan has to offer. The phenomenon is far from a fleeting fad, more, a cultural tidal wave of relentless hunger that is larger than life.



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Instapick

All about VMAs: Nominations for the 40th edition of MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) are out! While Taylor Swift leads the number of nominations with 10 out of 21 total categories, Post Malone follows closely behind with nine. The awards show will be held at the UBS Arena in Elmont, New York, on September 11. @mtv.com/vma



Talkingpoint

Out of network: For millennials, Cartoon Network's website shutting down spells heartbreak. Reportedly, Warner Brothers Discovery is now redirecting its viewers to its subscription streaming service Max. But, in India, the website leads you to YouTube where you can still stream your favourite shows.



SCREEN SHARE

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The months of July and August popularly see Friendship Day celebrated across the world, and there's no better time to indulge in some on-screen bromance, sisterhood, platonic love and everything in between. In Bollywood, the genre has perhaps become oversaturated in recent years, with Rajamouli's testosterone-fuelled brotherhood in *RRR* (and *Baahubali*, to a certain extent) inspiring several of the ilk; some mildly enjoyable, most dithering. The likes of *Dil Chahta Hai* and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* retain indulgent rewatch value, however *Jhankaar Beats* from 1993 still remains my comfort watch – how could you

Ode to friendship

Some films and shows that bring out waterworks, others that make us introspect our relationships

not fall for Sanjay Suri and Rahul Bose jamming to RD Burman? Some new-age gems from the South give us more hope, beginning with two Telugu buddy-comedies, Vivek Athreya's *Brochevarevarura* and Anudeep KV's *Jathi Ratnalu*, both serving as masterclasses in milking situational humour and emerging as breaths of fresh air among the star-driven commercial vehicles. In Kerala, Dulquer Salmaan and Sunny Wayne's bike trip drama *Neelakasham Pachakadal Chuvanna Bhoomi* inspired all sorts of road adventures amongst the youth, even contributing to a

▲ Still from *Booksmart*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

spurt in the number of Bullet users across the State, while two coming-of-age dramas from 2006 – *Classmates* and *Notebook* – still hold pride of place in any discussion on Malayalam films themed around friendship. Kannada films *Gaalipata* and *America! America!* deserve a mention too, for their commercial success and cult status even today. Kollywood will always have Mani Ratnam's *Thalapathi* with Rajinikanth and Mammooty in their now-legendary roles, as well as Kamal Haasan's *Panchathanthiram*, which audiences still enjoy. More recent picks include Shankar's *Nanban* (Vijay back to doing what he does best, even if it was in a remake), M Rajesh's laugh riots with a ridiculously in-form Santhanam in *Boss Engira Bhaskaran* and *Siva Manasula Sakthi*, and the often-forgotten *Five Star* directed by Susi Ganesan in his 2002 debut, which followed the lives of five friends after college. It is telling that reruns of *Friends*, *Sex and the City*, and *The Office* were among the most-watched English-language shows during the pandemic, but newer long-format contenders keep emerging to stake their claim in the genre. Three delightful British outings – *Extraordinary*, *Sex Education* and *Derry Girls* – invite all kinds of

fuzzy feelings, whereas *Broad City* and *Insecure* up the ante, and have been rightfully hailed for their progressive depiction of modern-day friendships and breaking stereotypes. PS: It behooves me to mention Judd Apatow's golden phase here (*Freaky and Geeks*, *Crashing*, *Superbad*, *Girls*, *Bridesmaids*), which also gave us some true-blue knockouts. On the movie front, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Seth Rogen fighting cancer together in *50/50* always makes for a wonderful happy-cry, while Greta Gerwig's *Frances Ha* and Olivia Wilde's razor-sharp *Booksmart* (featuring star turns from Beanie Feldstein and Kaitlyn Dever in the best teen comedy of the decade) were dazzling reminders on navigating friendships while growing up. Finally, a word on Apple TV's *Platonic*, which celebrated modern adult friendships between men and women after marriage, in a gloriously self-aware journey of two very different people going through their own midlife crisis and late millennial angst. On that note, even if Sofia Coppola never tells us what Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson whisper to each other at the end of *Lost in Translation*, surely it would count as the most intimate depiction of frien... platonic love ever?

From The Hindu cinema team, a fortnightly column recommending films and shows tied to a mood, theme, or pop cultural event.

Pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours and everything else you need to plan your social calendar. For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



Place of pride

Queering Madras, one of Madras Musings' events for Madras Week, will highlight LGBTQIA+ community's spaces, identities and inclusion in the city. Panellists include Dr L Ramakrishnan; Jaya of NGO Sahodaran; Meera Sundararajan, gender and monitoring and evaluation expert at the Greater Chennai Corporation; and trans rights activist Fred Rogers. August 21, 5.30pm at Residency Towers.



Goody two-shoes

Aldo and Warner Bros Discovery Global Consumer Products have teamed up for **Looney Tunes x ALDO** limited-edition capsule. It features Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Tweety on loafers, stilettos and sneakers crafted with Pillow Walk Technology. ₹14,999 upwards; Aldoshoes.in. Those feeling sporty can opt for **ASICS GEL-QUANTUM 360 VIII PARIS**, a sneaker inspired by Paris. ₹13,999; asics.com.



Delhi in Madras

The flavours of Delhi's street food are in for a southern outing at The Ambur Canteen, Chennai, this weekend. Dishes like Dastarkhwan mutton seekh kebab, lage lipte aloo and Kinari Bazaar ki gulathi feature on the lunch and dinner menu, An Ode to Purani Dilli, of **Ruchira Hoon x The Ambur Canteen Pop up**. A meal for two, only on pre-booking, costs ₹1,500; contact: +91 8925142541.



Wardrobe update

Scarlet Sage's Fall '24 edit **Pleats, Prints, and Power!** heroes pleating technique on dresses, shirts, skirts and more in denim wash prints. ₹8,000 upwards; shopscarletsage.com. Meanwhile, **No Nasties** has dropped its new vegan, upcycled and zero-waste edit made from 100% cotton, coconut milk and knit. Shirts, soft denims, sack dresses and polka knit co-ord sets start at ₹1,200; www.nonasties.in



Watch out!

Vacheron Constantin is paying an ode to Chinese culture with its Métiers d'Art - Tribute to Traditional Symbols series comprising two interpretations of the Seawater Cliff. vacheron-constantin.com. Speaking of watches, **Montblanc's Bohème collection** gets three new models inspired by the world of handwriting, watercolours. \$3,205 upwards; across Montblanc boutiques in India.



Battle of the sexes

While embracing her newfound love for saris, comedian Sharul Channa will disrobe myths, stereotypes and stigmas women deal with, in her act, **Saree Not Sorry**, on August 24, 8pm, at Medai - The Stage, Chennai. in.bookmyshow.com; ₹399. Those looking to explore the intricacies of marriage, go for Navin Kumar's show **Just Married** at Studio MuziCroft, Chennai, today, 8.30pm. ₹299; in.bookmyshow.com.



Sibling ties

For guilt-free fun on Raksha Bandhan, **Two Brothers Organic Farms** has launched Prakriti Rakhi Hamper with goodies like rajgira nutri bar. The recycled box is embedded with seeds. ₹999; twobrothersindiaishop.com. For quirky options, go for Oye Happy's **Prank Hamper** starting at ₹1,490; on oyehappy.com. It contains a monkey mirror card and eggless nutty chocolates.

A three-day exhibition, The Wedding Collective, brings over 100 fashion, jewellery and gifting brands to the Jio World Convention Centre

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Come wedding season in the latter half of the year, and you suddenly find your weekends packed. There are multiple events to attend, outfits to put together, gifts to think about, travel to plan... and if you are a bride or a groom, chances are that your Pinterest board is bursting with options, and you have a hundred reels saved for wedding outfit and decor inspiration. Working towards redefining the wedding shopping experience Reliance Retail will host The Wedding Collective, an exhibition, from August 23 to 25 at the Jio World Centre in Mumbai. "The idea for The Wedding Collective came about in a conversation with Isha Ambani, who fully recognises that the wedding industry in India is booming at an unimaginable level. A recent Jefferies report indicates that the industry is worth around ₹10 lakh crore,

For the happily ever after



which is very significant. An average of 8 to 10 million weddings are held annually in India," says Priya Tanna, president, The Right Side. Over three days, the exhibition will have nearly hundred brands – ranging from wedding couture, food and beverages, make up, gifting, music, wedding planning

▲ (Clockwise from above) Models flaunt designs by Shantanu and Nikhil; outfits from Dareaab by Sonia K Mahajan and Ekaya Banaras; and collections by Rohit Gandhi and Rahul Khanna. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and design, and a host of other premium services all under the same roof. With bridal wear forming a large part of couture in India, several designers including Abu Jani-Sandeep Khosla, Anita Dongre, Arpita Mehta, Ekaya, Faabiiana, Gaurav Gupta, Kshitij Jalori, Kunal Rawal, Manish Malhotra, Payal Singhal, Rahul Mishra, Ritu Kumar, Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Khanna, Sangeeta Kilachand, and Krésna Bajaj will showcase their latest collections. Traditional weaves will also have a strong presence with a dedicated Artisans Pavilion curated by Jaina Lalbhai where artisans from

across the country will showcase designs celebrating Indian craftsmanship and textiles. The jewellery brands in attendance include Badalia Diamond Jewellers, Birdhichand Ghanshyamdas, Farah Khan Jewels, Hazoorilal Legacy, Sunita Shekhawat, Sanjay Gupta Tibarumals, Rare Heritage, Raj Mahtani and Misho by Suhani Parekh. "We want to be an end-to-end wedding show, engineered towards retail and most importantly, cover the entirety of the wedding experience. Our first mandate is to bring everything you wish for in a dream wedding under one roof, with the biggest designers and fresh, young talent. Even if you are not planning a wedding, the festive season is just around the corner and this will be a great shopping experience," Priya says. This will also facilitate a direct interface between the brands and the designers, Priya says, which is important, given the need for individualisation and customisation. In its first edition, over 10,000 guests are expected to attend The Wedding Collective. The venue hosting The Wedding Collective, is an important part of the experience. "I envision the Jio World Convention Centre as the venue for many standout weddings; it has been designed to cater to events – both intimate and immense," said Isha Mukesh Ambani, director, Reliance Industries, on the launch of the exhibition.

Register for free and attend The Wedding Collective at <https://forms.thenodmag.com/theweddingcollective-registration/> on August 23, 24 and 25 at Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai.

Madras Day

Chennai chronicles

With Madras Week celebrations underway, Taj Connemara is offering two exciting experiences as part of its Connemara Chronicles. At Verandah, there is a special Madras Week menu dotted with Anglo-Indian dishes like railway lamb, chicken vindaloo, gentleman's toes (ivy gourd) and potato vindaloo, chicken Irish stew, old-fashioned bread pudding and more. For those seeking a sip of nostalgia, Lady Connemara Bar & Lounge offers exclusive Madras Week Cocktails recreated from the Connemara Bar's past, like Since 1891 and Madras No.1. August 19 to 25; ₹999 per cocktail. For reservations, call 044-66000000.



A historic brunch

As Chennai celebrates its 385th anniversary on August 22, Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort and Spa, Mahabalipuram, is preparing a special Sunday brunch. Expect classics like payasam, vada and gunpowder dosa along with milagu prawn paniyaram with yera thovaiyal, Madras cheesy fried chicken, Marina malli meen varuval and filter coffee tiramisu. There will be live-cooking stations too. The brunch, starting at ₹2,899, will be available on August 18 (1pm to 4pm) at The Reef.

(Clockwise from below) Palm leaf baskets being woven; the old Dutch Cemetery at Pulicat; Pulicat lighthouse. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.



Held as part of Madras Day celebrations by the AARDE Foundation, this heritage walk will cover places of historical importance at the ancient port town

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The earliest nets fishermen used were made of cotton, unlike the nylon ones that are chiefly in use today. Cotton nets are not that easy to come by, but the Art & Architecture Research Development & Education (AARDE) Foundation has preserved some at its museum in Pulicat. The museum has been around for 10 years, and is the first stop at the heritage walk Trace Origin of Madras, held as part of Madras Day celebrations. Organised by AARDE, this is the 12th edition of the walk that will cover places of historical importance at the ancient port town of Pulicat.

Xavier Benedict, founder-trustee of AARDE, will lead the heritage walk that will start at 7am on August 17 from Loyola's ICAM gate, Mahalingapuram Main Road. "Participants will arrive at Pulicat at 9am, and will first be shown around the museum, which has objects that were excavated by the ASI in and around Pulicat," explains Xavier. This

includes pots, fishing nets, and kalamkari fabrics. They will be shown how women there make palm leaf boxes, a craft that provides them financial stability.

The walk, that will be interspersed with talks, will cover the Dutch fort and cemetery, and the latter, according to Xavier, is the oldest cemetery in maritime trade. Among its highlights is a visit to the 25th milestone along the Buckingham Canal. There were once 25 milestones from Madras to Pulicat, set along the canal, starting



with Basin Bridge. Participants will also be taken to the Adi Narayana Perumal temple that is being renovated, and to the Kal Pallivasal (stone mosque). Xavier will talk about the link between the mosque and cotton trade in the region.

"Finally, we will walk up the Pulicat lighthouse, that opens to the public at 3pm," says Xavier. The idea is to show people the historical significance Pulicat has to the formation of the city of Chennai we know today. "Even before Madras was created, Pulicat was a port for the Dutch, and the British came to settle here since the Dutch were going strong," he says. "Even before that, in 1502, Pulicat had a Portuguese fort."

Xavier says that the reason behind holding the heritage walk is to help Pulicat, that is present in the list of World Heritage Sites from Tamil Nadu, make it to the national list.

The heritage walk will include a vegetarian meal, and non-vegetarians can try prawn fry, prepared by local women. It is on August 17. To register, visit aarde.in/madrasday2024, or WhatsApp 9884013409.

Omega's precision timing captured every millisecond of triumph at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games

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The Olympic Games Paris 2024 concluded with a grand closing ceremony on August 11, drawing the curtain on an event that had millions of people glued to their screens, cheering for their country's best athletes.

After 16 days of historic sporting achievements, USA emerged at the top of the medal tally with 40 gold, 44 silver, and 42 bronze medals.

These medals – won, lost, and contested – were often determined by mere milliseconds,

Seconds to glory

making one wonder: who ensured that everything was fair in the city of love?

The record-breaking performances were measured by a team of timekeepers from Swiss luxury watchmaker Omega, marking its 31st consecutive appearance as the official timekeeper of the Olympic Games since 1932.

For the Paris Games, Omega deployed 550 timekeepers, 350 tonnes of state-of-the-art equipment, and a team of 900

trained volunteers to ensure precision across all 329 events in 32 sports.

One of the most challenging decisions was the Men's 100m final, where both Noah Lyles of the US and K Thompson of Jamaica finished neck and neck, each clocking 9.79 seconds. Omega's photofinish camera, capable of capturing 40,000 images per second, determined Lyles as the gold medallist by a mere 0.005 seconds.

With over nine decades of experience, Omega brought its expertise to the Paris Games and will continue to do so until 2032 in Brisbane, Australia, marking a century of accurate decisions.



Omega's official countdown before the Paris Games. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

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Malayalam

A tedious, over-stretched film



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Everything is in your face right from the beginning in debutant Nahas Nazar's *Adios Amigo*, especially the running theme of the contrast between the haves and have-nots. So much so that one would expect something more to this never-ending and aimless journey of over 160 minutes with two aimless men. But, all we are left with are the few things the film repeatedly throws at us right from the beginning.

Two men from different backgrounds and situations meet at a bus station and begin an impromptu journey, the destination of which keeps shifting as they go along. The makers, for some mysterious reason, choose to reveal their names only in the end. While the poor man (Suraj Venjaramoodu) is trying desperately to get some money to take care of his mother's hospital expenses, the rich man (Asif Ali) has left home with a pocketful of money to go around on yet another aimless trip of non-stop drinking and banter with just about any random person he comes across.

Adios Amigo

Director: Nahas Nazar

Cast: Suraj Venjaramoodu, Asif Ali, Anagha

Storyline: Two men from starkly different backgrounds meet up by chance at a bus stand and embark on an aimless journey together

Right from the setup, it was inevitable that these two men would travel and stick together till the end. But, just to keep the journey going, the poor man who inexplicably goes on this trip even as his mother is in the hospital, does not reveal his need to the moneyed man until late into the day. All this, despite being with him even as he throws his money around to anyone he meets on the way.

Thankam, who wrote the screenplay for *Kettyolaanu Ente Malakha*, comes up with a script in which nothing happens for extended phases. There are long bus journeys, boat journeys, and a long night's stay at a hotel, but nothing crucial occurs in any of these, even as the attempted humour lands only occasionally. The only substantial event amid all this is their meeting with a textile shop employee (Anagha), which sheds light on the rich man's past and adds the rare emotional touch in a movie free of any such thing. Other than this, the only thing we know about him till the end is that he has been quite a headache for the entire family, splurging all the money he got from his father.

By the end, we wonder what the film was trying to convey as the director stretches a short film material. *Adios Amigo* could have been a humorous and profound work on inequality and its manifestations in real life. However, despite such aspirations, it ends up being a tedious, over-stretched film that fails to excite.

Adios Amigo is currently running in theatres



Taapsee Pannu's wilting rose

The dangers and deception that defined the 2021 dark romantic thriller feel contrived in the sequel

Hindi

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Three years after Vinil Mathew's romantic thriller brought some cheer during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Haseen Dillruba* returns to cash in on Rani Kashyap's charm and goodwill. Promising to be a racy sequel to enliven the rainy season, it, however, turns out to be a damp squib. The makers once again try to dish out a desi dose of pulp fantasy to Netflix audiences but fail to turn a Manohar Kahani into a romantic noir.

Part of the problem is that apart from the clueless police at the end, there was little left to add to the scandalous story of the small-town beautician who takes time to make up her mind about the kind of man she wants in her life. As a result, in the sequel, directed by Jayprad Desai, the build-up feels a tad forced, and then the purple prose of writer Kanika Dhillon bleeds one to boredom as the shallow dialogue-baazi takes a long time to translate into action. Despite being set in Agra, the romance lacks soul and the crime is bereft of passion. Going back and forth to keep the suspense ticking turns out to be more of an editing gimmick than an organic exercise.

After taking the police for a ride, Rani Kashyap (Taapsee Pannu) and Rishu

Phir Aayi Haseen Dillruba

Director: Jaiprad Desai

Cast: Taapsee Pannu, Vikrant Massey, Sunny Kaushal, Jimmy Sheirgill, Aditya Srivastav

Storyline: When Rani and Rishu's plans to reboot their relationship go awry, the beautician turns to a seemingly gentle compounder to bail them out of the police dragnet



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Saxena (Vikrant Massey) plan to escape abroad. In comes Jimmy Sheirgill as police officer Mrityunjay Prasad to scuttle their scheme. He has a personal connection with the case and is keen on unravelling the mystery behind the disappearance of Neel Tripathi (Harshvardhan Rane), the third angle in the original.

Meanwhile, another besotted admirer, Abhimanyu (Sunny Kaushal), walks into Rani's life and she finds a modus operandi to throw the police off track in the game of cat and mouse. Complicating matters, the one-handed Rishu also has a specially-abled admirer. The premise looks purposeful on paper, and the possibilities are immense, but the thriller fails to bring one anywhere close to the edge of the seat. The mood keeps simmering for a while but never really comes to a boil.

Rani's dilemma in the original made it a fun watch. She marries a mild-mannered man but gets charmed by the husband's rakish cousin. When the devoted husband develops muscle, Rani's confusion sets off a chaos that is not just skin deep. Three summers later, the deception and danger become one-dimensional and the supposed gotcha moment gets our goat.

The self-awareness of introducing a fictional pulp fiction writer whose novels inspire everybody in the film as a tribute to the genre gets a bit too obvious and his pearls of wisdom on relationships lose their shine pretty soon.

The only time my heart truly pounded in anticipation is when 'Ek Hasina Thi, Ek Deewana Tha' played in the background. That a 1980 song from Subhash Ghai's *Karz* is borrowed to generate goosebumps in 2024 says something about the state of originality and creativity in Bollywood. However, the writing is not in sync with the moral ambiguity of the iconic song for the makers play safe with the actor's image in the second edition. The dirty and sultry shades of red that are thrown in the parlour conversations don't reflect in the storytelling. Moreover, the defining line of the film—"if love does not push you to the brink of insanity, it is not true love—is reduced to a throwaway remark in the sequel.

The sexual tension between Taapsee and Harshvardhan Rane's characters that kept us anxious in the middle overs of the first installment is missing here because the bond between Rani and Abhimanyu lacks the covalent charge. Sunny is a fine actor but the role required a little more charisma. Saddled with a toothless character, Jimmy doesn't gel with the proceedings and appears utterly disinterested in the case. Vikrant who brought the story to life in the first chapter has little to play with and Taapsee needs to hit the reset button to come out of the rut. Like the film, she is efficient without being exciting.

Phir Aayi Haseen Dillruba is streaming on Netflix

Prashanth makes a splendid comeback with this imperfect remake

Tamil

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Top Star Prashanth is back! After headlining *Johnny*, the Tamil remake of Sriram Raghavan's Bollywood film *Johnny Gaddaar*, it's *Andhadhun*'s remake this time and Prashanth makes a brilliant comeback with *Andhagan*, helmed by his father and filmmaker Thiagarajan.

Prashanth isn't particularly renowned for his acting prowess; he peaked during the era when 'the chocolate boy' was a category of protagonists and known for his charming screen presence, he banked on the bandwagon of films that relied on his other talents like action and dancing. Hence, it's no wonder *Andhagan* will be his best performance in probably decades thanks to the excellent source material.

As a pianist, pretending to be visually impaired in the name of an



"experiment", *Andhagan*'s Krish gives Prashanth the perfect space to showcase his talents and the experienced actor laps it up. Be it the scenes where he witnesses the murder of actor Karthik (Karthik) that's orchestrated by the star's second wife Simi (Simran) and her paramour Manohar (Samuthirakani), or the comparatively casual sequences where he falls in love with Julie (Priya Anand), Prashanth does a great job as a man putting on a show

to deceive everyone only to be caught in his own web of lies. The film gives several opportunities for the character to indulge in moral ambiguity and as a man who barely wants to survive for a better tomorrow, Prashanth sells the character's vulnerability and emotions well.

If you have watched *Andhadhun*, it might feel strange to see that the Tamil version to have even copied the "What is life? It depends on the

liver" opening slide from the original film. But quick flashbacks of the tweaks *Johnny* had compared to *Johnny Gaddaar* reassured me that only a scene-by-scene remake would make this film work... and it does. So much so that it wouldn't be an overstatement to call it a far better iteration than the Telugu and Malayalam remakes, *Maestro* and *Bhramam*.

What makes the Tamil version stand apart predominantly, is its fantastic star cast. Inarguably, the crux of *Andhadhun* is Tabu's character and with big shoes to fill, Simran had her work cut out for her. Prashanth and Simran's characters are the living embodiment of how the duality of human nature works when stuck in a tight spot; while one tries to wiggle away to save themselves, the other would not think twice about bringing down the wall to make for a grand escape. Simran, in a powerful role after a long time in Tamil cinema, pulls it off so effortlessly that we almost forget that the duo fighting tooth and nail in *Andhagan* used to be one of the best onscreen couples in films

like *Kannedhirey Thondrinai*, *Parthen Rasithen*, *Thamizh* and *Jodi*.

What comes as a pleasant surprise is Karthik, playing the role of the yesteryear hero trying to spice things up in life with a new wife. Be it the shot of him watching *Mouna Ragam*, or listening to 'Panivizhum Malarvanam' and 'Kadhal Kavithaigal Padithidum', and the music of 'Keeravani' playing while his character is getting killed or the rendition of 'Chandirane Suriyane' and 'Nenjukulle Innarunnu', the film

doubles as an homage to the thespian.

The rest of the cast do a decent job and while the recreation of the final showdown between the cheating cop and his wife might be a hit or a miss in the Tamil version, the roles played by Urvashi and Yogi Babu as the organ harvesters miss the mark by a mile. The film also lacks the zaniness of *Andhadhun* and some of the scenes fall flat but it's the primary cast's sheer performance that keeps the film in check. While the film's songs don't manage to stay put in our memory, the fantastic piano compositions stand apart.

Apart from turning out to be a satisfactory watch for those who have not caught *Andhadhun*, the film makes for a befitting comeback for Prashanth, one of Tamil cinema's finest talents who hasn't gotten their due. Here's to hoping *Andhagan* turns out to be the rabbit's foot for Prashanth!

Andhagan is currently running in theatres

Borderlands

Director: Eli Roth

Cast: Cate Blanchett, Kevin Hart, Ariana Greenblatt, Jamie Lee Curtis, Jack Black

Storyline: A bounty hunter forms an unexpected alliance with a ragtag team of misfits to uncover a planet's most explosive secrets



Barren, boring and unwatchable

English

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It's an all-too-familiar trope in cinematic history: the curse of the video game adaptation. Once a cautionary tale of calamities, the genre has recently seen a glimmer of hope with successes like HBO's *The Last of Us* and most recently with Prime Video's *Fallout*. Yet it seems we have been inexorably drawn back into the cursed abyss with the arrival of *Borderlands*, a film so miscalculated, it deserves its own place in videogame purgatory.

Directed by Eli Roth, this latest outing feels like a wrenching, ill-conceived detour from Roth's usual terrain. Adapted from Gearbox Software's eponymous game franchise, *Borderlands*

is a discordant cacophony of ineptitude. The plot is a tired retread of every sci-fi trope imaginable. There are magical artefacts, a prophecy, a ragtag group of misfits who must band together to save the day – if it all sounds familiar, that's because it is. Roth and his co-writer Joe Crombie seem to be more than content to churn out cliché-ridden banter and uninspired set pieces, hoping that the sheer volume of noise would compensate for their lack of creativity.

The film features Cate Blanchett, whose Academy Award-winning presence might misleadingly suggest a semblance of gravitas. Watching her wander through this wreckage, you can almost see the regret in her eyes. Her performance is devoid of bounty hunter Lilith's endearing spark of wit rather, screams contractual obligation.

This weariness is matched only by Kevin Hart's Roland, a character so lifeless that even Hart's usual comedic flair seems muted and irrelevant. In a film that's supposedly an action-comedy, it's almost impressive how completely *Borderlands* fails at both. The jokes fall flat, the action is uninspired, and the entire enterprise is suffused with a grim sense of compulsion.

The supporting cast fares no better. Jamie Lee Curtis, is reduced to a

forgettable expository NPC. Jack Black's Claptrap, the beloved comic relief from the game, is nothing but a shrill annoyance. Meanwhile, Ariana Greenblatt as Tiny Tina – a delightful bundle of chaotic energy in the games – is rendered almost unbearable by the film's insistence on turning her into a shit-talking MacGuffin. Edgar Ramirez's Atlas is a villain so laughably one-dimensional that it's almost insulting.

Visually, *Borderlands* is an assault on the senses. The CGI landscapes of Pandora look like the digital refuse of a thousand abandoned projects. The special effects are so shoddy that at times the characters appear to be interacting with non-existent objects and it's almost a relief when the film resorts to practical effects, which are, unfortunately, few and far between.

Ultimately, *Borderlands* is but a cautionary tale: a reminder that not every game IP needs to be a movie. For those who still hold out hope for a good video game adaptation, this film is a bitter pill to swallow. For those willing to brave the dismay, *Borderlands* offers little more than a pressing desire to lunge for the exit.

Borderlands is currently running in theatres

Snippets



Netflix announces new crime thriller Sector 36 starring Vikrant Massey and Deepak Dobriyal

Netflix is set to release the crime thriller *Sector 36* on September 13, marking the directorial debut of Aditya Nimbalkar. The film, inspired by true events, looks at the mysterious disappearance of children from a local slum and follows a police officer's intense investigation into a sinister series of crimes. Produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films and Jio Studios, *Sector 36* features actors Vikrant Massey and Deepak Dobriyal and explores themes of power, crime, and social inequality, as the protagonist battles a cunning serial killer while uncovering harrowing secrets that challenge societal norms.



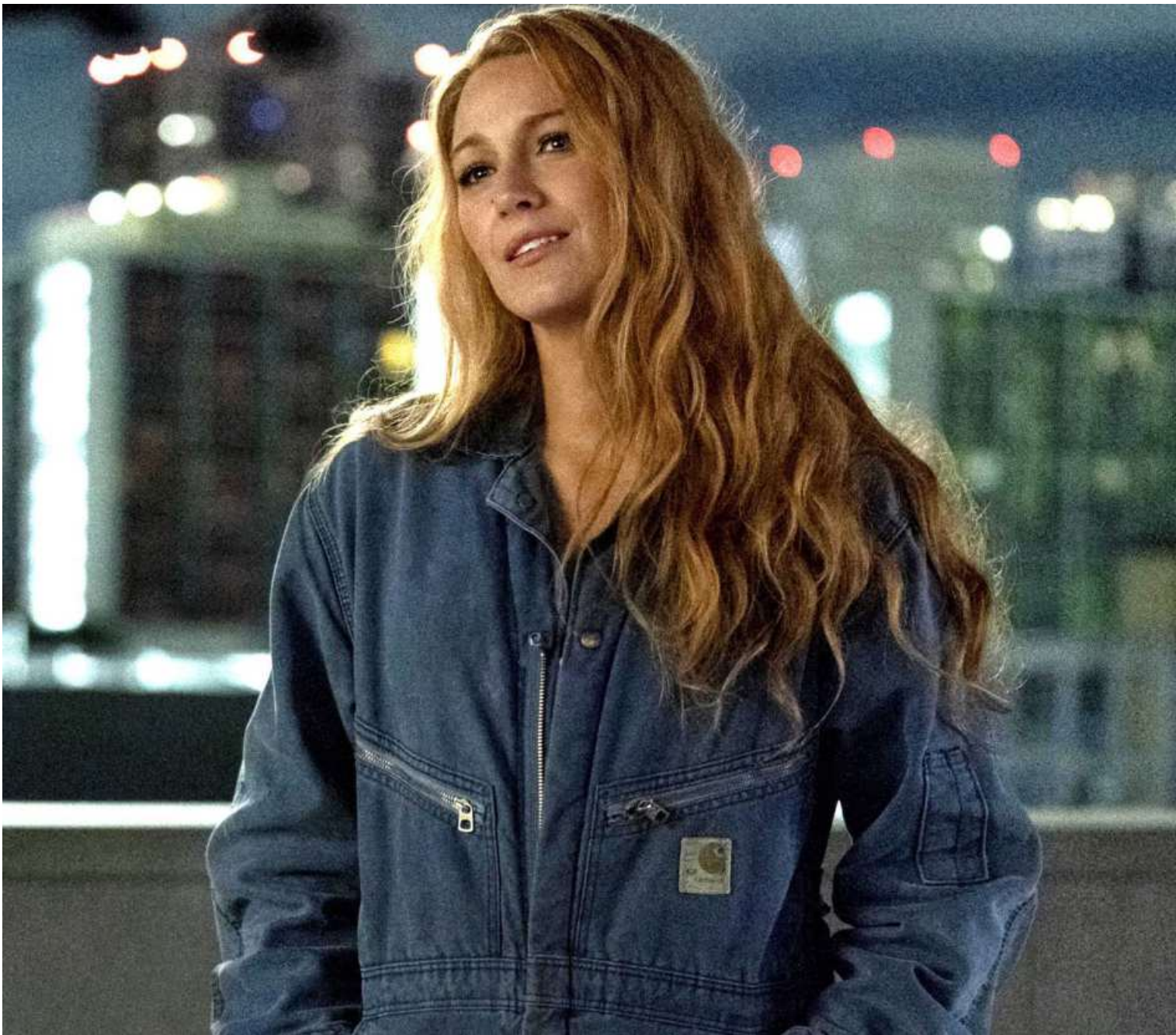
NTR 31: Prashanth Neel-Jr NTR film goes on floors, locks a release date

Director Prashanth Neel's film with Jr NTR, tentatively titled *NTR 31*, went on floors on August 9. The film is produced by Mythri Movie Makers and NTR Arts. The makers held a pooja to officially launch the movie. The film was announced in May, 2023. As per the official announcement, the film is set to hit the screens on January 9, 2026. While Prashanth Neel, who rose to stardom with the *KGF* franchise, was busy filming *Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire*, Jr NTR was involved in multiple projects. Jr NTR, who starred in the Oscar-winning *RRR*, directed by SS Rajamouli and also starring Ram Charan, is awaiting the release of *Devara-I*. He is also part of *War 2*, part of Yash Raj Film's Spyverse.



Salman Khan announces release date of docu-series on Salim-Javed

Actor Salman Khan has announced the release date of *Angry Young Men*, a docuseries that will trace the journey of the iconic writer duo Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar. Said to be a three-part series that provides a glimpse into the legendary partnership of Salim-Javed, who revolutionised Hindi cinema in the 1970s with films like *Sholay*, *Deewaar* and *Don*, the series will stream on Prime Video. Salman took to Instagram to share that the series will be out on August 20. The docuseries is narrated by the duo themselves and will also feature some of the most distinguished figures from Indian cinema.



This romantic drama does not fire

Based on the Colleen Hoover bestseller, Blake Lively's *It Ends With Us* is a tale of love, grief, abuse and rage that's oddly disengaging

English

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First off, *It Ends With Us* is a romantic drama, not a rom-com and definitely not a date movie. Fans of Colleen Hoover's 2016 best-selling novel, that the film is based on, have expressed disappointment at leaving out certain key facts and moments. However, at just over two hours the film feels like a bit of a slog. Approaching the movie like a fluffy rom-com, even though the trailer encourages one to do just that, would be a complete disaster.

The film opens with Lily (Blake Lively) returning home for her father's (Kevin McKidd) funeral. When her mother, Jenny, (Amy Morton) asks her about the eulogy she is to give, she admits to not writing it. She has nothing to say at the funeral staring down the empty bullet points on a serviette and abruptly walking out of the service.

Sitting on the ledge of a high rise trying to process her feelings, she meets an impossibly handsome stranger, Ryle

It Ends With Us

Director: Justin Baldoni

Cast: Blake Lively, Justin Baldoni, Jenny Slate, Hasan Minhaj

Storyline: Lily's dream encounter with a handsome neurosurgeon turns into a nightmare

(Justin Baldoni) and the two form a connection. Ryle lives in the apartment block and is a neurosurgeon. Lily, whose middle name is Blossom and whose surname is Bloom, loves flowers and wishes to open a florist shop. One almost wishes to agree with Ryle that her parents must have hated her something fierce.

Lily goes ahead and opens a totally 'gram-able florist called Lily Bloom's. As she is cleaning the store, Allysa (Jenny Slate), walks in and after saying she hates flowers, agrees to work for Lily. Despite Ryle preferring to keep things casual and Lily wanting a commitment, the two continue to see each other and their feelings deepen for each other.

Simultaneously, there are flashbacks of young Lily (Isabela Ferrer) forming a bond with a homeless boy, Atlas (Alex Neustaedter). Lily, Ryle, and Atlas, (there is nothing subtle about the names) have to process childhood trauma before they can move forward to make something of their lives. When Atlas (Brandon Sklenar), now a chef running a successful restaurant called Roots, reenters Lily's life, she sees a side of Ryle that is a major cause for concern.

It Ends With Us is coy in its portrayal of domestic abuse, perhaps in a bid not to glamourise it, or have it devolve into gratuitousness. But the fuzzy frames and

sharp cuts also divorce the viewer from the happenings on screen. The reason given for one of the character's abuse is troubling.

The scene towards the end in the hospital with deciding on the baby's name and divorce from the postpartum bed is so overwrought that one cannot help snickering. Acting-wise, Lively works with the material at hand while the men do not have much to do apart from providing eye candy and looking hurt or hurtful by turns, which they do competently.

The houses and lighting are beyond beautiful and have one gnashing teeth in envy at the spotless surfaces. The shoes are eye wateringly good, the clothes not so much. Apart from Marshall (Hasan Minhaj), Allysa's husband, and a doctor in ER, *It Ends With Us* is overwhelmingly white.

With Lily sporting Louboutins, which cost upwards of \$1000 a pair, a neurosurgeon and a successful restaurateur, money is obviously not an issue for the principals. *It Ends With Us*, plays out like a longer version of *Sex and the City*, with its attendant gains and losses.

It Ends With Us is currently running in theatres