

Stone Fields

Sam Littman

ENGL 2308-003

**Everything, Everywhere, All at Once: A Sprawling and fragmented, yet Cohesive
Masterpiece**

Everything, Everywhere, All at Once is an A-24 film released on March 25, 2022, in the United States is a film distributed by A-24 films, directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (AKA “The Daniels”) and produced by the Russo brothers. This film particularly grossed more money in box office sales any other film distributed by A24, (including *Hereditary* which released in 2018) with a box office amount of 103.1 million dollars.

This film was ambitious for many reasons, but in my opinion, was particularly ambitious in terms of its plot and its defiance of genre conventions. Everything, Everywhere, All at Once includes a plethora of different genre conventions, ranging from Sci-Fi to Dark Comedy, to Absurdism to even Martial Arts, lending itself to a direct representation of the title of the film. The Daniel brothers were not afraid to create an abstract and multi-faceted narrative in which every decision remains integral to the plot, but still lays emphasis on the bigger, macroscopic picture of the plot, and of the universe. The plot is hard to predict, but very easy to follow-

Chapter 1: Everything

The Film begins with the main protagonist of the film Evelyn (Michelle Yeoh), an Asian-American immigrant in her home, most likely taking place in the “present,” in the upstairs chamber of the laundromat her and her husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan) own. Everything is happening, and stakes are high: Evelyn’s strict and invasive father Gong-gong (James Hong) is visiting, Waymond wishes to hand divorce papers over to Evelyn, their laundromat is being audited and evaluated by the IRS and Evelyn’s daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu) wishes to introduce her white girlfriend Becky to Evelyn in hopes that Evelyn will accept her. Later, when Gong Gong arrives and Waymond and Evelyn have gathered their paperwork, they proceed to the IRS office at which Waymond has his mind taken over by the Waymond from another universe, at which he tells Evelyn that Jobu Tupaki (The Joy from alpha-Waymond’s universe) seeks the utter control and destruction of the entire multiverse. The Alpha-verse has developed universe jumping technology, at which an individual can inherit the characteristics or skills of a person’s alternative self in many other vast universes. However, the way they inherit these characteristics is by doing things that would make their current timeline intersect with the other and then verse-jumping. This is done through various things, such as using IRS trophies as butt-plugs, paper-cutting every crease between your fingers, etc. During the meeting of Evelyn and company with Deirdre (Jamie Lee Curtis), their IRS auditor, Evelyn follows some of the conditions needed to verse-jump and putting her shoes on opposite feet and other various steps, she verse-jumps to a universe in which Deirdre is breaking down the door (commanded by Jobu Tupaki) to the janitor closet which she was transported into. Evelyn is experiencing this reality alongside being audited by Deirdre, and screams as she is killed in the other universe. Jobu finds a way to invade Evelyn’s current universe and Evelyn is inquisitive to who Jobu Tupaki is. The Evelyn from the Alpha-verse forced Joy to “Verse-Jump” to the point where she now experiences every single

possible universe all at once, and it is the Evelyn in the IRS-auditing universe's responsibility to stop her. Jobu, after seeing all these universes believes that it is all futile, and seeks to destroy every carnation of herself, and Evelyn in order to stop herself from existing. Evelyn gains the ability to verse-jump and is attacked by the IRS-auditor who gains super strength and nigh-invulnerability through verse-jumping. Evelyn, after meeting Jobu after many scenes of karate, verse-jumps too much and sees every possible timeline she could have been: the universe where she has hot-dog fingers, the one where she becomes a famous martial artist actor (in which she didn't leave for America with Waymond), and many others.

Chapter 2: Everywhere

After Evelyn begins experiencing many different universes, she is transported to a world in which she has hot dog fingers and is in a relationship with her IRS auditor, a universe in which she is a hibachi chef and is coworkers with a man being piloted by a racoon, a universe in which she and Joy are rocks, etc. Jobu then transports Evelyn to the place where Jobu's ultimate weapon is being held: the everything bagel which destroys all universes in its path. Evelyn peers into the bagel and begins to enact destructive behaviors in all the other universes, including signing Waymond's divorce papers, running away from her IRS auditor hot-dog finger bearing partner. Jobu tries to convince Evelyn to destroy herself, and that everything is ultimately meaningless. After Waymond (from another universe) begins to plea to Evelyn to be kind and to not give up, Evelyn changes her mind and fixes all the problems in each of her alternative timelines and universes. She eventually convinces Jobu to step away from the everything bagel, being juxtaposed with Joy and Evelyn sharing a resolution in the original timeline.

Chapter 3: All at once

All is well in the multiverses, Joy is happy, Becky is accepted, Evelyn and Waymond have resuscitated their relationship, Gong-Gong is less overbearing and the IRS auditor gives the laundromat the clear. Evelyn sees her other universes in the IRS office, and then averts her attention back to the present moment.

Directing and Screenplay

With the setup of the plot, it is now important to discuss the directing and the artistic direction this movie goes for. This movie begins in a very down-to-earth environment: papers scattered, a dirty, cluttered, unorganized living space. Family pictures are on the wall and rice is cooking. Evelyn is frantically pacing around whilst Waymond is trying to serve her divorce paper, Evelyn is distant from Waymond, and Waymond has some urgent mannerisms and is telling Evelyn to relax creating some dynamic tension between the two. The movie starts out in a well-defined clear-cut box of troubles and issues from the start, and then becomes a greater fractured timelines that emanated from these original troubles. Waymond is focused on one thing, and then Evelyn is thinking about everything. There is a timeline in the movie in which Waymond and Evelyn separated when Waymond moved to America, which ultimately led to Waymond becoming a very successful businessman and then Evelyn becoming a very famous movie star. This is a thought lingering in the back of Evelyn's mind specifically after Waymond mentions wanting to get a divorce: what would she have done without him? Would she be better off without him? The universe of Evelyn being with Deirdre in the universe of hot dog fingers is representative of Evelyn's fear of acceptance of Joy being gay. The racoon controlling the

hibachi chef is representative of Gong-gong's constant control of Evelyn's life, and the rocks represent how Evelyn wish she had a strong foundation for her business, and her family. All of these individual problems that are shown in the very beginning of the scene splinter out into these alternative timelines, albeit slightly hyperbolic and absurd. The general structure of this film almost resembles a diamond, in the beginning, the plot of the movie is somewhat contrived and clear-cut, Evelyn and her family are going through a lot collectively and it creates a challenge for Evelyn. However, at the beginning of the movie, this somewhat contrived set of problems is struck with a multiversal hammer and fractures the plot of the movie. Evelyn's goal previously was to survive the moment, the current circumstances she was in, but now, after Waymond mentions the idea of the multiverse, is to rescue Joy and Jobu from the ever consuming, decaying nature of pessimistic nihilism. These many different timelines unfold at the same time, fractionalizing the whole of the greater theme and story: Evelyn has various struggles, and there is only one solution: to live with love and with Joy. Joy as a character is important because she not only is directly related to Evelyn and represents a struggle with Evelyn to come to terms with her former upbringing by Gong-gong, but also represents a key to Evelyn being joyful: acceptance. Evelyn accepts the fact that maybe her daughter is out of shape, and that her life is falling apart, and that Waymond is somewhat ungrateful. The culmination of the plot begins to narrow the overarching multiverse of themes and grievances in Evelyn's life. With acceptance, and letting go came the reduction of everything, being everywhere, always to simply the present moment.

There is extensive use of somewhat fantastical and sci-fi esque visuals, with very sharp cuts, various special effects and a lot of screen splitting, with Evelyn in the current timeline and

Evelyn in other timelines. There is a variety of screenplay that occurs here: there is a large emphasis on combat, and the individual motion of characters. Waymond uses a fanny-pack filled with various office supplies and wreaks havoc on the IRS security guards. There is a heavy weight to the characters, and there is a certain realism to the pain responses they feel, especially during the absurd portions of Verse-Jumping in which Evelyn and many other characters inflict themselves with intentional pain including, but not limited to using an IRS trophy as a butt-plug and Evelyn saying I love you to the crazy possessed IRS auditor. There is a wide blending of genre-conventions in a manner where it is seamless, and blends well. The genre conventions are everywhere and all over the place, they are everything that can be conceived of, and it is happening all the time during the movie. This movie does a fantastic job at keeping the viewer engaged through the implementation of very different (and some would theorize clashing elements) to a great effect. It not only keeps the viewer engaged, but also makes it hard to predict the plot of this movie. Viewers can sometimes have their experience ruined through the use of recycled Hollywood motifs and linear plotlines. This film is fragmented, in plot, in genre, and in theme, but it ties together a universal theme of love, and acceptance.

Acting

The acting in this film is very good because of its dynamism. A lot of the times, genre fusion movies can sometimes struggle in the sense that they lose the initial themes and integral plot in the vortex of ambition and confusion, but this movie specifically is able to center it through keeping these intact, whilst also having a lot of superb actors to rely integrate these themes and conventions and make them consistently delivered. There was a lot of talent required for this project just based on it being an infusion of differing genre conventions and screenplay.

Each role required the actors to not only act their roles convincingly, but also be able to change their characteristics and almost assume the role of an entirely different person given the abstract circumstances of the movie. Michelle Yeoh does a very effective job of portraying very different roles, ranging from martial artist-based movie star to hot dog finger bearing upper middle-class worker, to a hibachi chef. But also at the same time, her base role as a mother, an Asian-American immigrant and small-business owner is not forgotten during this torrential set of spiraling timelines and personas. This is very significant, because while everything is happening, Yeoh is able to stay true to the plot, and not lose herself in the multiverse minutia. Stephanie Hsu specifically can depict a very emotional, but also deadpan character in which her overwhelming emotions push her to seek destruction of herself and all selves around her. Stephanie's character interaction with Evelyn particularly were some of the most emotional portions of the movie, and her breakdowns really cement empathy for her motivations and desire. Joy seeks the destruction of the universe because there is ultimately no inherent meaning to existence, and to life. She sees all the suffering and hardship she endures in her plethora of alternate timelines and experiences as bad and is willing to destroy the entire universe because of her suffering. She suffers in alternate timelines, and she suffers in the primary timelines relative to the others. She is a fantastic villain in the sense that she instigates a large sense of dread in the viewer, the viewer not even knowing she is the villain in the first place with her title as Jobu Tubaki, but also has a large resonance with the viewer emotionally. She is experiencing everything too, alongside Evelyn. The supporting characters, including Ke Huy Quan and Jamie Lee Curtis help to make this universe cohesive, they can be very adaptable and supporting to the main characters. Quan can distinguish different characters of Waymond without even changing costume and is very expressive in his role. Jamie Lee Curtis can do this similarly and is able to place a real sense of

fright in the viewer, through the role of a somewhat intimidating real life in an IRS auditor, but also through verse-jumping into the role of a professional wrestler and Bautista-bombing Evelyn.

Conclusion

This movie is fantastic on many levels, but the most impressive portion is the fact that this movie is able to be complex, nuanced and sprawling whilst simultaneously being able to stay true to the original story and hammer home some very profound and heartfelt moments and themes. While the movie fractalizes the plot, these individual plots still stay intrinsic to their root causes and problems. This movie is able to project these troubles and themes into the cosmos, but also able to bring them straight back down to the earth, to its core. This movie is about the struggle, and how real it is, no matter what choice you make. No matter what universe you lie in, or what decision you last made, the struggle will always be there. It is important to understand that while life may feel meaningless, and even somewhat empty and loveless, goodness is always there. It is important to actively be grateful for those things around you. The things you currently have, no matter how hard it really gets. Because really, the only thing you have amidst the struggle happening all around you, is the people that you love.