



McDonald, Scott (2024) *Contemporary franchise revitalisation: The soft reboot*. MPhil(R) thesis.

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/84348/>

Copyright and moral rights for this work are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This work cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Enlighten: Theses

<https://theses.gla.ac.uk/>  
[research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:research-enlighten@glasgow.ac.uk)

# Contemporary Franchise Revitalisation: The Soft Reboot

Scott McDonald

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Philosophy (Research)

School of Culture & Creative Arts  
College of Arts & Humanities  
University of Glasgow

October 2023

## Abstract

This thesis aims to bring the term ‘soft reboot’ into regular academic use. Throughout the following chapters the term soft reboot is explained in detail, differentiating it from standard ‘hard’ reboots. The defining characteristic of a soft reboot is that it must maintain some of level of franchise canon; this thesis therefore highlights the shortcomings of previous definitions of the term ‘reboot’ in relation to film. I focused primarily on twelve key soft reboots, both to better illustrate what constitutes a soft reboot and to provide continuity between the various chapters that make up this dissertation. A thorough literature review was conducted which helped to better situate my own work within the current academic discourse surrounding reboot studies. Then, the key stages of a film’s life cycle were examined in turn to elucidate how soft reboots are texts largely concerned with targeting the audience’s feelings of nostalgia for the original films in their franchise. These stages were production, promotion, text, and reception. This research advances the field of reboot study by broadening the scope of analysis to include those films which reboot or revitalise their franchise *without* removing elements from canon, modernising our understanding of what a reboot can be to better suit its current usage, particularly since the soft reboot’s explosion in popularity in 2015. These findings highlight the opportunities for further study in the field, focusing more specifically on how soft reboots function in particular franchises. Though this thesis conducts such analysis and research, its purpose is primarily illustrative to better explain exactly what a soft reboot is and how it operates.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures	4
Acknowledgements	6
Introduction	7
Chapter One: Literature Review	15
Chapter Two: Production	26
Chapter Three: Promotion	50
Chapter Four: Text	75
Chapter Five: Reception	92
Conclusion	102
Bibliography	108
Filmography	120

## List of Figures

Figure 1-1 A collection of YouTube videos detailing the ‘easter eggs’ to previous Jurassic Park films in Jurassic World.

Figure 1-2 The *Jurassic Park* heroes share the screen with *Jurassic World*’s new generation of stars.

Figure 2-1 Daisy Ridley on location in Abu Dhabi to represent the desert planet of Jakku.

Figure 2-2 The ‘Polecats’ of *Mad Max: Fury Road* attack the War Rig driven by the central characters.

Figure 2-3 The infamous ‘cannonball stunt’ of *Mad Max 2* which saw a stuntman rotate numerous times before injuring himself.

**Fig 2-4 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for the first five *Halloween* films**

Fig 2-5 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for the remaining *Halloween* films excluding the recent soft reboot as well as the Rob Zombie hard reboots.

Figure 3-1 James Cameron’s return to the *Terminator* franchise as Executive Producer is highlighted in the first trailer for *Terminator: Dark Fate*

Figure 3-2 Sarah Connor’s return in the first *Terminator: Dark Fate* trailer, the character’s first cinematic appearance since *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*

Figure 3-3 The U.S.S Enterprise, the iconic ship of the original *Star Trek* crew, under construction, as seen in the first teaser trailer for 2009’s *Star Trek*

Figure 3-4 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for David Ayer’s *Suicide Squad*

Figure 3-5 “Chewie, we’re home.” Han Solo and Chewbacca return to the Millenium Falcon, marking the former’s first appearance on-screen in 32 years.

Figure 3-6 Darth Maul ignites his double-bladed lightsaber in the trailer for *The Phantom Menace*.

Figure 3-7 Kylo Ren ignites his crossguard lightsaber in *The Force Awakens*’ first teaser trailer.

Figure 3-8 Rey’s appearance in *The Force Awakens* drew many comparisons with the outfit worn by Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*, leading to speculation that they were related.

Figure 4-1 Adonis Creed sporting the USA-themed shorts worn by both Rocky Balboa and Apollo Creed.

Figure 4-2 Rey prepares to duel Kylo Ren after summoning the Skywalker lightsaber to her hand with the force.

Figure 4-3 “I am all the Jedi.” Rey, wielding the lightsabers of both Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa, deflects the Emperor’s lightning.

Figure 4.4 Alan Grant flees from the *Spinosaurus*, which stands over the *T-rex* it defeated in combat.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the tireless support of Professor Ian Garwood, my supervisor throughout a challenging writing process. His invaluable feedback, patience and expertise ensured that this project would be completed despite many delays and much rewriting. Our meetings, though intended for me to show my progress, shaped and focused my work into the finished product presented in this dissertation. Dr Garwood was the finest mentor anyone could ask for and he has my sincerest gratitude.

I would also like to extend my deepest thanks to my family. My mother, Margaret, for her feedback throughout the writing process and for watching many of the key films analysed for this project with me; her willingness to act as a sounding board for two long years sparked many of the ideas included in this thesis. My brother, Mark, for providing a fresh perspective on the films analysed. His familiarity with many of the films ensured I pushed my analysis further after our many discussions. My sister, Emma, for reading cobbled together drafts and providing an outsider perspective on the films analysed herein. Finally, my friends Emily and Chloe for providing ceaseless motivation and for challenging me to produce work of the highest academic standards.

## ***Introduction***

The rise of the film franchise over the past two decades has brought with it a multitude of changes to the film industry. Though highly successful franchises did, of course, exist over half a century ago with the likes of the *Godzilla* and *James Bond* franchises, their prominence has exploded since the turn of the millennium. One must only look at the top box office earners in recent years to identify the titanic success of films based on existing properties: the top ten highest grossing films of 2019 were all either sequels, remakes, reboots or comic book adaptations (in some cases, two of the four). Eight of those films grossed over \$1 billion worldwide in 2019 (Rubin, 2020), with *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (Abrams, 2019) following soon after in January 2020 (Rubin, 2020). Franchises have cemented their position as the biggest earners in the film industry, and studios have been keen to utilise their success in every marketable way. Major properties such as *Star Wars* and the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (MCU) increasingly take advantage of transmedia storytelling to weave an interconnected web of narratives across film, television, streaming services, and, in the case of *Star Wars*, novels, comic books and video games, too. Franchises in film and related media, it seems, have never been more dominant. The fact that popular franchises offer existing fanbases for future films to easily attract has led to the development of new means to sustain a franchise's lifespan.

As the industry continues to evolve, so too do the approaches to filmmaking. Film remakes, at least in some form, are almost as old as film itself. A film remake retells or reimagines the story of the original film but with changes; this most notably involves a new cast, though the setting and context of the film can also be changed, as well as certain story elements. Technological leaps, such as the introduction of sound or colour to cinema, often result in numerous remakes of classic films in order to 'update' them to modern standards. It is not uncommon for certain films to be remade numerous times; David O. Selznick's *A Star is Born* (Selznick, 1937) has been remade on three separate occasions, and the Italian *Perfetti Sconosciuti* (Genovese, 2016) - *Perfect Strangers* in English - set a world record for being remade no fewer than twenty-four times (Malas, 2023). Film reboots later followed; a type of film similar to the traditional



remake that instead discards the continuity of an established universe in favour of a new diegetic timeline. The reboot offers studios and filmmakers greater flexibility in their ability to build off the existing popularity of established products, as well as more long-term profit potential and longevity for the franchise; as Steven Gil argues, a remake relates to a single film whilst a reboot seeks to spawn a new series of films (Gil, 2014: 25-26). The reboot eventually evolved into one of the industry's most prominent film modes today: the soft reboot.

A distinction must be made between the traditional or 'hard' reboot and the soft reboot. A hard reboot erases all previous continuity of a film franchise and 'rebrands' the franchise whilst still using similar elements as the original film(s). One of the clearest examples of this in application can be seen through two *Batman* film series: the first of these series based on the character began with *Batman* (Burton, 1989), which was successful enough to spawn three sequels, ending the series with *Batman & Robin* (Schumacher, 1997). The character's onscreen portrayal was later rebooted in *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005) as 'it had sort of reached a dead end with its previous iteration' (Nolan, quoted in Foundas, 2012: 7); Michael Keaton was succeeded by Christian Bale in the titular role, and the character of Batman saw his origin story retold in an altered way to what audiences saw in the 1989 film. Though *Batman Begins* featured many of the same components as *Batman*, it still wiped the slate clean and told the story of Bruce Wayne from a new starting point. As a result, the film is a clear example of a hard reboot as it represented a new origin point for the franchise, going on to spawn two sequels - *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan, 2012).

By contrast, the soft reboot is a less drastic form of rebooting a franchise. Soft reboots often ignore or retcon established elements of canon, even going so far as to ignore entire films in the franchise. However, crucially, they maintain some elements of the previous films' continuity. The events of the first film in the franchise are typically retained, with the soft reboot attempting to take the franchise in a new direction whilst still incorporating elements of the films that fans love. Though a hard reboot restarts the entire continuity of a franchise, a soft reboot always builds on established canon. Returning to the *Batman*

example above, *Batman Begins* undoubtedly uses many similar elements compared to the 1989 film. However, it retains none of the earlier film's continuity. A different man killed Bruce Wayne's parents, Batman has a new origin story, new experiences and a new love interest. The two films may use many of the same building blocks, but they created different structures with them.

Soft reboots often see main characters from the original films cast in the role of side characters who support new characters for a new generation; this can be seen with Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Leia Organa in the *Star Wars* sequels, Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve, 2017) and Rocky Balboa in the *Creed* series. Though still important characters in these newer films, they generally step aside for - or, in the case of the *Star Wars* heroes and Rocky Balboa - pass the torch to the new generation of stars. Though not true in the case of all soft reboots, the plan seems to be thus: beloved characters get audiences to buy a ticket, the new characters make them continue to support the franchise.

Soft reboots as a separate film mode have begun to be acknowledged in modern films. The latest entry in the ever-meta *Scream* franchise described the key features and 'rules' of a specific kind of soft reboot: the legacy sequel, also known as the 'requel' or 'legacyquel'. More specifically, the film - a soft reboot itself - acknowledged within the diegesis the difficulties faced by a soft reboot attempting to satisfy longtime fans with a specific set of expectations. Mindy, one of the new characters introduced in *Scream* (Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillett, 2022) explains how the film's killings appear to be following 'requel' or 'legacyquel' rules:

“See, you can't just reboot a franchise from scratch anymore. The fans won't stand for it. *Black Christmas*, *Child's Play*, *Flatliners*...that shit doesn't work. But you can't just do a straight sequel, either. You got to build something new. But not too new, or the Internet goes bug-fucking nuts. It's got to be part of an ongoing story line, even if the story shouldn't have been ongoing in the first place. New main characters, yes, but supported by and related to legacy characters.

Not quite a reboot, not quite a sequel. Like the new Halloween, Saw, Terminator, Jurassic Park, Ghostbusters... fuck, even Star Wars! It always, always goes back to the original!”

Interestingly, *Scream* suggests that the soft reboot (legacy sequels do, of course, fall under the broader soft reboot umbrella) is the only acceptable way to reboot a franchise in the modern era. Reboots, as *Scream* suggests, must show respect towards the original films in their franchise.

This dissertation will introduce a new concept I have termed ‘liminal canonicity’ and explain its relevance to the soft reboot. Standard film canon can be defined as any material which is officially recognised as having happened within a series’ universe or continuity. The events of *Batman & Robin*, for example, are non-canon in Christopher Nolan’s *Batman* universe. Despite the decades of comic books, television shows and previous film iterations, only the events within Nolan’s films themselves are considered canon in the ‘Nolanverse’.

The term liminal canonicity fills a current void in the academic discourse to properly explain the status of alternate timelines and universes within films; liminal canon is that which is simultaneously acknowledged as ‘having happened’ and yet not recognised as canon to the ‘main’ timeline. This differs from instances where entire films are erased from a franchise’s canon without any acknowledgement of this occurring. Consider the status of the majority of the *Halloween* franchise after the release of the 2018 soft reboot *Halloween* (Green, 2018): in that film’s timeline, only the 1978 *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978) is recognised as canon, making the new film a direct sequel to John Carpenter’s venerated original. This renders both the original timeline - comprised of *Halloween*, *Halloween II* (Rosenthal, 1981), *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers* (Little, 1988), *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers* (Othenin-Girard, 1989) and *Halloween 6: The Curse of Michael Myers* (Chappelle, 1995) - and the first soft rebooted timeline - comprised of *Halloween*, *Halloween II*, *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* (Miner, 1998) and *Halloween: Resurrection* (Rosenthal, 2002) - entirely non-canon aside from the shared starting point. Crucially, there is no acknowledgement within the 2018 film’s universe that the events of any of these films ever occurred. Their canonicity is not disputed; they are explicitly non-canon. By contrast, an example of liminal canon can be seen

in the soft reboot *Star Trek* (Abrams, 2009); beginning what would later be dubbed ‘the Kelvin timeline’ (after the U.S.S. Kelvin which is involved in the inciting incident of the film), the film creates an alternate reality that differs from the original timeline, now known as the Prime timeline. The events of the Prime timeline, spanning from *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001) to the post-time jump events of *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017) still happen. The Kelvin timeline acknowledges this, though simultaneously makes it clear that the timeline of the soft rebooted films has diverged from the Prime timeline. As a result of this, the films and television shows relating to the Prime timeline occupy a liminal space between canon and non-canon within the Kelvin timeline; they happened, but ‘somewhere else.’ Liminal canonicity’s importance to soft reboots will be elaborated on throughout this dissertation, particularly the way it allows filmmakers to appease long-time fans of a franchise by suggesting that beloved events in the series’ history may still have happened in some sense, maintaining some relevance rather than being thrown, ‘into the dustbin of history as irrelevant and apocryphal.’ (Proctor, 2017)

Aside from this introduction, this dissertation will contain five key chapters, though these will contain various subheadings. The first of these chapters will be a literature review. The literature review will primarily focus on the existing discourse surrounding soft reboots and the various terms that fall under its umbrella: the legacy sequel or legacyquel, the requel and the nostalgia reboot. Here I will also conduct a thorough investigation of literature pertaining to reboots in order to better differentiate between them and the soft reboots that will be the overall focus of this dissertation. Finally, I will also examine literature relating to the concept of nostalgia in relation to film, as this will be a key concept throughout this dissertation due to soft reboots seeking to target this feeling in a variety of ways.

The remaining chapters, despite their differing content, will largely use the following twelve films as case studies in order to provide continuity throughout this dissertation. The films in question are:

- *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, 2015)
- *Terminator: Dark Fate* (Miller, 2019)

- *Terminator Genisys* (Taylor, 2015)
- *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015)
- *Superman Returns* (Singer, 2006)
- *Halloween* (2018)
- *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*
- *Star Trek* (2009)
- *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015)
- *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer, 2014)
- *Creed* (Coogler, 2015)
- *The Suicide Squad* (Gunn, 2021)

Following the literature review, I will analyse the production stage of soft reboots in the second chapter. The key aspects of this stage that will be discussed include the decisions made regarding the development of film scripts, the casting process - relating both to returning 'legacy' characters and to any major new characters introduced in the film - and the rationale for choosing to create a soft reboot instead of a standard sequel, prequel or 'hard' reboot. A key aspect of this section of the dissertation will be a discussion of the deliberate employment of various forms of nostalgia in soft reboots in an attempt to easily generate goodwill with fans of the previous entries in a franchise. Another subsection within this chapter will focus more heavily on soft reboots which erase films or key events from a franchise's timeline, rendering them non-canon. A particular point of discussion in this section is that the films that are omitted from canon or retconned are often the less well received films from a franchise: *Superman Returns* ignores the often-derided *Superman III* (Lester, 1983) and *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (Furie, 1987); *Terminator Genisys* and *Terminator: Dark Fate*, though separate soft reboots, both opted to render all *Terminator* films non-canon aside from the original two films. Furthermore, an examination of the decisions made regarding the canonicity of previous films and other media in the franchise will be conducted with reference to the concept of honouring the legacy of the franchise: how can one honour a legacy by ignoring or erasing huge parts of it?

The third chapter of this dissertation will see my focus shift to the promotion of soft reboots. By examining the promotional material of these films, we can

better understand how the films are presented or 'pitched' to audiences, whether they are returning fans of the franchise or potential new fans. When considering that the soft reboot, particularly those that engage with the nostalgia of the franchise, displays 'liminal newness' - simultaneously new and old, familiar and alien - the way these films are advertised and promoted is interesting as it can provide an insight into the appeal of so-called 'nostalgia-bait' films. This will be explored in more detail in a subsection focusing on soft reboot trailers and their importance in generating interest in the new film. Their role in creating fan expectations in the new franchise entry will also be examined, specifically relating to the inclusion of characters or things audiences will remember from prior films; in essence, they give audiences a sense of the new film's 'proximity' to others in the franchise. Also considered as promotional material in this section will be unofficial 'promotional material'; namely, trailer-reaction videos and breakdowns. Soft reboots, as previously discussed, attempt to appeal to pre-existing fans of the franchise. In the digital age, reaction videos to a wide variety of content have become increasingly popular. Here, I will argue that this type of video can be considered a form of promotion due their popularity and the nature of viral hype.

Chapter four will feature textual analysis of soft reboots, examining the films themselves in detail. This chapter will consider the textual features of a variety of soft reboots, explaining commonalities between texts that are part of this film mode whilst also identifying how nostalgic soft reboots appeal to the audience's nostalgic longings (following on from the work carried out in this area in the production and promotion chapters).

Chapter five, the last of the larger sections of this dissertation, will focus on the reception of soft reboots. Attention will be given both to the reception of these films by critics as well as the reception from fans, though the latter will receive a greater amount of focus due to the fact that soft reboots often market themselves (as will be discussed in the promotion chapter) as 'for the fans.' By examining sources such as professional film reviews, YouTube reviews by fan-creators and discussions on forums, I will look for common areas of praise and complaint regarding soft reboots, allowing me to better evaluate the efficacy of the filmmakers' attempts to create a future for their franchise. Furthermore, this

investigative process should be more impactful due to the preceding chapters and the use of a common core of twelve films that are examined. Perceived issues with the films in question, for example, should be easier to understand (or dismiss) for readers based on the evidence presented in the preceding chapters as the films will have been examined throughout their life cycle, from the production to the reception stage.

Finally, the dissertation will be drawn to a close with a concluding section. Here, I will draw conclusions about how soft reboots operate, both textually and industrially, whilst also discussing ways in which this research could be expanded on in the future. The overall impact and importance of nostalgia will also be examined, identifying if appeals to the audience's feelings of nostalgia are key to the success of a soft reboot.

## ***Chapter One: Literature Review***

This literature review will examine the existing discourse and theories relating to a variety of types of film reboot, whilst also providing greater elaboration on the key terms used throughout this dissertation and their definitions. I will also seek to elucidate the key distinctions between a film remake and a film reboot; this is often a source of confusion and point of contention, as the differences between the two are not always immediately clear and this can result in their meanings being mistakenly conflated. Moreover, this literature review should elucidate why a clear distinction must be made between soft and hard reboots, both in definition and in analysis.

The reasons why a franchise might be rebooted will also be discussed, as understanding the motivation behind such a decision can potentially be illuminating when discussing the reboot in an industrial context. Furthermore, this literature review will examine the current and historical discourses surrounding the tension between familiarity and newness in film reboots; the way this operates in the soft reboot, a less 'extreme' form of franchise revitalisation compared to the hard reboot, will also be discussed. The narrative schema of a soft reboot can often be more complex than that of a hard reboot, largely as a result of the conscious inclusion and abandonment of aspects of the previous continuity: viewers are more acutely aware that they are watching a constructed product as they are forced to consider which elements of previous films in the franchise (or which films in their entirety) are now irrelevant and which have maintained their status as canon.

Following on from this consideration of the more active role of the viewer, another subject of analysis and scrutiny will be the concept of nostalgia in reboots, particularly in conjunction with theories of fan ownership and notions of fan service. As film reboots are primarily applied to a popular or previously popular franchise (one would assume that a film series has been successful to warrant the creation of multiple films in its franchise), the reboot often seeks a greater level of viewer engagement - particularly from dedicated fans of the franchise - and rewards them with additional pleasures in the diegesis.



Furthermore, this section will also explore theories relating to memory such as the concept of vertical and horizontal memory.

Through a thorough analysis of the key literature relating to reboots, this chapter should make clear the current gaps in the academic discourse surrounding reboots, justifying this research's necessity as an evolution of what we consider a reboot to be and our knowledge of how it operates, both textually and industrially. Just as the film industry is constantly evolving, so too must the academic framework through which we analyse the medium.

Before approaching the subject of the soft reboot, it is important to understand what a 'traditional' film reboot - what I will refer to as a 'hard' reboot throughout this dissertation in order to differentiate it from the soft reboot - has historically be viewed and defined as by film scholars, as well as what differentiates it from a remake. William Proctor distinguishes a reboot from a remake primarily through its franchisability and its intention of restarting a franchise:

A film remake is a singular text bound within a self-contained narrative schema; whereas a reboot attempts to forge a series of films, to begin a franchise anew from the ashes of an old or failed property. In other words, a remake is a reinterpretation of one film; a reboot 're-starts' a series of films that seek to disavow or render inert its predecessor's validity. (Proctor, 2012: 4)

Simply put, a single film cannot be rebooted. A reboot, in Proctor's definition, must refer to a series of films being restarted from a new point of origin. Though a restrictive definition when we consider the emergence of the soft reboot, Proctor nevertheless provides a clear definition by which viewers can determine which category a new film falls under, as the term 'reboot' has flirted with becoming a mere synonym for a remake.

Though Proctor's definition is useful in its ability to provide a framework to distinguish between a reboot and a remake, it simultaneously complicates our understanding of what constitutes a film reboot in a modern context. The strict stipulation that a reboot must wipe the slate clean, restarting the series' canon

from a new point of origin, is overly restrictive when considering the rapid evolution of the film reboot over the past decade. Although films now considered soft reboots existed prior to Proctor's definition being composed - *Superman Returns* and *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*, for example - the number of films of this type has increased dramatically since the 2015 successes of *Creed*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Jurassic World*. Though a hard reboot undoubtedly seeks to 'render inert its predecessor's validity', there are several subcategories of film reboots that eschew this. One of these is the legacyquel, a type of soft reboot which aims for 'generational renewal' (Loock, 2020: 177) through directly engaging with the original films in a franchise in order to transfer their popularity to new films:

Based on the assumption that viewers will identify with characters like them, legacyquels have sought to lure older, infrequent moviegoers and more dedicated fans simultaneously with narratives in which an older generation of actors, reprising their "legacy" characters, "pass the torch" to a younger set. (Fleury, Hartzheim and Mamber, 2019: 32-33)

In this way, the legacyquel tries to offer a sort of officially sanctioned replacement to fan favourite characters and films, ultimately seeking to create a set of circumstances through which a new studio creation - both narratively and from a fan perspective - is deemed a 'worthy' successor to the legacy of a beloved older film. The legacyquel revels in its links to previous films; *Jurassic World* features the return of scientist Dr. Henry Wu from the original *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), as well as numerous easter eggs for fans such as a book written by Jeff Goldblum's Ian Malcom and the appearance of the jeeps used in the original film. Media outlets have gone so far as to compile these references to previous films into lists. Similarly, numerous YouTube channels created videos breaking down these easter eggs and references to the previous films.

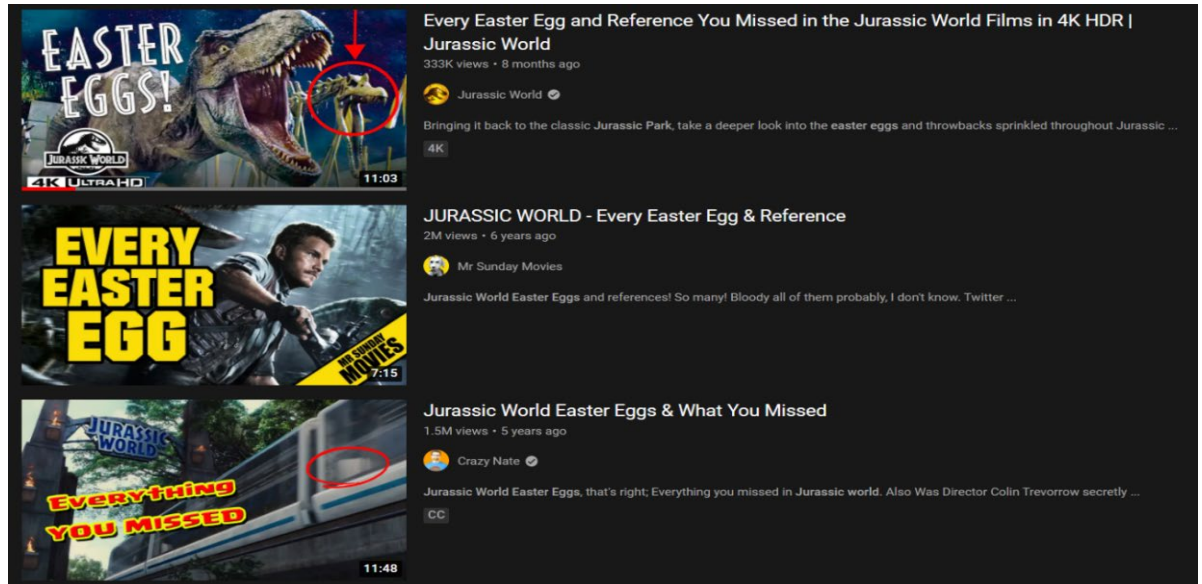


Figure 1-1 A collection of YouTube videos detailing the 'easter eggs' to previous Jurassic Park films in Jurassic World

By actively encouraging fans to seek out the various references made by the soft reboot to the original films, *Jurassic World* directly contradicts any notion of trying to disavow the validity of the previous films in the series. Instead, it builds on and around what came before - literally, in the film itself. The heroes of the film at one point find themselves trying to flee from the genetically engineered *Indominus rex*. Travelling through the jungle, they find the ruins of the original Jurassic Park from Spielberg's original film; Jurassic World, both within the film and in terms of production, was built on Jurassic Park, and the film does not avoid its status as a continuation of that legacy. Rather, it embraces it. The successful reboot of the *Jurassic* franchise has ultimately culminated in the return of the original three *Jurassic Park* protagonists: Alan Grant (Sam Neill), Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) and Ian Malcolm all appear in the second *Jurassic World* sequel, *Jurassic World Dominion* (Trevorrow, 2022), though Malcom (Goldblum) had previously returned in *Jurassic World Fallen: Kingdom* (Trevorrow, 2018).



Figure 1-2 The *Jurassic Park* heroes share the screen with *Jurassic World*'s new generation of stars

The so-called 'nostalgia reboot' similarly embraces the history of its associated franchise. Described as 'a serial form that restarts a franchise at the same time that it preserves and celebrates its past' (Herbert and Verevis, 2020: 13), the nostalgia reboot often features the inclusion of characters and plotlines from older films in the series; *Creed* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, for example, see the return of old heroes Rocky Balboa and the likes of Han Solo, Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker, respectively. Moreover, many of the new generation of stars are tied to previous lead characters through familial ties, giving the audience an in-built emotional connection to characters they introduced to for the first time: Michael B. Jordan's Adonis Creed is the illegitimate son of Apollo Creed, a character whose fan favourite status in the *Rocky* franchise is arguably only dwarfed by Balboa himself; Ben Solo (Kylo Ren), the central antagonist of *The Force Awakens*, is the son of Leia Organa and Han Solo, two key figures both in the Original Trilogy and in *The Force Awakens*. By embracing the franchise's past in this way, both films are immediately able to situate their new characters within the canon of their franchise, forging a connection between these characters and the audience through their relation to beloved characters from the past.

One area in which Proctor's definition remains perennially accurate is in its observation that a reboot 'attempts to forge a series of films.' This applies to hard reboots, soft reboots and all the associated subtypes within the soft reboot

classification. At its core, any film reboot attempts to reinvigorate a series or franchise. However, the definition falls short as a result of Proctor's stance that a reboot cannot adhere to pre-existing canon under any circumstances:

A reboot is not the same as a prequel as it strives to disconnect itself, in a spatio-temporal sense, from the earlier incarnation in a quest for autonomy. Concurrently, a reboot is not a sequel as this would, once again, imply an adherence to continuity. (Proctor, 2012: 5)

This directly contradicts the previously discussed definition of a soft reboot as a soft reboot *always* builds on pre-existing canon. Therefore, the relevance of Proctor's framework to analyse reboots in a modern context is limited due to when it was created. The prevalence of reboots that operate within the narrative confines put in place by previous films in a series was significantly less common during the time that Proctor proposed his definition of the film reboot. Regardless, to proceed with a thorough investigation of a film reboot in today's environment, a more up-to-date definition of the key terminology - one which can reflect the true scope of what a reboot can be - is needed.

Constantine Verevis attempted to offer such a definition, notably writing in 2017, after the explosion in popularity of the soft reboot. He defined a reboot as:

The process of restarting, remaking or re-commercialising a film property or franchise by denying or nullifying earlier iterations in order to "begin again" without any knowledge of those previous works. (Verevis, 2017: 278)

This seems to adopt a broader view of what a reboot can be, particularly through the provision that a reboot can be a simple re-commercialisation of a franchise. However, Verevis' definition lacks the clarity - restrictive though it may be - of Proctor's definition of a film reboot. Where Proctor explicitly states that a reboot 'wipes the slate clean', Verevis does not specify if *all* earlier iterations must be denied or nullified. Though a step towards a definition of a reboot that truly encompasses the soft reboot, this reinforces what has been suggested elsewhere in this dissertation: the characteristics of a soft reboot are distinct enough to warrant a definition for the term that is separate from the

hard reboot. As previously stated, a soft reboot *always* builds on established continuity. Any definition of the term must make this clear; as of yet, the current academic discourse has failed to illustrate this distinction.

Another lens through which reboots can be examined is through their function in an industrial and critical context. Joe Tompkins argues that the reboot can be seen as providing a framework for fans to analyse a film and justify their support of a franchise:

Reboots function as a critical industrial practice...a means of activating and sustaining discourses of aesthetic value and distinction that provide fan-consumers with officially sanctioned interpretive frameworks for legitimating subcultural investments in a given franchise. (Tompkins, 2014: 382)

Tompkins' statement does raise the issue of viewer engagement when watching a reboot. Viewers are often rewarded for their ability to pick up on details, references and 'easter eggs' inserted into a reboot by the filmmakers. Though rarely contributing significantly to the narrative, they provide a 'head turning moment', which Urbanski describes as, 'a scene, snippet of dialogue, or some other cinematic feature that causes audience members to turn to their neighbours and comment quietly.' (Urbanski, 2013: 31) In this way we can view the reboot as a potentially more pleasurable experience for viewers as it rewards them for paying attention to previous films throughout the franchise's history. It can signal or tease a plot development in a new instalment in the franchise, such as the arrival of a new character, or be a mere reference to another small detail in a previous film. The brief appearance of a Marksman-H training remote in *The Force Awakens* likely passed many casual fans of the *Star Wars* franchise by; for the more engaged among the audience, however, a brief nostalgic thrill is provided by seeing the same remote used when Luke Skywalker first trained with a lightsaber in *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* - or, for younger members of the audience, one of the small droids that a class of younglings practiced with in *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (Lucas, 2002). Due to the rich history of a franchise with over four decades of material to pull from, the filmmakers were able to offer a multi-generational nostalgic

pleasure. The journalist Dean Burnett argues for another potential source of the enjoyment audiences derive from this, arguing that part of the pleasure is knowing that not everyone has understood the reference: 'Scarcity and exclusivity is [sic] attractive, so any attempt to make your favourite thing more accessible to the masses effectively devalues it.' (Burnett, 2016)

One of the challenges posed by the film reboot is its seemingly contradictory goals; to provide both a sense of newness (justifying its existence as a separate entity from previous entries in the franchise) and simultaneously to be comfortingly familiar to audiences. The end goal, then, is to formulate a low-risk box-office success that offers the viewer a new experience that nevertheless strongly evokes their memories of past films. Paradoxically, Urbanski argues that 'creating reboots is, in many ways, a process of defamiliarization' (Urbanski, 2013: 17) whilst acknowledging that reboots carry an 'extra narrative burden: not just telling a compelling story but also handling the expectations from canon. (Urbanski, 2013: 17) In this way, audiences become more aware of the constructed nature of text. Narrative expectations are set due to a viewer's memories of films prior to the reboot in question; the new film is then evaluated partially based on its ability (or lack thereof) to meet or exceed these expectations. Yet the goal of the reboot must still be to garner viewer investment in the new narrative schema despite their more critical approach to evaluating the film. Understanding the burden of fan expectations, the reboot could be said to present itself overtly as both a text and construction which 'invites us to care about the storyworld while simultaneously appreciating its construction.' (Mittell, 2006: 35) Reboots can thus be considered transformative for the audience as they alter their role from consumers to consumer-critics.

Reboots also must overcome the challenge of audience apprehension. This is strongly linked to the concept of nostalgia. Due to the often-generational gap between an original film and its reboot, viewers will often experience the former as a child or young adult before then experiencing (with trepidation) the 'new' film as an adult. Cherished memories of the original film are, perhaps irrationally, considered 'at risk' by the new film and the possibility that it could 'ruin' childhood memories: 'there is a general apprehension among audiences

that cinematic remaking will destroy these personal ties to the past' (Loock, 2016: 279)

Another crucial aspect of the discourse surrounding film reboots that must be engaged with is the reasoning for rebooting a franchise at all. There are a multitude of reasons why studios and filmmakers may choose to reboot a franchise, and these reasons vary greatly. Perhaps the most obvious justification for a studio making such a decision is also the simplest: to make money. As previously discussed, entries into film franchises make up the vast majority of the top grossing films of the year in recent years. As Verevis argued, rebooting a franchise can be achieved through the relatively minor process (when considering it from a transformative perspective) of re-commercialising the series. However, the film scholar Peter Gutiérrez provided a comprehensive list of other reasons why a franchise may be rebooted in his 'Rationales for reboots and remakes':

- Update content or context to reflect more contemporary history
- Remain more faithful to the source material
- Leverage a solid premise/story from a film that is (comparatively) little-known by today's audiences
- Exploit enhanced ability to convey spectacle
- Expand narrative scope and/or revise for greater adherence to genre conventions
- Target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation
- Satisfy talent drawn nostalgically to 'classic' work from youth
- Service a massive fan base without extending the existing story continuity of the franchise (Gutiérrez, 2012: 47)

The rationale for undergoing a cinematic revival is, in Gutiérrez's mind, neither wholly artistic nor wholly financial. There are a wide variety of reasons why a studio may choose to reboot a franchise, though much of the rationale is focused on the concepts of expansion and quality control. Many of the listed rationale can also be said to focus on 'newness', whether that be bringing a story to a new audience, allowing a film's source material to make its way more truly to the screen for the first time or simply making use of new technology or filmmaking



techniques to better tell a story. All the rationale, save for the last on the list, also apply to soft reboots. Soft reboots necessitate, in some form, the extension of the existing story continuity. Though liminal canon can allow for this to be avoided - offering a deviation instead of a continuation - common storytelling devices employed in films where liminal canon is present, such as time travel and alternate universes, still offer something markedly different from the original film in their franchise. In this way, they could be said to *expand* the story continuity if not *extending* it.

However, though the literature pertaining to film reboots will undoubtedly be important throughout this dissertation, the concept of nostalgia will also be crucial to understand due to its position as an emotion that filmmakers deliberately seek to capitalise on. Ryan Lizardi describes the audience's modern relationship with nostalgia through the example of the Mirror of Erised from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), a magical object which allows those that gaze into it to see the "deepest, most desperate desire" of their hearts (Rowling, 1997: 214). Lizardi likens this to the modern audience's fixation with reliving the past through media rather than using it to improve the present and future:

The viewer of contemporary media culture has been placed in a similar position, lured by a recent narrative trend that is constructing us as past-focused subjects and has us fixing on a recent past... situating us as viewers face-to-face with our own mirror of narcissistic nostalgic desire. Where we could use the past as an adaptive functional mirror with which we could compare and contrast to our contemporary situation, possibly learning something along the way, the past instead is the same individualized version that transfixes Harry, thereby constructing us as uncritical citizens of our own culture. (Lizardi, 2015: 6)

Perhaps the most nuanced aspect of Lizardi's statement here in reference to the soft reboot is the belief that whilst we have the opportunity to 'learn something along the way' when engaging with our nostalgia, we fail to do this. Considering the soft reboot's dual focus on honouring and engaging with the past whilst

simultaneously building a new future, it could be argued that Lizardi's view is relevant more in the cases of film remakes and hard reboots. As previously discussed, a primary goal of the soft reboot is to reinvigorate or re-commercialise a franchise, setting it up to be profitable in the future by making later sequels.

Lizardi's belief that this trend has turned us into 'uncritical' media consumers is echoed by and expanded on by Jessica Sellin-Blanc, who argues that the nostalgic longing of modern audiences is amplified by the widespread availability of the material we are nostalgic towards:

“In large part, nostalgia is driven by the desire to revisit the past, and with current technologies and syndication, this desire can be easily achieved through *Star Trek* reruns on television, or through various streaming technologies, at the drop of a hat. With the original texts so easily accessible, a healthy, adaptive sense of nostalgia becomes more allusive, with a desired perpetual nostalgia more plausible, wherein the same source text is repeated again and again.” (Sellin-Blanc, 2019: 152)

Sellin-Blanc's view that a 'desired perpetual nostalgia' is more plausible suggests that there is no need for innovation or to create new films in a franchise; the material that audiences *know* they love are available at the press of a button. With this in mind, the soft reboot's similarities to what has come before is understood more easily from a critical standpoint. Creating stories and characters that can be directly linked to well-loved films ensures that the risk of a box office failure, from the perspective of the studio, is reduced.

## ***Chapter Two: Production***

### **2.1 Introduction: Soft Reboots and Nostalgia**

This chapter will focus on the production of soft reboots. Production is arguably the most important aspect of a film's timeline that will be discussed in this dissertation as it directly influences each of the other discussed aspects (promotion, text, and reception). Each of these are informed by key decisions made during the production process. Aspects of the production process which will be discussed include the rationale -as stated by the filmmakers - behind making a soft reboot instead of a traditional hard reboot, choices of key members of the filmmaking team, the development of scripts, the casting process and decisions made regarding the canonicity of previous films in the franchise.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the ways in which nostalgic references manifest themselves in soft reboots, as well as examining nostalgia itself. As detailed in the literature review, nostalgia is a particularly prevalent feeling for modern audiences. Any worthwhile discussion of reboots must address this issue as such films are often crafted with nostalgia in mind; whether the filmmakers wish to avoid or embrace creating so-called 'nostalgia bait' will vary based on several factors. However, soft reboots - with their open embracement of their franchise's history - often deliberately cater to the audience's yearning for the past. In order to elucidate the ways in which this occurs, I have conducted a study of behind-the-scenes material from the twelve core soft reboots mentioned in my introduction. These sources are useful as they represent a broad range of soft reboots, allowing me to investigate how the soft reboot has evolved over time. Furthermore, this will give an insight whether genre has any impact on how soft reboots approach the issue of nostalgia. After this, I will go on to examine the ways in which soft reboots appeal to the audience's feelings of nostalgia in two key areas: the use of legacy characters and the filmmaking techniques.

Focus will then shift to the concept of franchise recalibration. First, I will tackle the subject of erasure, where I will examine both why filmmakers choose to

remove certain films from the canon when making a soft reboot and how this, despite the seemingly contradictory idea of honouring a franchise's legacy by removing parts of it, can act as another form of appealing to nostalgia. Finally, I will analyse the efforts made during the production stage of soft reboots to look to the future of the franchise. This can manifest itself in a variety of ways, though I will primarily examine the concerted efforts to improve diversity in soft reboots compared to the original films in their franchise, the casting of new franchise lead actors and the methods to increase the mainstream appeal of these films. In this way, the chapter will examine how soft reboots honour the franchise's legacy (the past), remove elements of the franchise in order to improve the product being worked on (the present) and aim to create a successful franchise through multiple new entries into the series (the future).

As previously stated, soft reboots often operate as vehicles for nostalgia. However, employing a satisfying level of nostalgia when making a reboot of any sort has often proved to be difficult. A reboot which leans too heavily into its relationship with previous films in the franchise (as the fans perceive it, at least) runs the risk of being labelled a simple reread which offers little progression to the franchise as a whole; at the other end of the spectrum, a reboot which attempts to distance itself from the beloved films that came before it may be criticised for 'disrespecting' or failing to honour the legacy of what has come before.

The standard hard reboot may utilise iconography and characters from the film series it is rebooting; *Ghostbusters: Answer the Call* (Feig, 2016), for example, features various references to *Ghostbusters* (Reitman, 1984), including proton packs, the Slimer ghost, a giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, the classic Ghostbusters logo, and cameos from many members of the original cast. The soft reboot, however, always builds on pre-existing material. In many ways this creates opportunities for filmmakers to make more direct links to the original films in a series, perhaps the most common instance of this being the return of beloved characters - or legacy characters - from previous films.

However, the decision to create a soft rather than hard reboot does carry an increased weight of expectations. This is because audiences are aware that the new film takes place within the same canon as the original or originals. Rather

than creating a clean separation between old and new, the soft reboot embraces its connections to what has come before. Though it seems fair to say that all film reboots are burdened by expectations due to their already established fanbases, filmmakers of soft reboots have the added burden of ensuring that they satisfy the nostalgic yearnings of fans whilst simultaneously progressing the franchise's story. As Bob Iger stated when discussing *Star Wars* after Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm, "It's an unbelievable privilege and unbelievable responsibility to take a jewel and treat it in a way that is respectful of its past but brings it into the future." (Iger, in Graser, 2014)

As I will make clear further throughout this dissertation, soft reboots often take advantage of their place within a wider interconnected franchise to make direct references to these films. Filmmakers may choose to do this for a variety of reasons, such as to further the plot of the soft reboot or to bring closure to a plot thread that remained unresolved, however perhaps the most prevalent reason is to provide a nostalgic thrill for the audience. The heightened presence of intertextuality within soft reboots has been noted by audiences and critics alike, even if intertextuality is not specifically named. The video essay artist Nerdwriter1 has discussed the film industry's increased employment of intertextuality, particularly via references to other films in the relevant franchise:

In this new generation of film, more and more the intertextual manifests itself as objects, people or situations specifically meant to trigger an emotional response in the viewer. It's weaponised intertextuality. (Nerdwriter1, 2016: 2:02-2:14,)

Nerdwriter1 gives examples of this in his video which relate to a variety of film modes, including the soft reboot *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, the prequel *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (Jackson, 2014), the comic book adaptation *Watchmen* (Snyder, 2009) and the sequel *Spectre* (Mendes, 2015), which also exists in a hard reboot series. However, I believe that his description of the recent use of intertextuality particularly applies to soft reboots due to their implementation of intertextual features as key aspects of their narratives. Leonard Nimoy's appearance as Spock Prime in 2009's *Star Trek*, for example, is

not a mere cameo: his presence, as I will discuss later, is integral to the film's plot.

Weaponised nostalgia's presence in modern cinema is further emphasised through the soft reboot's use of liminal canon. Liminal canonicity presents a highly flexible, non-committal way for modern film franchises to make intertextual references to older films without having a major impact on the film being made. Films featuring time travel and alternate dimensions make this particularly easy; filmmakers can satisfy the audience's nostalgic love for older films or material whilst ensuring that a divide remains between the old and new. *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (Watts, 2021) features a storyline involving a multiverse - an element which has been explored in numerous recent Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) outings - and uses this to incorporate characters from previous iterations of the Spider-Man character. *Spider-Man* (Raimi, 2002), *Spider-Man 2* (Raimi, 2004), *Spider-Man 3* (Raimi, 2007), *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Webb, 2011) and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (Webb, 2014) all see representation in Disney's blockbuster film. This is seen both in the form of key villains from the films and, majorly, the return of previous Spider-men Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield, returning to their portrayals of the character rather than simply playing variations of Peter Parker from other universes; they are, in fact, the same characters that audiences had grown to love over the course of multiple films each. Though not necessarily intended to be a soft reboot of the Raimi and Webb-verses, the enormous success of *No Way Home* had the effect which soft reboots aim for: since its release, prominent online fan campaigns seeking a third *Amazing Spider-Man* film have gained significant traction, leading to numerous articles being written about the idea and Andrew Garfield himself publicly addressing the issue.

Though they expressed that the returning characters would have to serve the story of the MCU's Peter Parker, 'The screenwriters knew the central pull of a multiverse story was nostalgia for the past "Spider-Man" movies.' (Vary, 2021) This highlights the way in which intertextuality informed the text in question (*No Way Home*) to such an extent that it was believed to be the primary appeal of the film. Nostalgia, through intertextuality, has become a dominant force in modern cinema.

By examining the various processes and decisions relating to the production process, we can better understand how the soft reboot deliberately appeals to the audience's feelings of nostalgia for the original films in the soft reboot's franchise. Similarly, analysis of the production stage will serve to elucidate the publicly expressed intentions of the filmmakers, which can often differ from the achieved results. With this in mind, the actual results of their labour - the finished film - will be analysed later in chapter three.

## 2.2 Behind the Curtain: Making-of-Documentaries and Featurettes

To obtain an insight into the expressed intentions of those involved in the creation of soft reboots (including actors, directors, producers and writers), I watched making-of documentaries and behind the scenes featurettes for twelve different soft reboots. The relevant documentaries and featurettes appeared on the DVDs and Blu-rays of the corresponding films, a full list of which can be found in the bibliography. The list of films, as detailed in the introduction, was as follows:

- *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*
- *Terminator: Dark Fate*
- *Terminator Genisys*
- *Jurassic World*
- *Superman Returns*
- *Halloween (2018)*
- *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*
- *Star Trek (2009)*
- *Mad Max: Fury Road*
- *X-Men: Days of Future Past*
- *Creed*
- *The Suicide Squad*

As the list contains a wide breadth of soft reboots, ranging from early instances of this film mode such as *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* as well as more recent soft reboots such as *Terminator: Dark Fate*, I believe that a worthwhile study

investigation can be conducted. This method gives us an insight into the production process to an extent whilst also allowing audiences to understand the intentions that the filmmakers wish us to believe they had whilst creating the film. Watching a variety of behind-the-scenes documentaries and featurettes allowed me to understand the commonalities more clearly between soft reboots in terms of their production. Such a study made it easier to codify the key features of the soft reboot when considering it as a separate film mode, particularly with reference to intertextuality and nostalgia.

Before presenting my findings, however, a discussion of the value of this information seems pertinent. Nicola Jean Evans has addressed the issue of authenticity in the making-of-documentary, where she uses Joshua Meyrowitz's concepts of the 'front stage' and the 'backstage' (Meyrowitz, 1985). Meyrowitz describes the front stage as the area where a performance is carried out, whilst the backstage allows performers to either 'prepare for the role or relax from its requirements.' (Evans, 2010: 594) However, Evans argued that this is limited as it fails to distinguish, in the case of behind-the-scenes content, what is legitimately off-the-cuff and what is a prepared discussion of what occurs during the filmmaking process. To remedy this, Evans proposed the term 'pseudo backstage', with the following explanation of the new term:

the artful presentation of information that because it appears to come from behind the scenes, because it appears uncalculated, has in the eyes of the audience the invaluable attributes of honesty and sincerity. (Evans, 2010: 595)

Thus, whilst behind-the-scenes material may give the illusion of presenting a raw, real look at the filmmaking process, Evans contends that much of this material fits into the 'pseudo backstage' category. This is important to consider when analysing making-of-documentaries and featurettes in the forthcoming sections of this chapter, as the production of this material often serves the purposes of the filmmakers or the studio regarding controlling the narrative of the film's production. As Evans stated, 'If audiences go looking for the real, the authentic truth behind the scenes, studios are keen to determine what truth they find.' (Evans, 2010: 596-97) The making-of-documentary's (MOD) limited



insight into the ‘truth’ of a film’s production has resulted in Evans drawing comparisons between it and an electronic press kit (EPK), highlighting its use as promotional material rather than a true insight into the production process:

‘The dominant pattern of MODs on DVD is to generally operate within the discursive constraints of EPKs, a reflection perhaps of the wider tendency of the industry to focus on the marketing potential of the medium.’ (Hight, 2005: 7)

Though this does not mean that studying this material is not worthwhile, it must be considered in order to ensure that the contents of the material are accepted as an objective, accurate portrayal of the production process.

### 2.2.1 The Findings

Perhaps the most commonly expressed goal from the filmmakers of soft reboots in the behind-the-scenes documentaries viewed was a desire to “return a franchise to its roots” in terms of the filmmaking. The makers of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Halloween* all clearly stated this goal during the documentaries in question: the makers of *Fury Road* stated that they wanted to bring the kinetic energy of *Max Mad* (Miller, 1979) and *Mad Max 2* (Miller, 1981) back on-screen for *Fury Road*; Colin Trevorrow, the director of *Jurassic World* (as well as its two sequels) explicitly argued that the film must feature a working animatronic dinosaur as that was “what the series was built on”; *Halloween* director David Gordon-Green aimed to approach the new film stylistically in a way that would honour John Carpenter’s original whilst also re-engineering it and putting a new twist on it. A strong sense of reverence for the original film in the franchise was conveyed, arguably intimating that later films in the franchise had deviated from the ‘right way’ of doing things.

An idea which could be said to be similar was the belief that soft reboots can bring the story of their franchise more in-line with its original conception, positioning soft reboots publicly as a sort of franchise recalibration. This was the belief of Linda Hamilton regarding *Terminator: Dark Fate*, as she viewed the film as continuing the ‘true’ story started in *The Terminator*. Similarly, Jamie Lee Curtis responded to a question of whether those involved in *Halloween H20*:

*20 Years Later* were 'selling out' in any way, instead arguing that the film was "very true to the original movie" and more like it than any other film in the franchise.

Displaying similar reverence for what had come before, many documentaries highlighted the importance the filmmakers placed on returning legacy characters and iconic actors from the franchise. *Terminator Genisys* star Emilia Clarke (playing Sarah Connor) stated that you cannot make a *Terminator* film without series icon Arnold Schwarzenegger, a sentiment echoed by James Cameron in behind-the-scenes content for *Terminator: Dark Fate*. *Dark Fate* director Tim Miller also expressed his belief that the return of Linda Hamilton (the original Sarah Connor) to the franchise for the first time since *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Cameron, 1991) was the "biggest thing by far" for fans of the film, whilst also stating that the filmmakers never imagined that they would want to create a Sarah Connor not played by Linda Hamilton. These sentiments highlight the importance of legacy characters and actors to the franchise, as the makers of multiple soft reboots have suggested that the franchise continuing without them would be impossible. Somewhat similarly, though unrelated to legacy characters, *Superman Returns* director Bryan Singer stated that he did not believe that a movie like *Superman Returns* could be made without the blessing of *Superman* director Richard Donner. This seems to place Donner in a role as the 'keeper' of the franchise rather than either Christopher Reeve or Gene Hackman, the two key actors from the original four films.

Another aspect that was stressed in a number of behind-the-scenes material was the weight of the responsibility on the filmmakers and actors. Kathleen Kennedy, a producer of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, expressed this sentiment despite her over three decades of experience as a film producer at the time. Daisy Ridley (Rey), Gwendoline Christie (Captain Phasma) and Adam Driver (Kylo Ren/Ben Solo) all stated that they felt unprepared for their roles, whilst the film's director also highlighted how daunting the prospect of directing a new *Star Wars* film was.

However, behind-the-scenes material did not simply focus on displaying the respect the filmmakers had for the films that preceded the soft reboots they

were working on. Instead, time was also devoted to elucidating that the new films were, in fact, new, and would take their franchises forward and reinvigorate them with new storylines, characters, actors and filmmaking methods. J.J. Abrams, for example, stated outright in behind-the-scenes content for *Star Trek* that he aimed to evolve the filmmaking of the traditional *Star Trek* style and instead make the new soft reboot more akin to *Star Wars*, increasing the action in the film in order to appeal to a wider audience. Many behind-the-scenes documentaries also placed great emphasis on the concept of legacy characters and actors ‘passing the torch’ to the new stars of the franchise, whether they be new characters such as Rey and Daniella Ramos (Natalia Reyes of *Dark Fate*) or new actors playing familiar favourites such as Tom Hardy succeeding Mel Gibson as Max Rockatansky and Chris Pine replacing William Shatner as Captain James Kirk. Loock’s concept of generational renewal applies here to the cast of the film rather than simply to the audience targeted.

Another way through which the behind-the-scenes features highlighted the soft reboot’s focus on the future as well as the past was the discussions of performance. Though the importance of legacy characters to those involved in these films was clear to see, many of the new actors playing legacy characters made clear that they were not trying to imitate the original portrayal of their character: Jai Courtney, *Terminator Genisys*’ new Kyle Reese, stated that he did not place much emphasis on trying to draw from the performance of Michael Biehn, *Terminator*’s original Reese; though Leonard was said to have a “guiding role” over the new Spock of the *Star Trek* soft reboot (Zachary Quinto), other stars such as Chris Pine (James Kirk) and Karl Urban (Leonard “Bones” McCoy) made clear in a featurette focusing on the casting of the film that they did not want to imitate the performances of William Shatner and DeForest Kelley, respectively. Rather, they aimed to “capture the spirit of the characters” whilst still bringing their own performance to the fore. This artistic choice is particularly notable in the case of Chris Pine, whose decision to forgo the distinctive, pause-filled cadence of William Shatner makes his version of Captain Kirk feel original despite the film’s clear links to the existing *Star Trek* continuity. These statements from the actors elucidate that appealing to the audience’s feelings of nostalgia is not the central concern of all of those involved in the making of a soft reboot. Instead, the aim of ‘capturing the spirit’

of the original performance highlights the dual nature of the soft reboot as a text which both honours the past (through the presence of a legacy character that is familiar to the audience) whilst also creating a sustainable future for the franchise. As previously stated throughout this dissertation, a soft reboot aims to revitalise a franchise rather than to simply create a single new film. The franchise's future and past are both of considerable importance.

A final major issue of note in the documentaries for many of the more recent soft reboots was their focus on including a more diverse cast. As stated previously in this dissertation's literature review, one of the 'Rationales for reboots and remakes' as discussed by Peter Gutiérrez was to 'target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation.' *The Force Awakens*, *Halloween* and *Dark Fate* all stressed the positive steps taken for their franchises in terms of representation: *The Force Awakens* featured *Star Wars*' first female lead in a film, whilst *Halloween* and *Dark Fate* both starred a trio of women, notably taking a more active role than they had done in the films in which they were introduced; both Laurie Strode and Sarah Connor evolved targets fiercely prepared survivors, as made clear in their respective behind-the-scenes material.

To summarise, the behind-the-scenes material of this sample of soft reboots has revealed two key ways in which I would argue that soft reboots appeal to the nostalgia of the audience: by bringing back legacy characters and actors from the past and by utilising filmmaking techniques in keeping with the methods of the original films in the franchise, particularly in instances where these methods were celebrated aspects of the film, such as in the cases of *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park*. Other issues that were given specific attention in the behind-the-scenes material were the sense of responsibility felt by those involved in making the film (one could argue this was emphasised in order to reassure fans that those involved in a franchise they care about are also fans), the belief that the soft reboot would 'get the franchise back on track', as well as more forward-looking concepts such as passing the torch to new stars and modernising the franchise in terms of the diversity of its cast.

Now that I have presented my findings from this study of the behind-the-scenes material of soft reboots, later in this chapter I will go on to examine how soft reboots operate with reference to the various key points discussed above. This includes how soft reboots appeal to the audience's sense of nostalgia through legacy characters and the filmmaking techniques utilised as well as the use of erasure to simplify a franchise's canon. The ways in which the soft reboot looks to the future of the franchise, such as through generational renewal - often displayed through new, young actors chosen to lead the franchise - and the improved diversity in the cast will also be examined.

### 2.3 Legacy Characters and Actors

Legacy characters are the most recognisable names from a film franchise, sometimes becoming arguably as popular as the franchise they originate from itself. The likes of Luke Skywalker, Michael Myers and Arnold Schwarzenegger's T-800 Terminator are among the most iconic figures in all of pop culture. Their presence in a film can be seen by fans as legitimising to that film, making it a 'true' entry in the franchise. This often extends to the actors most associated with the roles, as the love from fans is directed towards those who play the role rather than simply the character themselves. As franchises are rebooted, a common anxiety amongst the fans of that franchise is that these actors and characters will be replaced, supplanted by the choices of a studio seeking to stamp its mark on the franchise, allowing the audience to know that this is *their* take on the franchise.

Film scholars have identified the concerns held by fans of a popular franchise, particularly when a reboot or adaptation is on the horizon. As argued by Jameson, concerns that studios will make a 'cash grab' rather than a 'true' addition to the franchise are common:

This is why geeks are so concerned that the artists making comics and films are also geeks. If so, there is hope, however tenuous and fragile, that someone will be there fighting to keep the artwork geeky, and consistent with the past. Any necessary changes will be respectful, not arbitrary. (Jameson, 2018: 174-175)

The 2009 *Star Trek* soft reboot faced similar concerns. One of the ways in which this sentiment was combatted was through the inclusion of one of the franchise's most iconic characters: Leonard Nimoy's original Spock. As argued by reviewer and longtime *Star Trek* fan Mike Stoklasa, Nimoy gave the film a feeling of authenticity:

Nimoy's presence was necessary to link this film to the original *Star Trek* and to assure the fans that this was indeed really *Star Trek*, and not just some hackneyed imitation or remake. (RedLetterMedia, 2015: 13:55-14:06)

Roberto Orci, co-writer of the film, has stated that Nimoy's presence within the film was crucial, so much so that the film's story hinged on his involvement: "There was never a plan B for me. Maybe Paramount had a plan B, but for me and Alex, it had to be Nimoy or bust." (Orci, in Pascale, 2019) Through this statement, as well as the preceding argument by Stoklasa, we can see how legacy characters can evolve past serving solely as a nostalgic thrill for audiences and instead become an integral part of a new story, bridging a generational divide through their status as a widely recognised figure. Sellin-Blanc's argument that nostalgia makes audiences wish to see the same material "repeated again and again" can also be recognised as carrying weight here, as though Spock Prime's presence in the Kelvin timeline does not mean that the classic adventures of the Starship Enterprise will be repeated in the new timeline of the films - the soft reboot specifically mentions that the opposite of this is true - his presence in the film does reassure audiences that the new film does not pose a threat to their fond memories for the previous *Star Trek* timeline. That timeline has not been erased, meaning that the new iterations of Kirk, Spock and the rest of the crew have not replaced the likes of Shatner and Nimoy; rather, they are simply alternate versions of the beloved characters. The audience will still be able to experience the classic television show, the slightly altered younger iterations of the characters and the various spin-offs featuring the likes of Captain Picard (a character still situated in the Prime timeline, whose own story was continued even after the debut of the Kelvin timeline).

Legacy characters can also change the trajectory of a film in terms of its financial backing and profitability, as seen in the case of *Halloween H20: 20*

*Years Later*. On the documentary *Halloween H20: Blood Is Thicker Than Water - The Making of Halloween H20*, the film's writer Robert Zappia detailed how the original plan for the film was to create a direct to video film. However, plans soon changed after the star of the original *Halloween* and its sequel, Jamie Lee Curtis, was convinced to appear in another film in the franchise. Though the creators of *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later* did not outright refuse to make the film without Jamie Lee Curtis' involvement, her agreement to join the production changed things drastically. What was originally envisioned to be a relatively low budget direct to video film became a \$17 million theatrical release after Curtis' return was secured. This highlights how the studio was able to bank on the marketability of a story revolving around the return of the series' long-absent heroine, who has stated that she was interested in the film in part due to its release coming twenty years after the original *Halloween*. In this way, we can see both the importance of legacy characters to the success of a franchise as well as the power of legacy as a concept, as celebrating the legacy of *Halloween* was clearly important to Curtis. The film can be seen as a multi-million-dollar celebration of John Carpenter's original, styling itself through its name intrinsically linked to the 1978 film.

However, legacy characters, though appealing to fans, can be harmful to the long-term sustainability of the franchise they appear in. Despite their often immense popularity and worldwide recognition, film writers have acknowledged the challenges they face when incorporating these characters into the story as they can divert attention away from the new faces that the film is trying to introduce. The original writer of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* made such a statement when discussing his difficulties with the returning character of Luke Skywalker: "It just felt like every time Luke came in and entered the movie, he just took it over...Suddenly you didn't care about your main character anymore." (Arndt, in Breznican, 2015) Though a large appeal of *The Force Awakens* for audiences would undoubtedly have been the prospect of the lead trio from the original *Star Wars* trilogy, Arndt here highlights how their presence made it difficult to establish Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac and Adam Driver as the new faces of the franchise; over thirty years of anticipation and fondness for the legacy characters featured in the film lead to a major issue with upstaging the new cast. *Spider-Man: No Way Home*'s screenwriters faced a similar issue

during the production stage, as Chris McKenna explained when discussing the characters who ultimately did not make their way into the film:

How do we tell not only a story with all these awesome villains that we know we want to bring into this movie, the classic ones, but also how do we make this still a Tom Holland/Peter Parker story so that he's not completely overshadowed? (McKenna, in Taylor, 2022)

As previously stated, soft reboots must look to the future whilst still honouring the past and making the various intertextual references that this dissertation has examined thus far. Though not addressed in many making-of-documentaries, the *Star Trek* filmmakers noted a similar issue when they attempted to incorporate William Shatner's Captain Kirk into their soft reboot of the series, stating that the presence of both him and the original Spock diverted attention away from the new cast of the film. The immense popularity of legacy characters and actors poses the risk of making the new characters (and their respective actors) from reaching the same level of mythic hero status, ultimately becoming iconic characters for a new generation of filmgoers.

## 2.4 Nostalgia and Technique

The audience's nostalgia can also be played on through the technical side of a soft reboot. Utilising similar filming methods, camera work or locations can help to ensure that the soft reboot captures the 'feel' of the original films. When making *The Force Awakens*, director J.J. Abrams expressed a strong desire to move away from the green screen, blue screen and CGI dominated methods of the *Star Wars* prequels. Instead, he aimed to return to the franchise's roots:

J.J.'s mandate from day one was authenticity and being as true to the original trilogy as possible. And he felt the prequels were flawed by the fact that they had every [CG] tool known to mankind and used everything at their disposal...I think J.J. wanted to reconnect with how the original films were made. (Gilford, quoted in Desowitz, 2015)

George Lucas' reliance on computer generated imagery (CGI) as well as green and blue screens during the making of the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy has been



well documented, with the films often being criticised for their lack of real sets and actors. Instead, the actors were often placed on a set with minimal real objects and were surrounded by green screens. This was perhaps best described by Obi-Wan Kenobi actor Ewan McGregor, who detailed his struggles during the final scene in *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) on an episode of *The Jonathan Ross Show* in 2021. When Obi-Wan is delivering the newborn Luke Skywalker to his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, McGregor was supposed to dismount an Eopie (a *Star Wars* creature somewhat resembling a camel) and deliver Luke to his Aunt and Uncle, after which the newly formed family would gaze at the twin suns of Tatooine. According to McGregor, the Eopie was represented by a small green box for him to sit on whilst holding a plastic baby. Due to the absence of a gimbal, he was had to mimic the movements of someone riding an imaginary creature. After handing the baby off to the other actors, he heard Lucas directing them to “look at the moons” whilst everyone looked around in the confusion due to nobody knowing where they were supposed to be located as the majority of the set was surrounded by green screens. (McGregor, *The Jonathan Ross Show*, 2021)

Though described in a comedic way, McGregor’s story clearly highlights the difficulties faced by the actors, particularly pertaining to their performances. A lack of real objects and people to react to and play off gave the actors little to work with. *The Force Awakens* attempted to avoid this mistake by filming on location where possible and creating a wide variety of props, costumes and physical sets to give the actors something tangible to work with as often as possible, with the aim of making the film feel “just how real you knew and felt *Star Wars* was when you first saw *A New Hope*.” (Abrams, 2015)



Fig 2-1 Daisy Ridley on location in Abu Dhabi to represent the desert planet of Jakku

Tangibility and realism have proven to be a goal of numerous soft reboots, highlighting the way in which nostalgia relates to far more than simply characters and storylines. Though filmmaking techniques continue to evolve, increasing the opportunities to dazzle audiences with CGI, embracing this wholeheartedly would be at odds with the tenets of the soft reboot. *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a strong example of a director choosing to continue with a well-loved filmmaking style despite the ‘easier’ alternatives. The *Mad Max* series, at the time of *Fury Road*’s release, had lain dormant for three decades. The proliferation of new filmmaking techniques and technology would have allowed for a less labour-intensive production, with Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) able to swell the number of vehicles used in the film’s extensive chase scenes and special effects allowing for the more dangerous stunts in the film to be handled digitally.



**Fig 2-2** The ‘Polecats’ of *Mad Max: Fury Road* attack the War Rig driven by the central characters

However, director George Miller was committed to maintaining the same level of authenticity as the original *Mad Max* trilogy, opting to make as much of the film as real as possible in terms of the stunts and effects. During the various behind-the-scenes featurettes, Miller and his team revealed that around one hundred and fifty vehicles were created for the film and that “around 90%” of what audiences see in the film is real. Elaborate sequences such as the attack of the Polecats, a group of Immortan Joe’s warriors who swing on large poles to grab Max and the other heroes from their vehicle, were practiced extensively and carried out for real. As in the earlier films, anything that could be carried out practically was done so, as Miller strived for a raw sense of realism within the frame. This was perhaps best exemplified through Miller’s desire to have a large explosion as a key set piece in the film. Rather than enhance the size of an explosion through CGI, the desired effect was achieved by blowing up 1360 litres of petrol. As the vehicle exploding was located in the middle of a large chase scene, the other vehicles and characters were then composited into the frame later.



**Fig 2-3** The infamous ‘cannonball stunt’ of *Mad Max 2* which saw a stuntman rotate numerous times before injuring himself

As with legacy characters, the use of filmmaking techniques similar to those used in the original films of a franchise can give a soft reboot a feeling of authenticity, reassuring audiences that they are not watching a film simply capitalising on the name value of its franchise. With specific reference to the debate surrounding practical effects and CGI, those that grew up watching many of the film franchises with soft reboots examined in this chapter would have been largely accustomed to practical effects as opposed to CGI due to the cost of CGI in its infancy.

## **2.5 Erasure: Recalibrating A Franchise**

Soft reboots that engage in timeline erasure present filmmakers with an opportunity to ‘fix’ a series’ timeline. The most common way in which this happens is by maintaining the canonicity of the films generally considered ‘good’ or successful in the franchise (by fans, critics or both) and removing the rest from the timeline entirely. Some of the most famous examples of this in practice can be found in the *Halloween* and *Terminator* franchises. As discussed in this dissertation’s introduction, *Halloween* has been soft rebooted twice; the first attempt kept only the first two films as canon whilst the second was a direct sequel to the original film, removing all other films from the new timeline.



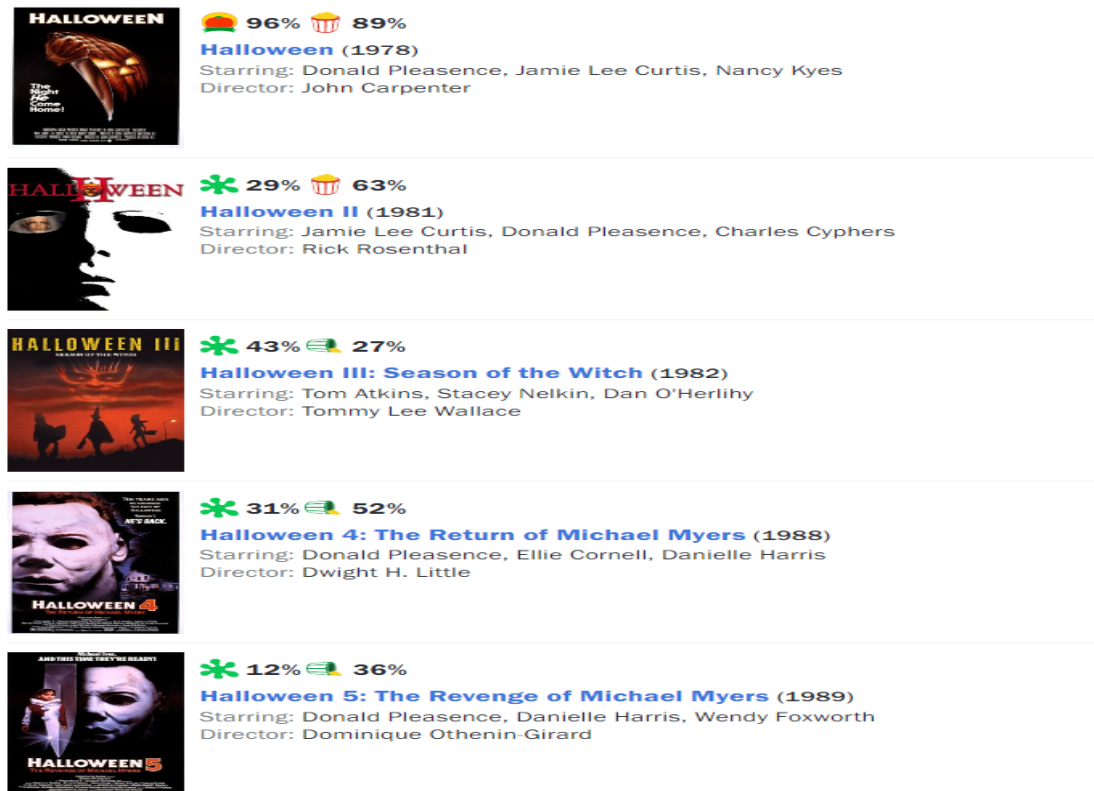


Fig 2-4 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for the first five *Halloween* films



Fig 2-5 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for the remaining *Halloween* films excluding the recent soft reboot as well as the Rob Zombie hard reboots

One of the writers of 2018's *Halloween*, Danny McBride, has stated that he strongly believed that Michael Myers, the iconic villain of the series, should not

be related to Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis): “I was pushing for that removal right off the bat. I just felt like that was an area where he wasn't quite as scary anymore, it seemed too personalized.” (McBride, in Chichizola, 2018) *Halloween 2* introduced the brother and sister relationship between Myers and Strode, which series creator John Carpenter has since admitted he regrets. For McBride, Myers' ability to generate fear in the audience came from his seemingly random acts of violence, a feeling that was diminished after the familial revelation as the audience is not related to Myers; they are not his target. (ibid) Curtis expressed a similar sentiment, stating that what made the original *Halloween* terrifying was that something horrible happened to the victims completely at random. (Curtis, quoted in Konrad, 2018)

Removing the family dynamic between Laurie Strode and Michael Myers brought the series back to its roots, simplifying the canon with two ultimate goals: first, the new film (and subsequent sequels) could appeal to those fans who had only watched or enjoyed the original *Halloween*; secondly, the filmmakers could create, in their minds, a better film as Myers would become a more effective and menacing villain.

When considering the soft reboot with reference to the concept of honouring the legacy of a franchise, the subject of erasure seems to become somewhat contradictory: how can filmmakers respect and honour a franchise's history by removing large swathes of it? Though films often considered as the 'bad' entries in a franchise - *Superman III*, *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (Furie, 1987) and *Halloween 4-6*, for example - certainly lack the critical and commercial success of their predecessors, they are not entirely without their fans. Moreover, filmmakers have also removed successful and well-received films from canon in order to accommodate soft reboots; *Terminator Genisys*, despite being the second highest-grossing film in the franchise, was scrapped from the *Terminator* canon almost immediately in order to give *Terminator: Dark Fate* a simpler timeline to work with, following on from the enormously successful *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* rather than the new timeline set up in *Genisys*.

Simplification and franchise recalibration was also a primary concern of *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*. Associate Producer Malek Akkad stated in the

making-of documentary for the film that the studio did consider continuing the story of *Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers*, however the franchise was considered overburdened by unresolved plot threads that the decision was made to simply the franchise's continuity, ultimately scrapping the Thorn trilogy (*Halloween 4-6*) and continuing the story from the much simpler point of *Halloween 2*:

“There was the idea, yes, pick up where *Halloween 6* left off, and there was (sic) ideas to sort of abandon that storyline. Ultimately, what we ended up with at the end of 6 was just so many loose ends that really I don't think anyone had the appetite necessarily to resolve them” (Akkad, 1:48-2:10)

These examples highlight the various ways in which the soft reboot can recalibrate a franchise. Though removing the 'bad' films and forming a new continuity where a soft reboot becomes a direct sequel to what audiences and critics consider a good entry in the franchise is common in the modern film industry, perhaps the most often seen form of recalibration or rejuvenation for a film franchise in previous decades (though it also continues today) was the recasting of the star of the franchise. The most famous example of this, which has been repeated numerous times throughout the franchise's history, can be seen through the various *James Bond* actors. Though the *James Bond* films are linked by a loose continuity, the films were technically part of the same canon until the hard reboot *Casino Royale* (Campbell, 2006). Prior to this, the recasting of Bond generally brought to the films a slightly altered tone whilst still maintaining the series' canon; Roger Moore, for example, has often been thought of as a funnier portrayal of Bond, bringing a more comedic and light tone to the films than the more no-nonsense portrayal seen by Timothy Dalton. Dalton himself pushed to influence the films behind-the-scenes, aiming to bring Bond closer to the grit and realism of the novels (Rubin, 1995). The series was slightly altered throughout its decades-long history to accommodate the skills of the lead actors that took over the franchise, whilst also attempting to adapt to the demands of the contemporary audience.

## 2.6 The Future: Diversity and Generational Renewal

Reinvigorating a film franchise is the primary goal of a soft reboot (or, indeed, any reboot). Creating a reboot should always be considered the starting point for future sequels, and a variety of decisions must be made whilst considering the future health of a franchise. This is perhaps a more difficult process when making a soft reboot, as the filmmakers have decided against starting with a clean slate on which to create a new series of films; rather, they are actively embracing their past whilst finding ways to modernise the series and allow it to fit into an ever-changing film industry.

The casting process represents a stage in production which is arguably the most crucial in the filmmaking process when considering the future of a franchise. Key decisions made regarding the diversity of the cast and the choice of actors to carry the franchise forward in future installments can lead to the soft reboot being criticised for a lack of representation or for failing to set the franchise up for success in the long term. One way in which the casting process was used to attempt to benefit a franchise can be seen in the production of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Director J.J. Abrams “commented at the time of *The Force Awakens*’ release that he had consciously hoped to expand the *Star Wars* audience through casting.” (Golding, 2019: 103)

Golding’s comment was particularly in reference to the director’s attempts to improve the racial and gender diversity of the *Star Wars* franchise, which was previously dominated by Caucasian male leads. *The Force Awakens* opted to go in a new direction, with actress Daisy Ridley cast as the new protagonist of the franchise, supported by the black actor John Boyega and the Latino Oscar Isaac as her key co-stars. In addition to these casting choices, Abrams also attempted to improve diversity in other areas of the film by casting the first live-action female *Star Wars* villain in Gwendoline Christie’s Captain Phasma, as well as bringing in Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong’o as the film’s spiritual guide Maz Kanata.

The concept of generational renewal, whereby a film franchise is ‘passed down’ to a new generation of fans whilst allowing them to share in this pleasure with older generations, can be applied to film franchises in a number of ways. Perhaps the most obvious of these can be seen through the casting process, as new, younger actors are cast as a new generation of heroes for a new generation



of fans. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these new heroes are supported by familiar fan-favourites of the older films in a franchise, creating an emotional attachment for existing fans of the franchise. *Creed*, for example, replaced the aging Sylvester Stallone as the star of the franchise, instead choosing to cast his Rocky Balboa character as a mentor and trainer to a new character, Michael B. Jordan's Adonis Creed. Adonis, despite his familial attachment to the franchise's Apollo Creed - Balboa's rival turned friend - was nevertheless replacing the franchise lead of four decades and six films. However, Stallone himself recognised the necessity of this, stating that Balboa's story was essentially complete and that a new character was needed that could be more relatable to a modern audience:

“How do you communicate with a different generation who is kind of angry, that kind of feels as though, like a lot of the millennials, that opportunity has passed them by? Rocky's kinder, simpler times don't automatically apply to today's standards.” (Stallone, 2015)

In this way, *Creed* acts as a form of generational renewal for the *Rocky* franchise on multiple levels. Though the casting of Michael B. Jordan renewed the franchise by giving it a new lead young enough for filmmakers to make multiple films with him as the cinematic boxing star of a new generation, it also installed a character that could, in the words of Peter Gutiérrez, ‘reflect more contemporary history’ and ‘target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation.’ As stated numerous times throughout this dissertation, the goal of a soft reboot (or any reboot) is to reinvigorate a film franchise, which can be seen through this attempt to make a franchise that was - at the time of *Creed*'s release in 2015 - forty-nine years old, culturally relevant.

This chapter, centred on the production of soft reboots, sought to illustrate the ways in which soft reboots ‘weaponise’ nostalgia. An investigation comprising the behind-the-scenes material of this dissertation's twelve core soft reboots was conducted, the results of which made clear that the makers of the aforementioned films often made decisions regarding returning characters and actors specifically to appease the audience. This goal of appeasement also extended to elements such as filmmaking techniques, particularly regarding a

sense of realism that was either to be retained or reintroduced. Many of the documentaries in question stressed a goal of returning to the 'right' way of doing things, often replicating the filmmaking techniques and styles used in the original film of the franchise. Creating an authentic entry into the franchise, thereby adhering to the wishes of fans to see the franchise respected (and reducing the risk of eliciting declarations from fans that their 'childhood has been ruined'), seemed to be central within the thoughts of the filmmakers in many instances. When considering how a soft reboot is created, this chapter has illustrated the primary concerns of the filmmakers and particularly the ways in which they utilise the audience's feelings of nostalgia.

## ***Chapter Three: Promotion***

### **3.1 The Industry and Film Trailers**

This chapter of the dissertation will progress the study of soft reboots to the promotion stage. Promoting and marketing a film has increasingly developed into an expensive and competitive endeavour for studios. New films are released at a rapid rate, many of which are part of pre-existing franchises due to their perceived level of greater financial security: March 2023, for example, saw key tentpole films *Creed III* (Jordan, 2023), *Scream VI* (Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillet, 2023), *Shazam! Fury of the Gods* (Sandberg, 2023) and *John Wick: Chapter 4* (Stahelski, 2023) all released within a three-week window, each with different distribution and production companies involved. Conventional wisdom dictates that franchise projects, as mentioned before, are generally a safer prospect for studios. In a *Vulture* article by Josef Adalian, an unnamed senior executive working in program development made this case for why television reboots and remakes are popular within the industry, stating that, “You know there’s some base of ratings you’ll be able to get,” (Adalian, 2015) Though this statement was given in reference to television reboots, its relevance to film reboots is difficult to ignore. Television reboots have an in-built, pre-existing audience due to the success of the original show; film reboots often enjoy similar benefits due to the popularity of previous films in their franchise.

However, the rapidity with which new franchise entries are now released has led to the financial security of reboots, remakes and other new franchise entries being challenged more sternly than in the past. The market, undoubtedly, is competitive. Perhaps because of this, studios continue to spend vast amounts of money advertising their films, at times exceeding the production budget of the film itself. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, for example, was estimated to have a marketing budget of at least \$350 million (Lopez, 2015). A film’s promotional material can heavily influence the level of financial success (or failure) it is likely to experience. Poor promotion or excessively high spending on marketing can lead to a poor net performance for a film; in the latter’s instance this can happen even if the film achieves a strong level of gross profit. To increase interest in their product, studios must carefully select which aspects of their

film they wish to show to the public, such as highlighting a humorous tone in the film or revealing a key moment in the story. Essentially, a film's promotion is about studios choosing how they wish their film to be presented to the public - however, as we will discuss in the text and reception chapters of this dissertation, this presentation may later be viewed as disingenuous at times. It should be noted, when referring to 'the public', I refer to the wider moviegoing audience that may or may not be fans of previous entries in a soft reboot's associated franchise.

Promotional material for a film can be wide ranging, including a variety of posters, special features in magazines and television interviews. However, my analysis in this section of the chapter will focus specifically on a variety of film trailers, including both teaser and theatrical trailers. Though different promotional material can be made for different countries - such as unique theatrical trailers and posters meant to target specific regions - this section of the dissertation will examine globally released theatrical and teaser trailers. The key findings of this examination - which will be expanded on in detail - centre around the main aspects of soft reboots that are commonly highlighted throughout their corresponding trailers. First, I analyse the 'nostalgic return', usually in the form of a legacy character from previous films in the franchise. However, this return can also come in the form of iconic vehicles (such as the Millennium Falcon piloted by Han Solo and Chewbacca), objects or locations. Next, I examine the ways in which the future of the franchise is spotlighted. This occurs through three primary facets: changes to a franchise's narrative direction, the erasure of elements or entire films from the franchise's timeline and the introduction of new lead characters and actors. The latter of these elements will also be considered through the lens of on-screen diversity as contemporary films steadily progress to being more representative of modern society.

Theatrical trailers are often the most prominent aspect of a film's promotional campaign. Generally, a theatrical trailer is a one to three-minute-long preview of what audiences can expect to see in an upcoming film. Lisa Kernan, who describes film trailers as the 'cinema of coming attractions', provides a brief summation of what is typically found in a film trailer:

Most trailers have in common a few generic features: some sort of introductory or concluding address to the audience about the film either through titles or narration, selected scenes from the film, montages of quick-cut action scenes, and identifications of significant cast members or characters. (Kernan, 2004: 9)

Kernan stresses that trailers generally focus on ‘attractions’ rather than on the narrative of the film being advertised, stating that, ‘In trailers, images are selected and combined in ways that privilege attracting the spectator’s attention over sustaining narrative coherence. Yet trailers also maintain a relationship to the narrative they promote...’ (Kernan, 2004: 7) This elucidates the challenges of a modern film trailer as it simultaneously must showcase key highlights - the attractions - from the film whilst also giving the audience some indication of the narrative they can expect. Though the cinema of attractions relates to the film image, narrative can itself be a strong promotional tool as audiences may be curious about the direction a story could take. This is particularly true in the cases of reboots, as fans of the original film(s) in the franchise are more likely to have pre-conceived notions about how the narrative *should* proceed.

Though they have a similar purpose, the theatrical trailer is nevertheless distinct from the other type of trailer this section will discuss: the teaser trailer. Carter Moulton’s seminal work on what he calls the ‘announcement trailer’ is useful when analysing this particular paratextual feature of films, though the confusion between the terms ‘teaser’ and ‘announcement’ must first be addressed. Moulton makes clear that certain trailers styled themselves as ‘announcement trailers’ despite possessing the same characteristics as a teaser trailer for a film, as they, ‘typically range from 10 to 60 seconds in length’ and act as ‘teasers for the teaser’ (Moulton, 2018: 434-449). Furthermore, many of the trailers discussed in his article relate to films which had been announced long before the ‘announcement trailer’ debuted, leading to this terminology seeming redundant. The article’s worth when examining the more commonplace teaser trailer, however, is clear as the description of the content being analysed is consistent with that of a teaser trailer. Moulton later discusses the purpose of

an announcement trailer in greater detail, arguing that it simultaneously encourages audiences to speculate about the future and reminisce about the past:

‘Announcement trailers invite audiences to look forward (anticipate, speculate) while also calling on them, through the deployment of iconic images, to look back (nostalgia); moreover, the announcement trailer’s specific reveal-conceal structure also encourages audiences to scan the text for clues (look inward) while making connections to other previous or adjacent texts (look outward).’ (Moulton, 2018: 434-449)

Moulton’s references to nostalgia are, as explained in his article, adopted from Lisa Kernan’s description of, ‘Trailers’ unique temporal status as, paradoxically, nostalgic structures of feeling for a film we haven’t seen yet.’ (Kernan, 2004: 15) Though Moulton’s writing was in reference to announcement trailers in a more general sense, his description is undoubtedly relevant to the study of reboot promotional material; this is particularly true in the case of soft reboots: A teaser trailer for a soft reboot, of course, aims to intrigue audiences (anticipate); it often utilises imagery fans of the film’s franchise would recognise (nostalgia); the fact that it is part of a pre-established franchise can result in its existing fans closely analysing each frame of the teaser (note: this will be explored more in the ‘fan promotion’ section of this chapter) to look for hints about the upcoming film (look inward); finally, as the soft reboot *must* take place within a pre-existing continuity, fans are more likely to ‘scan the text’ for connections between the soft reboot and previous films in the franchise, particularly in order to glean information regarding which films in the franchise remain part of the soft reboot’s continuity (look outward).

Another aspect of trailers which must be considered is the way in which they are able to affect the expectations of the audience relating to a number of factors, ranging from the content of the new film to its actual quality. In their article ‘The Effects of Film Trailers on Shaping Consumer Expectations in the Entertainment Industry—A Qualitative Analysis’, Jorg Finsterwalder, Volker G. Kuppelwieser and Matthew de Villiers explored the power held by film marketers regarding exposing audiences to elements of a film that are found to

have the most influence in moulding their expectations of a variety of aspects of a film, ranging from its quality to its content. They found that it was those that *market* films rather than those that *create* films that primarily influence the expectations of the audience when considering a film's content:

People involved in a film have a direct influence on how consumers form expectations of the quality of the film; however, these individuals do not influence how consumers form expectations of the content of the film. (Finsterwalder, Kuppelwieser and de Villiers, 2012: 591)

This statement, though not necessarily inaccurate when considering the broader film industry, can be seen as less relevant when we discuss films that are part of a franchise, whether that be a reboot, soft reboot or simply a sequel. The return of an actor in a franchise film, as will be discussed later in this chapter, can signify the return of a beloved character. This, in turn, can influence the audience's expectations of the quality or even legitimacy of a film (consider the discussion surrounding Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator Genisys* and *Terminator: Dark Fate* presented in the production chapter). By conducting a thorough analysis of a variety of trailers from soft reboots (detailed below) I will seek to elucidate the necessity of considering soft reboots as an independent film mode that warrants further study due to its unique qualities.

In this chapter I will first present my findings from an examination of soft reboot trailers that I conducted. As was the case in my production chapter, the trailers analysed are for the core twelve films that were discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. These are:

- *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*
- *Terminator: Dark Fate*
- *Terminator Genisys*
- *Jurassic World*
- *Superman Returns*
- *Halloween (2018)*
- *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*

- *Star Trek* (2009)
- *Mad Max: Fury Road*
- *X-Men: Days of Future Past*
- *Creed*
- *The Suicide Squad*

Rather than simply analysing the final trailer of each of these films, I have also opted to examine some of the teaser trailers and earlier trailers released by the studios in addition to the final trailers. Doing this has allowed me to better understand the progression of promotional trailers; the material from the film that is shown in the earlier trailers, as I will expand on throughout this chapter, helps to get audiences interested in seeing more, whilst the final trailer is what aims to get them into a theatre.

My investigation will centre on several factors that are common amongst the trailers of soft reboots. In particular, I will examine the ways in which soft reboot trailers aim to present the film in question as both old and new, simultaneously a pleasurable return to a nostalgic past and a showcase of the franchise's exciting new future.

The purpose of a trailer - of any kind - of a reboot can partially be divined by considering the reasons for rebooting a franchise at all. As explained in the literature review, Peter Gutiérrez's 'Rationales for Reboots and Remakes' lays out a variety of reasons why a franchise may be rebooted. Though many of the reasons are relevant to soft reboots in addition to hard reboots, two of his rationales are particularly noticeable in the presentation of the trailers of soft reboots discussed in this dissertation: 'Target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation' and 'Remain more faithful to the source material.' Combined, these rationales serve to honour a franchise's past whilst also modernising the franchise in order to remain relevant in a modern context. The former of Gutiérrez's rationales can be considered a form of both modernisation and correction; major franchises such as *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (MCU) have been criticised for the prevalence of white, heterosexual male characters leading the franchise. As Kies argues, the importance of on-screen diversity is greater among 'new generation'



fans: ‘For new generation fans, vision toward the future often drives a deep desire to see more diversity in portrayals of race, gender, and sexuality.’ (Kies, 2022: 18) Despite the MCU starting in 2008, the franchise’s first female-led film would not release until 2019: as a result, the entirety of the ‘Infinity Saga’ boasted only *Captain Marvel* (Boden and Fleck, 2019) as a female-led film out of the saga’s twenty-three total films. All three of the aforementioned franchises have gradually seen an increase in on-screen diversity; in the case of *Star Wars*, this will be explored later in this chapter and throughout the rest of this dissertation.

The latter of Gutiérrez’s rationales, though generally considered to refer to novel or comic book adaptations, is relevant here due to the appeal of soft reboots attempting to ‘return to the roots’ of the franchise, a goal spoken about openly by filmmakers (as illustrated in the production chapter) and made clear through both teaser and theatrical trailers. Returning to the roots of the franchise can be achieved, among other methods, narratively, tonally, visually and through various production techniques. A sense of returning to a franchise’s celebrated past - of ‘restoration’ - has often been a key selling point of a soft reboot, with the cast, filmmakers and producers touting a return to a more familiar *feeling* to the new film.

### 3.2 The Nostalgic Return

One of the more common elements found throughout the trailers of soft reboots is that they often either build to or highlight a key nostalgic return or reference. Though this most commonly occurs through the return of a legacy character it can also be seen through a return to a key location from a franchise’s history or the reappearance of a vehicle or object that the audience feels a particularly strong attachment to, as will be illustrated later in this section. The ‘nostalgic return’ is perhaps the most easily identifiable and common ways in which soft reboots create a link between the new film and previous entries in the franchise. Though often done for narrative reasons as well, this link provides an emotional hook for the audience as they should, in most cases, already be invested in the person or thing making its return. Discussing the recent trend of ‘nostalgia bait’ - a term applied to new media that cynically attempts to ‘trick’

the audience into believing it is good because of the presence of characters or concepts from older media - films, *New York Times* writer Tom Philip argued that, 'For an indeterminate, but clearly not immeasurable, swath of moviegoers, there is no marketing campaign more alluring than one that taps into foggy childhood memories.' (Philip, 2019) Though the effects of this will be examined further in the 'reception' chapter, the *power* of these returns is undoubtedly relevant here.

One such example of the nostalgic return can be seen in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, which sees its first trailer end with the onscreen meeting of two different portrayals of Professor Charles Xavier, played by original actor Patrick Stewart and the younger James McAvoy respectively. Stewart's Xavier had not featured in a notable way (aside from two cameos) in the *X-Men* franchise since *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Ratner, 2006), a film that saw him disintegrated by Jean Grey. Stewart's cameo in *The Wolverine* (Mangold, 2013) could be considered as promotional material for *Days of Future Past*, whilst also teasing an upcoming soft reboot to the franchise. He appears in a post-credit scene, approaching Wolverine for help regarding an impending threat to the mutant race. With him is former enemy Magneto (Ian McKellen), who had previously lost his powers in *The Last Stand*. In this way, the scene immediately suggests to the audience that *Days of Future Past* will be a film closer to the first two *X-Men* films. The original stars have returned, and the status quo has partially been restored through Xavier and Magneto both returning to the full power. Moreover, *Days of Future Past* saw the return of *X-Men* (Singer, 2000) and *X2: X-Men United* (Singer, 2003) director Bryan Singer. Despite the less favourably received instalments in the franchise after Singer's exit, fans could be optimistic for the future as the original team behind the *X-Men*, cast and director both, returned to the fold. Nostalgia in instances such as this could be said to have strong links to feelings of security and reassurance, as the familiar elements remind audiences of when the franchise was 'better'.

Other soft reboots re-introduce actors after a far longer gap between appearances, using their return to the franchise as a more heavily pushed marketing device. Though it does not end the trailer, the first trailer released for *Terminator: Dark Fate* undoubtedly highlights the return of Linda Hamilton's

Sarah Connor above the other content in the trailer. As discussed in previous chapters, soft reboots often appeal to the audience's feelings of nostalgia for an element of a particular franchise. The return of Linda Hamilton to the franchise for the first time since *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Cameron, 1991) was the most significant remaining 'weapon' available to the *Terminator* franchise in an era of 'weaponised nostalgia', and her return was promoted heavily across a variety of mediums such as video game crossovers with *Gears 5* (2019), talk show appearances and a large presence throughout the film's trailers. *Dark Fate* director Tim Miller framed Hamilton's return as crucial rather than simply a welcome addition to the cast. Whilst discussing *Dark Fate* on the ReelBlend podcast, Miller discussed his reason for believing that *Dark Fate* succeeded where previous *Terminator* sequels post-*Judgement Day* had failed: "I knew the answer to that: it didn't have Linda Hamilton in it. It is essentially Sarah's story. And even if they focused on Sarah, it's not Linda Hamilton. And that's always gonna feel odd." (Miller, in O'Connell, 2019) Another figurative seal of quality that was touted throughout *Dark Fate's* promotional period was the return of series creator James Cameron as an Executive Producer for the film. Miller stated that one of his conditions for taking on the project was that Cameron returned in some capacity, believing that the return of the franchise's creator would restore faith in the franchise within fans: "That, as a fan, would be some indicator that you weren't gonna fuck it up again." (ibid)



Fig 3-1 James Cameron's return to the *Terminator* franchise as Executive Producer is highlighted in the first trailer for *Terminator: Dark Fate*

Aside from featuring both Arnold Schwarzenegger and the T-1000 model Terminator famously seen in *Terminator 2*, another *Terminator* soft reboot, *Terminator Genisys*, also featured the return of Sarah Connor in its trailers. *Genisys*' trailers make clear to the audience that "the rules have been reset" as the events of the original *Terminator* film are no longer fully canon. Though they are acknowledged rather than entirely erased, what is clear is that a new timeline has been created in which Sarah Connor has become a hardened warrior long before she learned about the Terminators in the original timeline. The dynamic within her relationship with Kyle Reese - as the trailers portray it - has seemingly been inverted, with Sarah guiding Reese through the altered timeline and no longer requiring the protection he was sent there to provide, a change best encapsulated by Sarah using Reese's "come with me if you want to live" line from the first film, originally delivered to a bewildered Sarah Connor.

Though not a nostalgic return in the same way as the other examples discussed in this chapter, *Terminator Genisys*' trailer also brought about the return of a divisive *Terminator* trope: the reveal of a major twist in the trailer. *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* and *Terminator Salvation* (Nichol, 2009) both revealed narrative twists that many would have expected to see hidden until the film's cinematic release. In the case of *Terminator 2* this was the revelation that Arnold Schwarzenegger was portraying a T-800 Terminator protecting John Connor rather than trying to eliminate his mother, whilst the trailer for *Terminator Salvation* gave away the twist that Sam Worthington's character Marcus Wright is a Terminator/human hybrid. James Cameron himself argued for placing the former of these reveals in the film's trailer, believing that it would be the most attention-grabbing element of the sequel to the original *Terminator*:

He's revealed as the Protector at the end of Act One. And I always feel you lead with your strongest story element in selling a movie. I believed our potential audience would be more attracted to seeing how the most badass killing machine could become a hero than they would be to just another kill-fest in the same vein as the first film. Sequels have to strike a delicate balance between honouring the most

loved elements from the first film, but also promising to really shake things up and turn them upside down. (Cameron, in *Empire*, 2022)

Cameron's gambit seemed to pay off, as *Terminator 2* went on to gross over \$520 million compared to the \$78.3 million earned by its predecessor. For *Genisys* to make a similarly huge reveal in its trailer - the twist being that John Connor, future saviour of humanity and enemy of Skynet, had become a Terminator - could have indicated to audiences that the filmmakers believed that this plot point was intriguing enough to get them into a theatre. In this way, the nostalgic return discussed here relates more to the advertising technique itself rather than the plot point itself.



**Fig 3-2 Sarah Connor's return in the first *Terminator: Dark Fate* trailer, the character's first cinematic appearance since *Terminator 2: Judgement Day***

One of the more minimalistic approaches to the nostalgic return in a soft reboot trailer can be seen in the first teaser trailer for 2009's *Star Trek*. Rather than showing any footage for the film itself, the trailer is used merely to suggest a return to the days of the original *Star Trek* series. Viewers are first shown what appears at first to be some sort of aircraft or ship under construction whilst a

voiceover of dialogue from the Apollo 11 moon landing plays. As the camera begins to pan up a new voiceover plays, this time of the classic opening line of the original *Star Trek* series: "Space, the final frontier." However, unlike the original series, the line is spoken by Leonard Nimoy rather than William Shatner. Nimoy's voiceover is accompanied by the original series' theme music swelling and ends on a shot of the name of the ship that the audience has seen under construction: the U.S.S. Enterprise, James T. Kirk's familiar ship. As the ship is under construction, the trailer suggests that the audience will see the beginning of the Enterprise's adventures rather than being dropped into seeing its mission already underway. The familiarity brought about by the Enterprise is somewhat disrupted, however, by the change in narrator from Shatner to Nimoy. In true soft reboot fashion, this shift suggests to the audience that things are simultaneously known and unknown to them; many of the elements (the Enterprise, the crew, the alien species) are familiar, yet they seem to be handled in a way that audiences have not seen before.

These changes are quickly expanded on in the first full trailer for the film. James T. Kirk's father is revealed to have heroically sacrificed himself to save 800 people, a fact that is used by an unknown (at the time) individual to push James to greatness as he is dared to "do better." Though George Kirk is not seen during the 'Prime' timeline, it was established Prime canon that James was raised by both of his parents (and alongside a brother). To fans unfamiliar with *Star Trek*, this new backstory for James offers an immediate emotional hook and an insight into the new version of his character's motivation; *Original Series* fans, by contrast, would recognise this as an immediate deviation from what had previously been established. As a result, the new film becomes less of a traditional prequel and instead covers new ground with a group of characters that are recognisable to the audience. Furthering this sentiment, Eric Bana's character during the same trailer states that, "James T. Kirk was a great man...but that was another life." Much like in the case of *Terminator Genysis*, *Star Trek 2009* is set up as a soft reboot where 'the rules' have changed, creating uncertainty around the fate of the various characters even if they are known to the audience. In this way, the film becomes simultaneously familiar - as many fans will know the characters such as Kirk, Spock and Sulu - yet unfamiliar due to the parallel timeline introduced.



Fig 3-3 The U.S.S Enterprise, the iconic ship of the original *Star Trek* crew, under construction, as seen in the first teaser trailer for 2009's *Star Trek*

### 3.4 Changes, Erasure and the Future

Another aspect of trailers that is particularly interesting in the case of soft reboots is their approach to illustrating to their audience that key changes have been made within the franchise's universe. This can come in the form of a change in tone, narrative direction or even the removal of entire films from the continuity of the franchise. In the latter case, the promotion stage is somewhat inverted relative to the usual manner of operation. As illustrated elsewhere in this chapter, a film's trailers are generally used to give a small sample of what the audience can expect to see in the upcoming film; in the case of soft reboots, this often relates to the spotlighting of a particular character or actor making their return to the franchise. However, what is discussed in the forthcoming section is those instances in which films are promoted - which, lest we forget, is the attempt to entice potential viewers into watching a film - by making clear what those viewers *will not* see in the upcoming film.

The erasure of films from the timeline has commonly been highlighted in the trailers for soft reboots in both the *Terminator* and *Halloween* franchises. Both franchises have undergone multiple soft reboots. *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later*

was seemingly the franchise's first attempt at 'course correction', moving away from the critically panned Curse of Thorn storyline present in what is commonly referred to as the 4-6 timeline, arguably the first soft reboot the franchise attempted by shifting focus from series icon Laurie Strode to her daughter, Jamie. In the trailer for *H20*, audiences are immediately shown that Laurie has returned to the franchise, ignoring the 4-6 timeline's continuity which stated that she died. She is shown to have a son and there is no indication that she has any other children, seemingly removing Jamie Strode from the equation. *Halloween 2018*'s trailer simplifies things further: within the first thirty seconds of the trailer, the audience is informed that Michael Myers was taken into custody after the events of the original *Halloween* and that he has spent four decades in captivity. For those familiar with the franchise, this makes it clear that the events of all films aside from the John Carpenter original have been erased from the timeline that the 2018 will follow. Emphasising this point, when Laurie's granddaughter is asked if it was Laurie's brother that "murdered all of those babysitters" she responds by stating that that was "something that people made up." In a key difference from *H20*, this shows that the familial connection between Michael and Laurie that was introduced in *Halloween 2* was removed for the 2018 film. The familial bond between the series' protagonist and antagonist has been publicly regretted by series creator John Carpenter. Carpenter has stated that the relationship was retroactively changed after a deal with NBC to show the original *Halloween* on television required the film to be made longer. As a result, new footage was shot which incorporated the sibling relationship into the extended television cut of the original film. Regarding the twist itself, Carpenter has since said that "I think it was, perhaps, a late night fuelled by alcoholic beverages, was that idea. A terrible, stupid idea!" (Carpenter, in Evans, 2018) As a result, the decision to ensure that audiences would know that the twist was no longer canon could be seen as a way of heralding the return of the 'purity' of the original *Halloween* film, a return to Carpenter's original vision for a franchise he had not been involved with since *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (Wallace, 1982). This simplified the messy canon of the series for fans only familiar with the original film - soft reboots, as previously mentioned, often aim to function as a new entry (or re-entry) point into the franchise - or those that did not keep up with the wide array of sequels, reboots and soft reboots already present within the franchise.



*The Suicide Squad*, a soft reboot of David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* (Ayer, 2016) occupies a less common space when considering the typical soft reboot. Rather than drawing on years or even decades of nostalgia held by the audience, Gunn's film came just five years after the release of the first *Suicide Squad*, a film that was largely unsuccessful critically and divisive among audiences. *The Suicide Squad*'s trailers suggested to viewers that the new film would feel lighter and more outlandish than its predecessor, highlighting the humorous tone of Gunn's adaptation of the comic book characters. Though three characters from Ayer's film are featured prominently in the trailers to the 2021 film - Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn, Joel Kinnaman's Colonel Rick Flag and Viola Davis' Amanda Waller - their returns to the new installment are not built up as the previously discussed 'nostalgic returns.' All three are introduced within the first twenty-five seconds of the one hundred and seventy-seven second long Red Band trailer. Though the original *Suicide Squad* was critically panned, the returning characters were often noted as bright spots - with Margot Robbie's performance in particular singled out for praise, resulting in her return as Harley in the spin-off film *Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)* (Yan, 2020). *The Suicide Squad*'s approach to its predecessor can be compared to the approach the later *Halloween* and *Terminator* films adopted: taking the elements of the franchise that were particularly good or well received and scrapping the rest. Where Gunn's film differs is that it did display the reverence for the original film displayed by the likes of *Terminator: Dark Fate*. Though it is set within the same continuity as David Ayer's film, *The Suicide Squad* highlights the ways in which a soft reboot can be utilised in a franchise *without* a well-regarded point of origin.

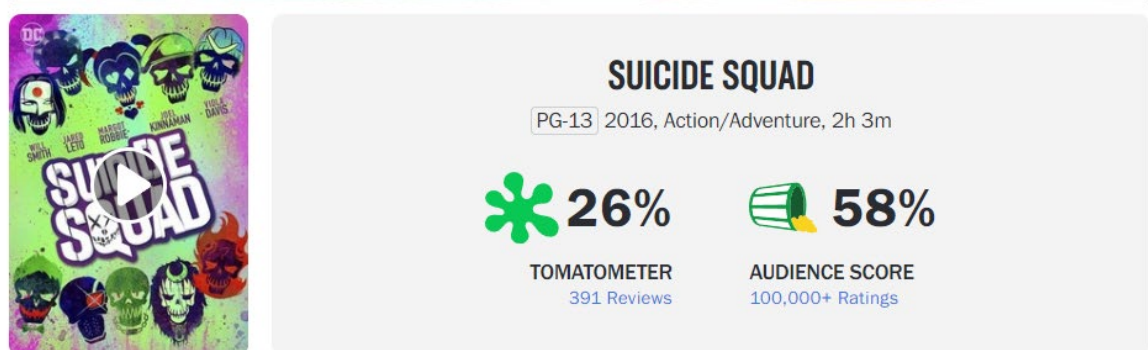


Fig 3-4 The Rotten Tomatoes scores for David Ayer's *Suicide Squad*

A final area of commonality discovered through this study of key trailers has been the emphasis on attempting to ‘target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation.’ As diversity and representation increasingly become larger issues across a variety of industries, the film industry has seen steps taken to improve the on-screen representation and presentation of previously marginalised or underrepresented groups.

*Terminator: Dark Fate*, though a continuation of a successful female-led franchise, nevertheless made similar strides to diversify the cast of the film. Joining the returning Linda Hamilton and Arnold Schwarzenegger was the Colombian Natalia Reyes (positioned in the trailer as the ‘new Sarah’), Diego Luna - of Mexican descent - portraying the new Rev 9 Terminator and Mackenzie Davis. Though Davis did not represent a step forward in terms of racial diversity, the trailers for *Dark Fate* highlighted to the audience her physicality and role as the primary ‘protector’ figure for the film’s heroes, a role previously occupied by Schwarzenegger or *Terminator Salvation*’s Sam Worthington and Christian Bale.

The trailers for *Dark Fate* put the spotlight on the three female leads of the film. Though the *Terminator* franchise has a nuanced and mixed reception as a feminist franchise - some have argued that Sarah Connor, despite the relatively common perception of the character as a feminist film icon, ‘is merely the vessel that was needed to produce the true saviour of the world.’ (Flint, 2017) - *Dark Fate*’s trailers appeared to address this issue by highlighting the varied roles of its strong female characters. Hamilton’s role in the trailers in relation to her age was also praised, as ‘sixty-two-year-old women don’t usually get to be action stars.’ (Berlatsky, 2019)

### 3.4 Case Study - *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*

*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* provides an opportunity to explore a wide variety of aspects of trailer analysis through the promotional material of a single film. Three global trailers were released: the first, a 1:28 teaser trailer, was released on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2014; the second, a 1:48 teaser trailer, was released on

the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2015; a final, full-length 2:20 trailer was released on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2015. Through these we can see the progression of what material from the film was highlighted as the film's release date drew closer.

*The Force Awakens'* first teaser trailer was largely focused on intriguing images rather than revealing anything relating to the film's plot. The trailer opens with a voiceover asking, "There has been an awakening...have you felt it?" A sense of mystery is created here, which is followed up by a man in a Stormtrooper uniform on a desert planet; though this would later be revealed as Jakku, the similarities between the planet featured in the trailer and Tatooine (the desert planet home world of both Anakin and Luke Skywalker, the protagonists of the previous two *Star Wars* trilogies) are striking. The trailer then proceeds to alternate between showing new *Star Wars* imagery and things from the Original Trilogy that fans will recognize: in order, we are shown an unfamiliar droid (BB-8), Stormtroopers in a drop ship (though their helmets are of a new design), a woman on a speeder (later revealed to be Rey), X-Wings flying low over water, a cloaked man walking through a forest before activating a lightsaber, and, finally, the triumphant return of the Millennium Falcon in a dogfight with a pair of TIE Fighters. As previously stated, the legacy sequel (a form of soft reboot) is concerned with merging the familiar with the unfamiliar. *The Force Awakens'* first trailer adhered to this philosophy strictly, ensuring that viewers would be intrigued by the new material whilst also receiving nostalgic thrills in equal measure following each showing of new characters and images. Though much of the trailer's content would be familiar to viewers, only the return of the Millennium Falcon could be described as an example of the 'nostalgic return' mentioned throughout this chapter. This is because it is highlighted at the end of the trailer and is accompanied by the iconic main *Star Wars* theme, with the combination of the two acting as a statement that "the *Star Wars* from your childhood is back" to a generation of film fans. Furthering this notion, the second teaser trailer for the film also ended with an example of a major nostalgic return, this time in the form of Han Solo and Chewbacca stepping foot once more onto the Millennium Falcon as the former declares, "Chewie, we're home."



Fig 3-5 “Chewie, we’re home.” Han Solo and Chewbacca return to the Millenium Falcon, marking the former’s first appearance on-screen in 32 years.

The film’s first trailer also utilised a similar promotional tactic as *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999), perhaps to appeal to the audience’s inner childish glee - the unveiling of a new style of lightsaber (the franchise’s iconic weapon wielded primarily by the heroic Jedi and villainous Sith). *The Phantom Menace* introduced the double-bladed lightsaber used by the film’s main villain, Darth Maul, whilst the first trailer for *The Force Awakens* highlighted the new crossguard lightsaber of Kylo Ren. Though the trailer did not make reference to the prequel trilogy in any meaningful way, this moment undoubtedly harkened back to the style of promotion used for *The Phantom Menace*.



Fig 3-6 Darth Maul ignites his double-bladed lightsaber in the trailer for *The Phantom Menace*.



Fig 3-7 Kylo Ren ignites his crossguard lightsaber in *The Force Awakens*' first teaser trailer.

*The Force Awakens*' various trailers also seemed intent on reassuring fans that the franchise's return would come with a certain level of 'recalibration', placing the new films deliberately alongside the original trilogy whilst almost ignoring the prequel trilogy entirely, as noted by Dan Golding:

This is a more precise form of nostalgia, then - one that invokes some *Star Wars* films but not others. In the marketing for *The Force Awakens*, it was almost as if the prequels did not exist, such was their exclusion from the nostalgia invoked. (Golding, 2019: 53-54)

Golding also argues that this strategy extended to the musical choices used in the film's trailers. Rather than playing on the audience's nostalgia in a more general way, re-using recognisable themes from across the franchise wherever appropriate, the marketing of *The Force Awakens* instead used targeted nostalgia to create a link between the new film and the Original Trilogy:

That 2015 saw a deliberate strategy of targeting nostalgia is reinforced by the music of both trailers. It's no coincidence, for example, that the major musical theme of the full-length trailer released in October 2015 is "Han Solo and the Princess" from *The*

*Empire Strikes Back*. This is, of course, the only major musical theme from the whole original that did not make a return in any form in the prequels... “Han Solo and the Princess” was a direct musical line straight to the original trilogy. (Golding, 2019 :53)

One could argue that this relationship between *The Force Awakens* and the Original Trilogy was merely a result of the former’s chronological placement within the franchise’s timeline, as it followed *Return of the Jedi* rather than any of the Prequel Trilogy films. However, the deliberate choice of a specific musical piece which did not feature in the somewhat divisive Prequel Trilogy does indicate a concerted effort to reassure existing fans of the franchise that the new film would be more in line with the more universally celebrated Original Trilogy. Moreover, rather than simply showing that the new film would be *similar* to the 1970s and 1980s classic, the reintegration of a theme ignored by the ‘new look’ *Star Wars* of the Prequel Trilogy was a signifier to older fans that the Sequel Trilogy would show appropriate reverence for the Original Trilogy.

### 3.5 Fan Promotion

Though official promotional material for soft reboots is, of course, of huge importance, this chapter of the dissertation will also examine what I have labelled ‘fan promotion.’ Fan promotion is fan-made material which can be used to generate hype for a new film; this material, as will be examined later, can also be utilised directly by the official marketing team of a film (or the marketing team instead use a similar type of content that they create themselves), essentially co-opting the excitement of fans to increase the interest of other fans in the product promoted by the filmmakers.

Here, I will focus on two key forms of popular fan promotion: the trailer breakdown video and the trailer reaction video. The latter of these are, simply put, videos where people film themselves reacting to a trailer for an upcoming film or television series. Their popularity surged in the 2010s, with various YouTube channels, film fans and even actors posting their reactions to a variety of film and television trailers. A particularly notable instance of this came shortly after the release of the final trailer for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*,

when both Daisy Ridley and John Boyega uploaded their first-time reaction to seeing the trailer. The actors' excitement for the first live-action *Star Wars* film to be released in a decade was palpable, as Ridley wept and declared the trailer "amazing" whilst Boyega excitedly jumped over a couch upon seeing Finn ignite a lightsaber. (Boyega and Ridley, seen in Luke Eclipse-Ujano, 2015)

Reaction-based content has seen a surge in popularity throughout the last decade, with reality television shows such as *Gogglebox* (2013) and a wide variety of YouTube channels based on this content- such as the *React* media franchise first launched with the *Kids React* (2010) series - garnering consistently high viewership. Though research into our proclivity for watching people through screens watch other people through screens is a continually evolving area, many argue that humans are simply curious about the reaction others have to media we like - or dislike; social media has merely made accessing the reactions of others easier. Other research, as stated by Emma Beddington, takes this notion further and suggests that we may derive pleasure simply by watching other people experience this emotion:

There is some evidence that the mirror neurons in our brains, which activate when we do something and also when we see someone else do the same thing, may operate in the same way with emotions: when we see someone experience pain or disgust or joy, we "feel" it, sort of. That would make watching people react an exercise in empathy. (Beddington, 2022)

Anna Lee Swan argues in her article *Situated Knowledge, Transnational Identities: Place and Embodiment in K-pop Fan Reaction Videos* (Swan, 2017) that reaction videos forge online communities centralised around both the media being reacted to and a fandom of the reactor themselves:

Reaction videos are useful texts to study when exploring the omnipresence of communities that are inherently hybrid, but primarily sustained through feeling and emotional attachment. While my focus is on the user-generated self-surveillance of the music video reaction, YouTube is rife with people unboxing products, tasting new

foods, playing video games, and watching pornography trailers. The reaction video as a communicative tactic centralises shared meaning that brings people together and expands far beyond a singular object, allowing people to creatively insert themselves into the media narrative...K-pop YouTubers invite others to exist in multiple communities at once, as viewers both actively participate in the uninhibited feelings of fandom and may revel in sharing a YouTubers' visible differences of culture and identity. (ibid: 553-554)

Considering this understanding of the reaction video, its relevance to the subject of the soft reboot becomes clearer. Though the vicarious enjoyment provided by consuming reaction content can be derived from a number of different sources, the community building aspect of this (relatively) new genre provides new avenues for the soft reboot to create a new generation of fans. As previously discussed, the soft reboot is concerned with the issue of generational renewal - honouring the legacy of the franchise whilst also ensuring its continued success, passing down the fandom from one generation to the next. Reaction videos, existing largely on new media such as YouTube and other social media sites, reach the younger viewers that soft reboots aim to entice into the fandom whilst more traditional content such as the film trailers themselves stoke the excitement of existing fans.

Swan does argue that the reaction video creates a fan community around the reactor as well as the media being reacted to. With this in mind, the earlier example of Daisy Ridley and John Boyega's reaction videos to *The Force Awakens'* final trailer gains new meaning: rather than a reactor figure gaining fandom independent of the content they react to, instead the factors coalesce as Boyega and Ridley create vicarious excitement for the *Star Wars* franchise whilst ensuring that fans wishing to support them will ultimately support the franchise. The actors - though this is not exclusive to John Boyega and Daisy Ridley - may also be viewed as more relatable due to the perceived 'realness' of their reactions, positioning them as fellow fans alongside the viewers watching their videos rather than detached figures without a connection to the franchise.

A more long-form type of content also considered in this chapter is the trailer breakdown video. Trailer breakdown videos are videos uploaded by channels or



individuals that analyse a film trailer frame by frame in order to extract as much information as possible, generally for the purpose of theorising various plot details, character identities and, in the case of franchise films (including soft reboots), references to previous films in the franchise. Differing from the reaction-based content discussed above, where vicarious excitement can be derived from seeing the excitement of others, trailer breakdown videos instead create ‘viral hype’ by examining *potential*. A key aspect of many fandoms is often the discussion of what may happen next in a franchise, whether the next instalment comes in the form of a film, television show or video game. In the case of *The Force Awakens*, the theory that the film’s lead villain Kylo Ren was the son of Han Solo and Leia Organa dominated fan theories relating to the film, whilst Rey was often theorised to be the daughter of Luke Skywalker as a result of her visual connection to the character, as well as their desert planet origins. (The Stupendous Wave, 2015) The fan theory, though often criticised as fans setting themselves up for disappointment (an issue examined in-depth in the ‘reception’ chapter) nevertheless exists as a mechanism by which the film being discussed can remain a key topic of conversation before its release, with each new trailer, still image and interview from the cast being dissected for information.



Fig 3-8 Rey’s appearance in *The Force Awakens* drew many comparisons with the outfit worn by Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*, leading to speculation that they were related.

The trailer breakdown video has since become a promotional tactic used by filmmakers themselves rather than existing solely in the realm of the film fan. *The Suicide Squad*, the 2021 soft reboot of David Ayer's 2016 film *Suicide Squad*, is a more recent example that has received this treatment. In conjunction with IGN, director James Gunn spent ten minutes breaking down a trailer for the film (Gunn, in IGN, 2021). Differing from the traditional trailer breakdown video, the presence of someone involved in the filmmaking process - in this case the film's director - allowed for some of the lingering questions that the audience may have had to be cleared up. Most notably, Gunn immediately makes clear to viewers that his film does share take place in the DC Extended Universe (DCEU), situating it firmly as a soft reboot of *Suicide Squad* rather than as its own, entirely independent entity. However, this particular form of breakdown video could be considered a separate subgenre of the traditional trailer breakdown video due to the absence of speculation. Questions have answers provided rather undergoing the typical process of examination leading to a variety of possibilities being discussed. Though this could be considered an attempt by filmmakers to co-opt the trailer breakdown video - a genre that exists firmly in fan circles - it shares characteristics most clearly with the director's commentary of a completed film.

Overall, this chapter has sought to illustrate the ways in which the promotion stage of the soft reboot has been used to highlight the 'familiar but different' feeling to the films being promoted. This has been achieved in some of the case study examples (namely *The Force Awakens*) by alternating returning or familiar imagery with new material to intrigue fans within a soft reboot's trailers. The 'nostalgic return' of key characters from previous films is demonstrably often a moment that a trailer is built around or up to. However, promotion for soft reboots also often seeks to reassure fans that characters and plot elements that they did not like from previous films will *not* be returning, with many trailers making it explicitly clear that only the events of the original film in a franchise (or perhaps the first two in cases such as the *Terminator* franchise) are relevant to understanding the soft reboot. This both appeases long time fans and makes the soft reboot a more accessible entry point into the franchise, as fewer films must be watched in preparation for the new entry.

In addition to this, the concept of ‘fan promotion’ was also examined in order to highlight the ways in which franchise films can have their trailers examined in-depth by fans in order to extract all possible information from each frame presented to them, creating an additional level on which the soft reboot’s trailer can be enjoyed; references to previous texts within the franchise can be unearthed after careful examination, essentially rewarding the most dedicated and knowledgeable fans. Furthermore, the trailer reaction video was examined as a contemporary way for fan excitement for a film to be ‘supercharged’, with the excitement or elation seen on the faces of those being watched then enhancing the emotions of those doing the watching. Ultimately, this chapter reinforces this thesis’ original contribution to knowledge by highlighting the promotional strategies utilised by the filmmakers and marketing teams of soft reboots that are uniquely suited to soft reboots themselves. The marketing of a soft reboot is able to utilise ‘weaponised nostalgia’ and create excitement for the *removal* of content from the canon all within the same film trailer.

## ***Chapter Four: Text***

This chapter will focus primarily on textual analysis of soft reboots, though analysis of previous films in the relevant soft reboots' franchises will also be examined, both for comparison and to better contextualise the content found in the soft reboots themselves. Whilst the individual attributes of each film will be examined in detail, this chapter largely aims to illustrate the key areas of commonality between soft reboots. Though not every soft reboot will contain each of these tropes, the primary topics of discussion are:

- The passing of the torch moment and narrative.
- Killing off legacy characters.
- Narrative and thematic similarities between the soft reboot and previous media in their franchise.

These areas of discussion are largely concerned with the ways in which the soft reboot plays on the audience's feelings of nostalgia for the franchise. Though the areas can intersect (as killing off a legacy character, for example, can also be an example of a narrative similarity to a previous film), my goal is primarily to elucidate the impact these narrative choices have on the films and the audience. However, key differences that illustrate the evolution a franchise has underwent as a result of a soft reboot will also be examined, particularly in those cases where a soft reboot spawned a sequel or multiple sequels.

### **4.1 -Passing of the Torch Moments and Narratives**

It is perhaps appropriate at this time to reiterate that legacy sequels utilise returning legacy characters both to entice audiences to watch the new instalment in a franchise and to set up the next generation of franchise stars for success, allowing the younger generation to be positioned as worthy successors to the stars of the franchise's past. As stated by Bryan Hikari Hartzheim and co. (and discussed further in the literature review):

Based on the assumption that viewers will identify with characters like them, legacyquels have sought to lure older, infrequent moviegoers and more dedicated fans simultaneously with narratives in which an older generation of actors, reprising their “legacy” characters, “pass the torch” to a younger set. (Fleury, Hartzheim and Mamber, 2019: 32-33)

The goal, therefore, of these legacy sequels is to harness the popularity of the previous films to set a new cast of characters up for future long-term success. This should extend beyond simply the characters, however, as filmmakers and studios must also ensure that the franchise is ‘passed down’ from one generation to the next, so that a new generation may grow up viewing the likes of Brandon Routh, Andi Matichak and Chris Pine as *their* heroes the way that older generations may have viewed Christopher Reeve, Jamie Lee Curtis and William Shatner. Dan Golding reinforces this when he argues that the legacy film is concerned with generational renewal:

Legacy films are made with an awareness of the intergenerational possibilities of fandom and an eye to stimulating and authorizing a moment of renewal and generational transference across multiple levels of narrative, production, and reception. (Golding, 2022: 137)

Within the legacy sequel, it could be argued that the passing of the torch is not a moment and rather functions as an overarching feature of the film’s narrative. Perhaps the clearest example of this can be seen in *Creed*, a soft reboot of the *Rocky* franchise. Sylvester Stallone steps out of the starring role and transitions the character of Rocky Balboa into a supporting act, making way for Adonis Creed (Michael B. Jordan) to star. Adonis, the son of famed Balboa rival (later friend and trainer) Apollo Creed, becomes the new face of the franchise with a somewhat meta narrative centred largely around the concept of Adonis living up to his father’s legacy (a narrative we may read as *Creed* acknowledging the enormity of the challenge to act as the successor to the *Rocky* films). As discussed during this dissertation’s introduction, soft reboots often introduce new characters as relatives of legacy characters in order to give audiences a reason to be invested in them immediately. In a move made seemingly to help legitimise Adonis in the eyes of long-time *Rocky* fans, he is trained within the

film by Balboa, who was initially hesitant to return to the boxing world, especially to train the son of a man whom he feels he could have saved from dying in a boxing ring during the events of *Rocky IV* (Stallone, 1985). Concerning the meta-narrative of shying away from confronting a legacy of greatness, Adonis reflects this in his initial decision to fight under his mother's name of Johnson rather than using the Creed name, arguing that he wants to build his own legacy rather than standing in the shadow of his legendary father. Later, he is forced to fight under the Creed name in order to receive a title shot for the Heavyweight Championship. However, before the fight Adonis embraces his legacy, fighting in the same colours that both his father and Rocky made famous during the events of the *Rocky* films. Rather than simply being presented as the new Apollo Creed, Adonis is visually and stylistically presented as a hybrid between the two influential boxers. During his championship fight with Ricky Conlan, the commentators note during the final round that Adonis is "throwing body shots like he's Rocky Balboa, going upstairs like he's Apollo Creed."

As successor to both the Creed name and the *Rocky* franchise, Adonis is a clear product of their influence whilst retaining his individuality, as he is consistently presented as a character with his own life experiences and struggles. Though he is shown to fight with the heart and determination of Rocky Balboa, outside of the ring Adonis is characterised by a quick temper brought about by a difficult upbringing as a child with time spent in group homes before being raised by Apollo's widow, who discouraged him from pursuing boxing. Though Apollo is venerated by many of those Adonis interacts with - from the son of his trainer to Adonis' boxing peers - Adonis does not worship his father. One notable scene in the film sees Adonis shadowboxing in front of a projection of the second fight between Apollo and Rocky; rather than mimicking the movements of his father, literally fighting in his shadow, Adonis mimics Rocky, suggesting the underlying anger at his father that is explored later in the film. Though Adonis has figuratively been passed the torch by Rocky and his father, proudly bearing the Creed name and sporting the same colours the two men fought using, the goal of setting the franchise up for future success is achieved by ensuring Adonis remains a distinct, unique character in his own right rather than being defined by his relationships to his father figures.



Fig 4-1 Adonis Creed sporting the USA-themed shorts worn by both Rocky Balboa and Apollo Creed

In the case of the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, the passing of the torch narrative could be said to extend across all three films in the case of series protagonist Rey. *The Force Awakens* undoubtedly functions as a passing of the torch narrative in isolation - Rey is literally handed (passed) the Skywalker lightsaber (a figurative and literal source of light) once wielded by both Anakin and Luke Skywalker, as well as becoming the pilot of the Millennium Falcon after the death of Han Solo. However, her effective role as the heir to the Skywalker legacy develops throughout the three films, ultimately culminating in her finishing the work of Luke and Anakin by finally vanquishing the threat of the Sith for good.

During the opening title crawl of *The Force Awakens*, the audience is informed of the situation in the galaxy over three decades after the events of *Return of the Jedi*: 'Luke Skywalker has vanished. In his absence, the sinister FIRST ORDER has risen from the ashes of the Empire and will not rest until Skywalker, the last Jedi, has been destroyed.' Viewers are then told that Leia, 'is desperate to find her brother Luke and gain his help in restoring peace and justice to the galaxy.' From this we can immediately ascertain that a new hope must arise in order to take up Luke's mantle as hero of the forces of light (in this case the Resistance). Throughout the film the audience is presented with two candidates from the newly introduced characters to fulfil this role: Finn, a former Stormtrooper that



recently deserted the villainous First Order, and Rey, a scavenger on the desert planet of Jakku that is waiting for her parents to return after leaving her on the planet many years ago. During the second act of the film, Rey is offered the lightsaber lost by Luke during his duel with Darth Vader on Bespin in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1981); however, she rejects it, and the weapon is instead given to Finn. Audiences familiar with the promotional material for the film would recognise this as a decision that matched up with the marketing for the film, all of which showed Finn wielding the lightsaber in various trailers, posters and promotional pictures. However, Finn shows no obvious aptitude for the force whilst in possession of the lightsaber and is ultimately defeated by Kylo Ren in a duel in the third act of the film. Ren (the son of Han Solo and Leia Organa, and thus a member of the Skywalker tries to summon the lightsaber wielded by his grandfather and uncle, only to have it weapon fly into the open hand of Rey. Much like Adonis embracing his legacy in *Creed* by wearing the colours sported by both his father and Rocky, Rey ends *The Force Awakens* by appearing to embrace her role as a hero. She defeats Ren in a duel, saves Finn and later leaves on the Millennium Falcon (accompanied by R2-D2 and Chewbacca) to find Luke Skywalker, with the film ending on Rey's silent offer to Luke to take his lightsaber back and return to the fight for the galaxy's safety.



**Fig 4-2** Rey prepares to duel Kylo Ren after summoning the Skywalker lightsaber to her hand with the force.



The Skywalker lightsaber can be viewed both as a symbol of hope within the diegesis of the film and as a signifier of legitimacy to fans of the franchise. The weapon has been wielded regularly (we need not consider Han Solo cutting open a tauntaun or Padmé Amidala freeing her husband from a pair of binders in this matter) by the *Star Wars* saga's previous two protagonists: Anakin Skywalker, the weapon's creator and primary protagonist of the Prequel Trilogy, and Luke Skywalker, the man first associated with the weapon by audiences and lead hero of the Original Trilogy. Rey's handling of the weapon indicates her status within the franchise moving forward, positioning her as the modern equivalent (in importance if not in nature) of the Skywalker leads. However, the final instalment in the Sequel Trilogy seems to elevate Rey further, bestowing on her the accolade of finally ending the threat of the evil Sith - a threat audiences believed had been ended by Anakin Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi* thirty-six years prior to the release of *The Rise of Skywalker*.

Darth Sidious, originally known to fans simply as the Emperor, was introduced to audiences in *The Empire Strikes Back* before taking on a key role in *Return of the Jedi*, representing the pure evil that Darth Vader served. During the final act of the film, Luke Skywalker tries to convince Vader (by this point openly acknowledged as Luke's father) to abandon the Emperor and return to the light. Vader refuses and defends his Sith master after Luke is goaded into attacking him. Vader is defeated after Luke batters him to the ground in an enraged state, seemingly beginning to follow his father down a dark path. When he rejects the Emperor's overtures to join the dark side, Luke is attacked by lightning emerging from the seemingly defenceless man's hands. His father, finally motivated to take action, picks his master up and throws him into an exposed reactor shaft, gaining a measure of redemption for his crimes by saving his son and ending the threat posed by the Emperor. This was, for sixteen years, the story as the wider audience knew it. The Prequel Trilogy later added greater significance to this sequence of events, revealing that Anakin Skywalker was no mere fallen Jedi; instead, he was a child born of a virginal birth and destined to 'bring balance to the force' and 'destroy the Sith'. His actions in *Return of the Jedi*, therefore, are now the fulfilment of a grand prophecy.

*The Rise of Skywalker*, the final instalment in the Sequel Trilogy, saw the Emperor return as a result of his spirit being transferred to a hidden clone body

on the planet Exegol. Vader sacrifice, rather than ending the Sith threat permanently, was retconned to inflict a serious delay on the saga's main villain's plans of galactic domination, rather than ending them for good. Moreover, Luke Skywalker was now unable to end the resurgent Sith after his own death in *The Last Jedi*. As a result, the film saw the task fall to Rey, who ultimately confronts Palpatine whilst using the Skywalker lightsaber as well as the newly introduced (or uncovered within the context of the film) lightsaber used by Leia Organa during her Jedi training. Rey's subsequent defeat of a once again fully powered Emperor Palpatine (seemingly killing the franchise's lingering menace permanently) would seem, in a literal interpretation of the aforementioned prophecy once attributed to Anakin, make *her* the prophesised destroyer of the Sith and figure that would bring balance to the force. During their fight, the Emperor declares himself to be "All the Sith", emphasising to the audience that Rey's victory was over the combined teachings and knowledge of over a millennium of Sith. Prior to redirecting his lightning that threatened to overwhelm her defences, Rey states in response that she is "All the Jedi" - fully embracing Luke's words to her from earlier in the film where he informed her that "A thousand generations live in you now" - after which she uses the two lightsabers to block Palpatine's attacks, pushing forward until the redirected lightning kills the Sith lord. This overt passing of the torch narrative, explicitly positioning Rey as the heir to the Jedi legacy, is finally encapsulated by her adoption of the Skywalker surname in the final scene of the film, completing a narrative that stretched across all three films.



**Fig 4-3** “I am all the Jedi.” Rey, wielding the lightsabers of both Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa, deflects the Emperor’s lightning.

In certain cases, soft rebooted franchises display an arguable inability to move on to a new generation. In the case of the *Jurassic World* trilogy, for example, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* featured in the original *Jurassic Park* - affectionately referred to by fans as ‘Rexy’ - returns in each instalment of the soft reboot trilogy. Moreover, she plays a crucial role in the climax of these films.

*Jurassic World* - the original soft reboot within the franchise - introduced the *Indominus rex*, a genetically engineered and transgenic dinosaur. During the film, Bryce Dallas Howard’s character Claire explains that visitors to the Jurassic World theme park are no longer awed by standard dinosaurs, as at this stage in the franchise’s timeline dinosaurs have been revived from extinction for over three decades, with the Jurassic World theme park open ‘without incident’ for a decade. The geneticists within the park, as a result of the fact that, “consumers want them bigger, louder, more teeth” create the *Indominus* as a new attraction. Throughout the film it is revealed that the *Indominus* was created after altering the genome of the *Tyrannosaurus rex* and combining it with the DNA of a variety of other dinosaurs and creatures, most notably the velociraptor. The new attraction inevitably escapes, terrorising the previously functioning park and usurping control of Owen Grady’s (Chris Pratt) pack of trained velociraptors. The climax of the film sees the velociraptors return to Owen’s command, assaulting the *Indominus* in a battle reminiscent of the ending of

*Jurassic Park*, though inverted as the audience is instead supposed to support the velociraptors in *Jurassic World*. When it seems that the antagonist will prevail, Claire frees REXY from her enclosure and lures it over to the Indominus, resulting in a fight between the old and new apex predators. After assistance from the lone surviving velociraptor, the *Indominus* is overpowered and pushed to the edge of the water before ultimately being swallowed by a *Mosasaurus*. REXY, after being absent from dinosaur versus dinosaur combat in the second instalment of the *Jurassic World* franchise, returned in *Jurassic World Dominion*, once again fighting the new menace of the film - this time the *Giganotosaurus* - and bringing about its defeat with aid from a *Therizinosaurus*, allowing the heroes (this time including the returning Alan Grant, Ellie Sattler and Ian Malcolm) to escape to safety.

Aside from the franchise's general appeal of seeing dinosaurs engage in battles with each other, the climax of *Jurassic World* also provides a particular appeal to fans of the original film who may have been curious to see the two main dinosaur species of the original *Jurassic Park* trilogy on the same side. However, the film's ending could be said to reveal an inability or unwillingness to move forward with the franchise, instead presenting the original film as superior to those that followed. Though the *Indominus*' defeat at the hands of the original menaces of *Jurassic Park* could be viewed as a narrative about the power of nature over scientific engineering, with the genetically 'pure' creatures triumphing over a beast designed for maximised profits. Director Colin Trevorrow argued that the new dinosaur represented the greed and excess of humanity, with the narrative of *Jurassic World* seemingly operating as an allegory about the state of the film industry:

The *Indominus* was meant to embody our worst tendencies. We're surrounded by wonder and yet we want more. And we want it bigger, faster, louder, better. And in the world of the movie the animal is designed based on a series of corporate focus groups. Like in the same way a lot of movies are. They sit a bunch of people down and they ask them, "What can we do to make the dinosaurs more entertaining for you? What would make you tell a friend to come to Jurassic World?" And their answer is, of course, "We want to see something bigger,

faster, louder, more vicious; we want a killer.” And they get what they ask for. (Trevorrow in McGovern, 2015)

Trevorrow seems to argue for a return to simplicity and purity in filmmaking, allowing for creative expression unhampered by focus group-led decision making. However, when viewing his work across the *Jurassic World* trilogy, the spectre of *Jurassic Park* is ever-present, creating the impression that respect for the original film has progressed to the point of being unable or unwilling to move past the iconography and figureheads first seen in 1993.

The film openly reveres *Jurassic Park*, going so far as to have a character in the film - played by Jake Johnson - represent the original film's fans, praising the original park for “not needing genetic hybrids” and instead just needing “real” dinosaurs, a not-so-subtle comment on the film industry's shift away from practical effects and realism towards CGI and extensive visual effects. However, when analysing the new trilogy this reverence seems to come at the expense of the audience's ability to fully invest in the situations being shown to us on-screen. Though the variety of new dinosaurs are undoubtedly presented as major threats, the consistent reliance on returning creatures - or characters - to save the day creates the impression that the new cast is unable to stand on its own. From a critical standpoint, there is an overriding sense that the events and cast of the original *Jurassic Park* simply *must* be included in order to maintain audience interest and satisfaction. *Jurassic Park*'s popularity cannot be denied; however, the aura built up around Rexy throughout the film can be utilised in a variety of ways. In the case of *Jurassic World* and its sequels this is to elicit excitement and joy from the audience when she dramatically saves Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard and the other lead characters from each film. However, the consistent dominance from the creature reduces the sense of danger around other dinosaurs that function as antagonists within the *Jurassic World* series, as there exists a lingering feeling that they will always be proven inferior to the franchise mascot. *Jurassic Park III* (Johnston, 2001), though considered far less popular than the original *Jurassic Park*, opted to use the aura of power that the franchise had built around the *Tyrannosaurus* by having one killed when the film introduced its new monstrous villain: the *Spinosaurus*. Though it is not Rexy herself that is fought and killed by the *Spinosaurus*, the image of a *Tyrannosaurus* brutally slain in a fight immediately informs the audience of the

enhanced level of danger that Alan Grant, Paul Kirby (William H. Macy), Amanda Kirby (Téa Leoni) and the rest of the humans on Isla Sorna. In this way, a sequel has elevated its own effectiveness on the audience by harnessing the dread the audience is conditioned to feel when the *T-rex* appears and creating a more intimidating monster, as anything which can slay the *T-rex* in a straight fight is, logically speaking, more fear-inducing. Though not a traditional passing of the torch moment, the *Spinosaurus* forcefully asserted itself as the most dominant threat in the franchise (at the time of the film's release) by proving its superiority over the former 'king' of the franchise. By contrast, the *Jurassic World* series consistently reverted to the narrative familiarity and safety of the image of a triumphant Rexy roaring after saving the day. Though the audience may always feel nostalgic for the original film in the series, the *Jurassic World* trilogy seemed content to join them rather than giving them a reason to be intrigued by the new direction of the franchise.



Fig 4.4 Alan Grant flees from the *Spinosaurus*, which stands over the *T-rex* it defeated in combat.

#### 4.2 - Let the Past Die; Kill it if You Have To

Perhaps one of the most well-known (and, as the 'Reception' chapter will explore, controversial) traits of the soft reboot is its tendency to kill off legacy characters. The primary effect of these deaths within the narrative is the increased motivation of the remaining characters, spurring them on to assume

the mantle of 'hero' that the fallen character previously held. In this way we can see an obvious link between the killing off of legacy characters and the passing of the torch from one generation to the next. However, this particular trope also aims to raise the stakes for the franchise, elucidating that previously 'safe' characters can also die. Returning to the earlier example of *Scream 5* (a meta soft reboot about characters attempting to make a fictional soft reboot), the killers discuss their reasons for attacking certain characters, stating that "Dewey had to die to make it real. To show that this wasn't just some bullshit, cash-in, run of the mill sequel." Dewey Riley, played by David Arquette, was one of only three characters to appear in the first five *Scream* films, joining Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) and Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox). Though the killers in the film are portrayed as an angry 'fanboy' and 'fangirl', it is not inaccurate to say that the deaths of major longstanding characters in a franchise can bring an uncertainty to the future safety of the protagonists.

The *Star Wars* sequels were particularly trigger-happy regarding the deaths of legacy characters: *The Force Awakens* saw the death of series icon Han Solo; *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Johnson, 2017) saw the demise of franchise lead Luke Skywalker as well as popular side character Admiral Gial Ackbar; *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* brought Leia Organa's journey to a close (though the real-life passing of Carrie Fisher necessitated changes to her role in the film), whilst the saga's overarching villain of the original six films - Emperor Sheev Palpatine - was revealed to have survived the events of *Return of the Jedi* by transferring his essence into a clone. However, he, too, failed to survive the final film in the soft reboot trilogy. In many cases, as the passing of the torch discussion above should have illustrated, the trilogy attempted to use its legacy characters to set up the continued success of the Sequel Trilogy's original creations in Rey, Finn and Poe. Legacy characters were slowly phased out over the course of the trilogy in order to continue adding importance to these characters. The continued presence of legacy characters in a soft reboot can, at times, become a hinderance to the development of newer characters and ideas as audiences will naturally compare the old with the new; however, the newer additions lack the feelings of nostalgia held for the icons of the past, often resulting in a longing to see more of the old and less of the new. Dan Golding, arguing specifically for the case of the *Star Wars* franchise, put forth the belief that the idolisation of these

characters and concepts was actively holding the franchise back: ‘As long as the nostalgic fondly cradled their too-perfect memories of *Star Wars*, nothing new would ever be good enough. Luke, Han, Leia, Darth Vader, the Empire, the Rebels - they are what *Star Wars* grows beyond.’ (Golding, 2019: 198) However, Golding’s belief can apply to a wider array of new franchise entries. Though it would perhaps be impossible to ruin the ‘too-perfect memories’ held by some members of the audience, the constant side-by-side evaluative opportunities presented by many soft reboots in regard to what audiences already know and what they are being introduced to for the first time can prevent the new characters and concepts from gaining the same level of adoration as the classics.

### 4.3 - Nostalgic Nods

George Lucas, in a now somewhat infamous video, described the events of *The Phantom Menace* as ‘rhyming’ with previous *Star Wars* films, stating that when watching the film, “you see the echo of where it’s all gonna go...And again, it’s like poetry, it’s so that they rhyme. Every stanza kind of rhymes with the last one.” (Lucas, 1999) Though this applied to a prequel film which might understandably have nods to events from the Original Trilogy, Lucas’ statement can be seen to hold true when examining a variety of soft reboots. By inserting these ‘echoes’ of previously popular and successful films (in most cases), filmmakers can attempt to recreate that success within the new film, allowing new protagonists, for example, to benefit from a similar hero’s journey as their predecessors.

*Creed* contains many examples of this ‘rhyming’ structure, perhaps the most notable being the role given in the film to Stallone’s Rocky Balboa. As previously mentioned, Michael B. Jordan is introduced in the film as the franchise’s new star Adonis Creed, the illegitimate son of fan-favourite character Apollo Creed. Though initially Balboa’s rival in the franchise’s first two films, Apollo’s retirement between the second and third films saw him transition into the role of Rocky’s new trainer in *Rocky III* (Stallone, 1982). In *Creed*, the eponymous character is trained (after initial refusal) by Balboa. Structurally speaking, the film also shares similarities with the original *Rocky*: Adonis, like Rocky, starts the film as a small-time fighter that is catapulted to almost overnight fame when he secures a fight for the Heavyweight Title. Both men are expected to be soundly



defeated in the early rounds of their respective bouts, yet both are able to knock their opponent down for the first time in their career and ultimately go the distance, losing via split decision. Adonis, both within the context of the film and in the eyes of the audience, must earn his status at the top. Adonis' narrow loss portrays him as an underdog that performed far better than expected. Crucially, however, the decision to have him lose ensures that he is not presented as a better fighter than Rocky Balboa, as fans would potentially react poorly to the notion that the new franchise lead is immediately positioned as a superior fighter compared to the beloved eponymous face of the franchise for over three decades (this backlash relating to the idea of legacy characters being replaced or usurped will be examined further in the reception chapter).

*The Force Awakens* also contains a variety of 'rhyming' moments within the narrative, though arguably more noteworthy is the way in which legacy characters transition into mentor roles. Han Solo, though still a brash, cocksure pilot, has largely transitioned into the mentor role occupied by Alec Guinness' Obi-Wan Kenobi in *A New Hope*. As the member of the original three heroes with the most screentime in the film, Solo serves as a link to the past both for the audience and for the franchise's new heroes in Rey, Finn and Poe. Though his personality is still very much the familiar Han Solo, he is now portrayed as wiser and a leader within the new group of characters. Much like Obi-Wan, Han is killed by the film's primary villain as a future Jedi watches helpless. Progressing to the next film in the soft reboot trilogy, *The Last Jedi* reveals that Luke Skywalker has also adopted a new role within the context of the franchise, becoming a hermit Jedi that secluded himself on planet after his perceived inability to stop a great evil from rising in the galaxy, much like Yoda. Though these changes could be viewed as simply 'creating space' for the new characters to occupy the primary hero roles, they also allow for soft reboots to show the evolution of a character compared to their presentation in the older films in a franchise. In many cases, this evolution directly ties into a moment where a character was expected to *learn something*, resulting in the soft reboot providing a payoff to a moment or scene years or decades after a film's release. Continuing the example of *The Last Jedi*, the climax of the film sees Luke Skywalker using astral projection to distract Kylo Ren/Ben Solo in order to allow the surviving members of the Resistance to flee to safety. Even without a

physical form, Luke never attacks his nephew during their fight, choosing only to dodge attacks and otherwise frustrate his opponent. In the Original Trilogy, Luke was often characterised as being quick to anger. *The Empire Strikes Back* saw Yoda impart the wisdom that, “A Jedi uses the force for knowledge and defence; never attack.” Luke’s final actions in *The Last Jedi* - which ultimately result in his death from the immense exertion required to maintain his illusion - show his growth and adherence to the philosophy passed down to him from his master, whilst also rewarding audience members that wished to see the formerly rash character transition into the peaceful monk-like figure in the same vein as his two masters.

*Terminator: Dark Fate*, though ostensibly providing a departure from Sarah Connor’s traditional role as the mother and teacher of humanity’s future saviour, ultimately sees the film end with Sarah in a familiar role. In the film, the audience learns that three years after the events of *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* where Sarah, John Connor, Miles Dyson and the reprogrammed T-800 Terminator destroyed Cyberdyne Systems, another Terminator was sent back in time and successfully terminated John Connor. Sarah, after spending decades hunting down Terminators whenever she learned that they had been sent back, eventually comes into contact with Grace and Dani, the latter of whom is eventually revealed as the future liberator of mankind, in essence the ‘new’ John Connor. This revelation comes after the film initially leads audiences (and Sarah) to believe that Dani is the new Sarah, the mother of the saviour rather than the saviour herself. The group of women eventually join forces with the Terminator that killed John, now calling itself ‘Carl’, in order to protect Dani from the Rev-9 Terminator that was sent back in time to kill her. Despite the twenty-eight years between the release of *Terminator 2* and *Dark Fate*, the films end with Sarah in a largely similar position: after Carl and Grace sacrifice themselves to end the threat of the Rev-9 (much in the same way as the T-800 sacrifices itself to ostensibly end the threat of Skynet in *Terminator 2*), Sarah falls into the role of once again becoming both maternal figure and military instructor to the future saviour of humanity against a rogue Artificial Intelligence (AI). A key difference between the two endings is that the new AI threat, Legion, is not destroyed by the end of *Dark Fate*, whereas *Terminator 2* saw Skynet - within the *Dark Fate* timeline - destroyed. Despite the differences in danger

presented to Sarah at the end of each film, her role is largely the same after their conclusion.

Also of note when considering the soft reboot is the ways in which media outside of the films is referenced (if it is acknowledged at all). Regarding the issue of 'erased' canon after Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm (and, in turn, the *Star Wars* franchise), *The Force Awakens* appears to make a variety of references to what has come to be referred to as 'Legends' content. Some of these, such as the knowledge that Luke Skywalker went on to train a new generation of Jedi after the events of *Star Wars: Episode VI -Return of the Jedi* (Marquand, 1983) could be seen as simply a logical continuation of the narrative. Others, however, appear to be more explicit nods to the previous continuity. Ben Solo (also known as Kylo Ren), the film's primary villain, shares key traits with Jacen Solo (later Darth Caedus), one of Han Solo and Leia Organa's children from the Legends continuity. Like Ben, Jacen fell to the dark side. Both trained under their Uncle Luke Skywalker, and both were handpicked by their dark side master due to their family's strong connection to the force. The similarities continue into *The Last Jedi*, as the film's climax sees Luke distract his nephew by employing the force to use astral projection, a feat similar to one Luke uses to aid Jaina Solo (Han and Leia's daughter in the Legends continuity) in her first duel with Caedus in *Legacy of the Force: Invincible* (Denning, 2008), confusing Caedus into believing that he was fighting Luke instead of his sister.

Moving past Ben and Jacen Solo, the sequel trilogy contains a variety of other key similarities with the Legends continuity, perhaps the most notable of these being the return of Emperor Palpatine/Darth Sidious. In both *The Rise of Skywalker* and the *Dark Empire* (Veitch, 1991) story arc, Palpatine returned after secretly surviving his apparent death in *Return of the Jedi* by transferring his essence into a clone body. Both stories saw Palpatine and his followers, from a stronghold strong in the dark side of the force, create a huge new fleet in secret with which he aimed to reconquer the galaxy (the Dark Empire and Final Order fleets respectively). Moreover, both fleets contained Star Destroyers capable of destroying entire planets, though the canon story saw the Final Order fleet constructed seemingly entirely of these ships, whilst the Dark Empire contained only the two *Eclipse* class Star Dreadnaughts.

What these similarities - whether they are deliberate references to prior source material or not - allow is for a greater variety of ways in which *The Force Awakens* and its sequels are able to play on the audience's feelings of nostalgia for previous *Star Wars* content. Though these references and outright incorporation of Legends material in the sequel trilogy are not always received well by the fanbase, they nevertheless provide an opportunity for fan appeasement by creating a sense of security surrounding the more popular elements of the previous expanded universe. The audience's feelings of nostalgia are targeted, though this time in a different way to soft reboots which incorporate ideas and characters from previous films; by making reference to material from the expanded universe, audiences are presented with concepts that are new to the cinematic universe whilst simultaneously providing a nostalgic thrill for the more 'hardcore' or dedicated fans familiar with the additional material outside of the films and television shows. For these fans, a sense of vindication is provided as the stories from the expanded universe are deemed worthy of being shown to the wider audience.

Through close textual analysis of a variety of soft reboots, this chapter has sought to recognise the key narrative and thematic tropes present in many soft reboots. As illustrated throughout the chapter, many of these attempt to honour the franchise's past whilst setting up the new actors and characters for future success. Passing of the torch moments and narratives are common in soft reboots, as the likes of Rey and Adonis Creed associate on-screen with franchise stars Luke Skywalker and Rocky Balboa respectively. Through their relationship on-screen, the new characters earn the approval of their (and the audience's) heroes, positioning them as figures that have received the blessing of our childhood heroes to replace them at the head of the franchise. However, the potential dangers of this reverence for the object of the audience's nostalgia on the part of the filmmakers is also elucidated, as the refusal or inability to pass the torch can result in the new material from the soft reboot being positioned as clearly inferior to what has come before. Whilst audiences may have the attitude that a new film cannot possibly compare to the original that they hold dear, soft reboots can also reflect this same attitude within the diegesis, ultimately failing to achieve a central goal of the soft reboot as a film mode: to set the franchise up for future success.

## ***Chapter Five: Reception***

The final key aspect of soft reboots that must be analysed is their reception. When considering how a film - particularly a franchise film - is received, it is often prudent to divide our analysis between audience and critics (though the general consensus among each group does not always differ). Whilst the critiques from film critics are often wide ranging and take into account a variety of aspects of the film - treating it as a text to be studied, much like in this dissertation's previous chapter - responses from fans of the film's associated franchise tend to focus far more on issues of narrative and character.

Another key area of criticism that is particularly associated with modern soft reboots relates to the issue of a perceived 'forced' politicisation of a film's franchise, often in the form of so-called 'woke' narratives and casting decisions. Some of the most financially successful film franchises which have been soft rebooted in recent years - particularly those that originated in the 1970s and 1980s - have moved away from male-dominated (often white male-dominated) casting and instead started to feature women and a variety of races aside from Caucasians in their franchise's key cast of characters. Of the twelve core soft reboots discussed throughout this thesis, the *Star Wars* and *Creed (Rocky)* franchises moved from a white male lead to a white female lead in the case of the former and a black male lead in the case of the latter; similarly, the *Terminator*, *Mad Max*, *Halloween* and *Star Trek* franchises all saw their respective soft reboots introduce more female characters of significance in comparison to the original films in their franchises.

As this chapter will elucidate more clearly in the appropriate subheading, the improved diversity in both hard and soft reboots has been met with backlash from certain groups; *Ghostbusters: Answer the Call* is perhaps the best-known example of this, as the gender-swapped hard reboot saw its first full trailer become the most disliked film trailer on YouTube upon its release (Shoard, 2016). Though it would be disingenuous to argue that all the criticism centred around the fact that the film starred four women, the film did become something of a microcosm for a 'culture war', a fact that was exacerbated when then-presidential hopeful Donald Trump criticised the film in 2015 for being

remade with “only women.” As a result of this, the film was viewed by some as a cultural battleground in the 2016 Presidential Election.

Furthermore, despite soft reboots often maintaining the entire existing canon of a franchise, they remain prone to accusations of ‘replacing’ white male leads with women or men of other races to make a political statement, disrespecting the franchise’s history and heritage (and, by the extension, the fans of the franchise) in favour of appealing to new fans via ‘political correctness.’ Curiously, this has resulted in small sections of a number of fanbases seemingly implying that the ‘true’ fans of their franchise reject the franchise being led by women on-screen.

### 5.1 - Retreading and Replacing

One of the most common criticisms found of soft reboots, particularly in fan circles, is that they share too many similarities with previous films in their franchise. Accusations of laziness, a lack of originality and excessive reliance on ‘nostalgia bait’ are all commonplace on forums such as Reddit and the comments section of various articles, YouTube videos and social media posts.

Writing on the issue of originality in *The Force Awakens*, Jonathan Gray detailed the range of audience and film critic critiques related to the film’s perceived lack of meaningful contribution to the saga:

The critique took on several forms, sometimes oozing contempt for fandom, writing the movie off as “fan service” or “fan fiction,” as if anything for fans could only be bad. Some such posts and reviews recycled the tired and insipid suggestion that anyone who enjoys a blockbuster Hollywood franchise film is a brainless sheep, grazing here in the pasture of Farmer Walt. Others were less unkind to audiences but instead framed themselves as aesthetic critiques, arguing that the film offered “nothing new” while wringing their hands about a culture of repetition. (Gray, 2019: 153)

Largely stemming from the narrative similarities between the film and *A New Hope*, *The Force Awakens* was reductively described as a remake of it the

franchise's first film. However, in a now-deleted video on the Cosmonaut Variety Hour YouTube channel entitled *It's Okay to Like The Force Awakens*, the case is put forth that the film is undeserving of the criticism regarding it "ripping off" *A New Hope* due to the differences in tone and significance applied to otherwise similar scenes:

"*The Force Awakens* shares its plot structure with *A New Hope*, yes...I just think it does it well. It diverges in enough areas to make it a unique experience. I didn't get the same feelings watching it as I do when I watch *A New Hope*. When I watched *The Force Awakens*, I enjoyed the familiarity. It's easy to drone on and say, "it's unoriginal", but if a movie is adapting similar circumstances but applying a different emotional context to it it's considered an homage." (The Cosmonaut Variety Hour, 2017: 5:05-5:32)

Shortly afterwards, the video goes into detail differentiating Luke and Rey, with key differences including Luke's desire to leave his home and the mystery surrounding Rey's origins:

"Luke is down on his luck, and he wants to move out of his parents' house and have fun. He's also supposed to be the everyman; we're supposed to put ourselves in his shoes. Rey is basically stranded and we aren't shown how she got to the planet or why she's there. Part of her also wants to stay where she is. It's the same as *A New Hope* narratively, but it gives us a different emotional context. We may relate to Rey and her struggle, but we're more interested in the mystery behind why she's here." (ibid: 5:36-6:01)

Marcus, the creator and narrator of the video, elaborates on various differences between *The Force Awakens* and *A New Hope*, arguing that if the soft reboot was a true rip-off or remake of the 1977 original then the key characters in *The Force Awakens* would clearly represent the protagonists of *A New Hope*: this, in his eyes, is not the case, as he instead argues that Rey is a direct inversion of Luke Skywalker in terms of personality, neither Finn nor Poe are analogues of Han Solo and there is no 'new' Princess Leia among the three new protagonists. Though the events taking place in each film can undoubtedly be viewed as

similar, the label of ‘rip-off’ is disingenuous as *The Force Awakens* presents the audience with an opportunity to see how completely different individuals from Luke, Han and Leia (meaning Rey, Finn and Poe in this instance; Han Solo is still, of course, Han Solo) react to similar trials and tribulations. Finn is perhaps the best example of this in practice, as his status as a Stormtrooper deserter causes him to attempt to flee the looming battles with the First Order. Han Solo in *A New Hope*, though undeniably an initially selfish individual, is seen rushing headlong into fights. Finn’s other potential counterpart, Luke Skywalker, contains youthful optimism and a yearning for adventure, whilst Finn seeks a quiet life far from danger.

Strongly related to the criticisms of rereading familiar ground and essentially ‘remaking’ an older film is the argument that the newer film exists as simply a weaker or less enjoyable version of what has come before. One of the main fan forums for the *Terminator* franchise, the r/Terminator subreddit, contains a host of posts from users detailing their issues with the recent films in the franchise, particularly *Dark Fate* and *Genisys*. A post asking, ‘Why do people hate dark fate so much?’ (u/WelcomeFormer, 2023) received a number of responses, with many comments stating that they felt the film was disrespectful to the history of the franchise by inserting a ‘new’ John Connor at the expense of the original:

John Connor may not have been the main character of the story, but he was an important one. Killing him off like that just to replace him and retell the same story but with a new person is lame. At least do something new. Furthermore [sic] it rendered T2 pointless which is just annoying. (u/Starryskies117, 2023)

Though the argument that *Terminator 2* is rendered pointless may seem excessive, as the film does not cease to exist in personal or indeed cultural memory simply because a new text has entered these spheres, the importance of certain texts such as the first two *Terminator* films related to William Proctor’s concept of ‘totemic nostalgia,’ which is useful to consider here to better understand this issue. Proctor argues that a ‘totemic object’ is a key cultural artifact from childhood to which individuals (generally films or a novel, film, franchise or other piece of media) can anchor their personality: ‘The



totemic object as a deified (and reified) icon of childhood, a nostalgic conduit with which to view the formation of social identity, formative memory and personal history.’ (Proctor, 2017: 1117) As a result of this importance to the fan’s sense of self, ‘Threats to the totemic object, then, can thus be felt as threats to self-identity, self-continuity, and self-narrative.’ (ibid: 1120) As a result, the threat of a new text - soft reboots, for our purposes - ‘overwriting’ the totemic object from cultural memory (such as *Dark Fate* becoming what people think of when, for example, *Terminator* is mentioned) is reacted to negatively, with pre-existing fans of the franchise seeking to protect the totemic object from cultural and canonical erasure.

Soft reboots which avoid the critique of ‘remaking’ an older film can still face criticism for an ‘inferior’ iteration of a character, however. Reviews for *Superman Returns*, though largely devoid of accusations of retreading the material of the first two *Superman* films, often focus on the performance of Brandon Routh. *Returns*, a soft reboot which takes place five years after the events of *Superman II* whilst ignoring the latter two sequels entirely, is situated firmly within the ‘Reeve-verse’. As a result, Brandon Routh’s performance as the Man of Steel was compared to that of Christopher Reeve, with both critics and audience members often noting that Routh was trying to emulate Reeve, with varying responses to this attempt. Rotten Tomatoes user Marc Z, reviewing the film on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2023, stated that ‘Brandon Routh is pretty good in the lead role; however, he clearly is doing an impersonation of Christopher Reeve.’ User James M was more critical, arguing that Routh lacked the necessary qualities for the role that Reeve portrayed so well: ‘Brandon Routh is somewhat OK as Clark Kent, but lacks the masculine charisma needed for the Superman character, qualities that made Christopher Reeve's version so great.’ These criticisms extended into the realm of noteworthy film critics as well, with Roger Ebert similarly noting Routh’s failings in the role:

Brandon Routh lacks charisma as Superman, and I suppose as Clark Kent, he isn't supposed to have any. Routh may have been cast because he looks a little like Reeve, but there are times when he looks more like an action figure. (Ebert, 2006)

Though we may again apply Proctor's concept of totemic nostalgia here, it seems disingenuous to assume that anyone deeming Routh's performance as inferior to Reeve's must view the original *Superman* films as key fixtures of their childhood, a prism through which their self-identity is measured.

What is apparent throughout these examples is that soft reboots, with their inescapable ties to franchise canon (which cannot be fully removed lest it shed its tag as a soft reboot) are consistently compared to other entries in their franchise. Whilst hard reboots may 'overwrite' franchise canon, replacing it with a fresh slate, soft reboots generally result in perceived instances of overwriting characters with the soft reboot's own creations whilst *both* still exist in the same canonical space. Returning to the *Dark Fate* example, Dani Ramos being written as the 'new' John Connor may be viewed as especially egregious to long-time *Terminator* fans as John is still part of the canon timeline's history.

## 5.2 - Mary Sue? Culture Wars and the Soft Reboot

Next, we must consider the discourse surrounding soft reboots and their perceived politics. Though these discussions are increasingly common regarding a wide variety of films, they are particularly prevalent when considering franchise films due to the ease with which comparisons can be made between the new instalment and the prior entries into the franchise. Soft reboots in particular incite discussion in this area due to the perception that they function as 'replacements' for the original films in the franchise, a fear often associated with franchises previously dominated by white male figures.

Returning once more to the work of Peter Gutiérrez, it is important to remember at this time that soft reboots aim to 'target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation.' Casts, narratives and themes are all often updated in order to better reflect contemporary society, diversifying various elements of the film in order to interest more potential viewers and to make fans feel represented on-screen. However, these progressive steps are often met with accusations of filmmakers trying to push an agenda rather than entertain their audience. A simple Google search of the words 'woke', and 'Hollywood' will result in a barrage of YouTube videos, articles, forum posts and blog posts discussing their issues with the film industry's perceived issue with

forced social commentary. Articles such as ‘Movies Where a Cultural Agenda Killed the Plot’ (Naidoo, 2023), though relatively tame in comparison to the thoughts put forth by fans not associated with a well-known website such as *Movieweb*, argue that films have failed because of the politics - overt or otherwise - of the film. Naidoo specifically lists *Dark Fate* in the article, noting that, “Serious fans of the franchise found it to be a sad masquerade of the *Terminator* movies, hijacking a beloved franchise through a glib attempt to unnecessarily politicise it.” (ibid) The politicisation of the franchise, one famous for its strong female lead character, was alleged to be an overtly and overly feminist agenda. Other films received similar criticism, ranging from the soft reboot of the *Charlie’s Angels* series (Banks, 2019) - a traditionally female-dominated franchise - to *The Force Awakens* and its sequels. Describing the increasingly toxic and politicised discourse surrounding the *Star Wars* franchise in the wake of the divisive *The Last Jedi*, Marc Benardin argued that much of the ‘anti-woke’ and ‘anti-social justice’ elements from the fandom came from trolls clinging to the nostalgia of their youth:

Some loved the bold liberties of writer-director Rian Johnson. They understood that there was room under that big tent for characters like Vice Admiral Holdo (Laura Dern) and Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran), women placed alongside Carrie Fisher’s Leia and Ridley’s Rey at the center of the *Star Wars* drama. But others hated it. Hated everything it stood for. Hated what they saw as a social justice warrior remix of the *Star Wars* they grew up with. And they hated Tran’s Rose most of all because they decided that she was the avatar for all that was wrong with the franchise. Those fans – a minority but a loud one – found their “them” in the very thing they used to love. (Benardin, 2018)

This ‘us versus them’ mentality has noticeably divided the fanbase, with the *r/saltierthancrait* subreddit being created just one day after the release of *The Last Jedi* in the United States. One of the top 5% largest communities on Reddit, this subreddit features discussions relating to the ‘current state of the franchise,’ with many of the most upvoted posts of all time on the subreddit either criticising or outright mocking elements of Disney’s *Star Wars*, particularly the Sequel Trilogy.

Perhaps the most common criticism for female-led films in recent years comes in the form of protagonists being described as Mary Sues. Per the Oxford English Dictionary, a Mary Sue is, ‘a type of idealised female character, typically a young woman, unrealistically lacking in flaws or weaknesses.’ However, the subjective nature of art, naturally, allows for disagreements surrounding perceived weaknesses or flaws that a character may possess. Writing for *Collider*, Kelcie Mattson argued that the term has evolved from a simple description of what was essentially a self-insert character appearing in fan fiction to a misogynistic ‘buzzword disguised as a legitimate critique’:

It's always been culturally acceptable for the heroic roles of the chosen one to default to fictional men. They're unquestionably the best of the best, the saviours of the world, perpetually skilled at everything necessary for their success and seducing every woman in their path. Few questioned (or still question) whether these depictions are realistic; if Luke and Bond are just too powerful, or if they worked hard enough to deserve said power...Using "Mary Sue" is an attempt to hide their sexism under the guise of protecting their fandoms from bad writing. (Mattson, 2023)

Concerns, sincere or not, regarding the ‘earned’ power or skill of a character often dominate the discourse around whether or not a female character fits the Mary Sue definition. Comparisons are made between alleged Mary Sues and similar male characters from their franchise, most notably in the case of Rey and Luke Skywalker. On his list of examples of recent Mary and Gary Sues, Ryan Christian includes Rey, describing her as ‘overwhelming gifted’ to the point that it negatively impacts on the rest of the cast of characters: ‘This competence ultimately overshadows the rest of the cast, even making them into dead weight when they are operating together.’ (Christian, 2023) However, Rey’s status as a Mary Sue is incredibly contentious, as Google searching her name along with the term Mary Sue will offer a litany of articles, videos and blog posts - such as *No, Rey From 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' Is Not A Mary Sue* (Kain, 2016), written shortly after the film’s release - explaining in detail why the heroine does not deserve the Mary Sue tag.

Future research in this area would prove valuable if it were to focus more on the reasons that soft reboots experience this backlash (aside from those instances where the answer is simply misogyny). For the purposes of this thesis, it was more important to illustrate that the films receive backlash relating to issues of casting and so-called ‘social justice’ or ‘woke’ narratives. However, an in-depth examination of the reasons why such casting decisions and narratives receive backlash - particularly considering the films within the context of their respective franchises - could illustrate whether this backlash is heightened for franchise films simply because there always other texts (in most cases, films) which the soft reboot will be compared to. Particularly, this could highlight any potential links between nostalgia and the dominance of white males in leading roles.

### 5.3 - This Will Begin to Make Things Right

Finally, we must consider those soft reboots that received praise for their efforts in franchise recalibration. The removal of entire films from the canon timeline, bringing the franchise ‘back to its roots’ and generally attempting to ‘fix’ or improve things have all been noteworthy elements that garnered praise within a number of soft reboots. *X-Men: Days of Future Past* was praised for the way in which the film ‘takes a cinematic eraser to some of the series’ low points.’ (Serafino, 2014) The film notably undid the events of every *X-Men* film at the time of its release aside from *X-Men: First Class* (Vaughn, 2011), retconning key events such as the unceremonious death of Cyclops and the tragic end of Jean Grey in *The Last Stand*. Another soft reboot of a less than universally loved film, *The Suicide Squad* was described as ‘redemption’ for DC: ‘After 2016’s ugly, bludgeoning “Suicide Squad,” I couldn’t imagine liking – and could barely stomach the idea of seeing – another movie called “Suicide Squad.” I’m delighted to be proven wrong.’ (Chang, 2019) *Superman Returns*, despite the criticism levelled at some of the performances in the film, was widely regarded as a vast improvement over the third and fourth instalments in the *Superman* franchise; *Superman Returns* wisely ignored the events of both of these films.

*The Suicide Squad* is perhaps the most unique example of the three listed above as it does not overtly change the *Suicide Squad* series in the way that *Superman*

*Returns* and *Days of Future Past* do with their franchises. No oft-derided material is removed from canon, no major change in direction was taken as the franchise moved forward. The 'fixing', simply put, was a result of a stronger film entering the series in the eyes of both audiences and critics. As this thesis first argued in the introduction, a soft reboot does not need to be a *Halloween 2018*-esque change to the franchise, removing everything but the foundations and ignoring anything which would taint or otherwise compromise the purity of the hallowed franchise being worked on.

Much of the discourse surrounding a soft reboot, as elucidated by this chapter, is often a result of comparing it with previous films in the film's franchise. This can be seen both positively - when the soft reboot is considered a vast improvement over the previous release in a franchise - and negatively. Soft reboots can be criticised narratively for containing too many similarities with previous films; similarly, the act of 'replacing' a legacy character with a new character that fulfils a similar role (such as Dani Ramos becoming the new saviour of humanity or Rey being the one to finally end the threat of the Sith) can be met with backlash. When considering these issues in conjunction with the backlash these films can receive for placing women in positions of power on-screen, the position of the soft reboot within the industry becomes more understandable: the soft reboot is able to provide the forward momentum within the franchise that a simple remake will generally fail to offer (as it will arrive at a similar end point as the film being remade) whilst still reassuring fans that the film will not stray so far from previous entries in the franchise that it alienates the audience (as in the case of many of the films that had to be 'erased' from franchise canon). However, as the soft reboot continues to evolve it is clear that the level of similarity between the original films and the soft reboots themselves has not been modulated correctly in many instances. The tension between offering fans a product that is familiar to them whilst simultaneously ensuring that the new product justifies its own existence outside of operating simply as a modernised version of a beloved classic is, undoubtedly, one of the key challenges faced by the makers of a soft reboot. Absolute authenticity to the original vision of the franchise seems to be paramount to many fans' enjoyment of a soft reboot; however, this can - evidently - come at the cost of significant progress.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this thesis at its inception was to argue for the wider use of the term 'soft reboot' within film studies and discussions to in order to accurately describe a film mode which has seen immense prominence within the film industry over the last decade. Existing terminology such as the legacy sequel, requel and nostalgia reboot all adequately describe a particular category of what I call the soft reboot, yet there was an absence of study into a group of reboots tied together by one key defining characteristic: the preservation of the canonicity of the first film in their respective franchises. Rather than narrowing the scope of this thesis' analysis, a wider umbrella term was used to better describe arguably the most increasingly common form of film reboot. By analysing films connected by, at the very least, this single characteristic, the soft reboot as a film mode could be examined at each stage of a film's life cycle, illustrating its inner workings and allowing for more definitive and accurate classification of both past and future reboots.

When examining the production stage, I conducted a study of behind-the-scenes material of the core twelve soft reboots used throughout this dissertation. The key findings of this study pertaining to the soft reboots were:

- The importance of legacy characters was discussed throughout many of the making-of documentaries. Their presence was discussed as a legitimising factor for the film being made, both for the fans and for the filmmakers themselves.
- Reverence for previous films in the franchise, particularly the first film, was highlighted in many instances. This was particularly noticeable in behind-the-scenes material for films being made by a director that did not direct the original film in the franchise (this was the case in most instances aside from the consistent presence of George Miller behind the *Mad Max* franchise). A concerted effort appeared to be made to present the filmmakers and actors working on the soft reboots as fans of the franchise they were working on, often noting the pressure of the huge responsibility placed on their shoulders by entering a beloved franchise.

- The future growth of the franchise, though often taking a back seat to the more nostalgic elements involved in the production, was nevertheless highlighted by showing the love held for the franchise by a wide variety of people involved in the making of the soft reboot. Relating to the concept of generational renewal, an effort seemed to be made to show that the franchise's future was 'in good hands.'
- Finally, the goal of bringing a franchise 'back to its roots' was emphasised throughout a variety of soft reboots' making-of documentaries. Rather than being expressed by those making a soft reboot which caused a level of erasure to take place within the canon of its franchise - such as 2018's *Halloween* soft reboot - this sentiment was shared by filmmakers working on legacy sequels with no canonical editing carried out at all. Often this related to the technical and production aspects of a film's creation, suggesting a desire to return to the 'right' way of doing things. As the soft reboot is inextricably linked to concepts of nostalgia, many of the making-of documentaries revealed a similar (fans would perhaps argue appropriate) level of reverence for the original source material behind a franchise, extending past the narrative into all facets of the film's creation.

Examination the promotion stage of the soft reboot was carried out in the form of a study of the teaser and theatrical trailers for this dissertation's core twelve soft reboots. My findings in this area were:

- Many soft reboot trailers built to a 'nostalgic return,' a key moment in the trailer that saw a legacy character (or ship in certain cases) return in order to garner interest from long-time and returning fans of the franchise.
- Teaser trailers were particularly full of nostalgic moments and references, with advertising for soft reboots appearing to prioritise a strong emphasis on the familiar and returning elements within the film before using the full length trailer to highlight the newer, original elements fans could expect to see in the film.



- New entries into a franchise with a confusing or messy canon, such as the *Halloween* and *Terminator* franchises that have each undergone a variety of reboots, prioritised highlighting the simplified canon that the new film follows. The purpose of this is to ensure returning or new fans are less confused as they enter (or re-enter) the franchise, as a soft reboot generally aims to function as a suitable new point of entry within the series.

My chapter focusing on textual analysis primarily analysed the ways in which soft reboots function as vehicles for nostalgia whilst simultaneously attempting to ‘pass the torch’ to the new generation of characters and actors. The key findings in this chapter were:

- Legacy characters, though potentially disruptive to the progress of new characters - as they risk overshadowing the newly introduced and thus less popular characters - were effective in passing the torch from one generation to the next, particularly their role was scaled back and allowed the new protagonist(s) to take centre stage within the narrative of the film.
- Killing legacy characters within a soft reboot often furthered the ability of new characters to become fitting replacements for the legacy characters. Both within the diegesis and from the perspective of fans, the new characters (and actors) are forced to assume greater responsibility.
- Filmmakers of soft reboots often employ a ‘rhyming’ structure between the soft reboot and the events of previous films in the franchise, particularly the most beloved or well received among the originals. This provides a ‘safe’ narrative structure that many fans will have responded well to in the past whilst also creating new heroes and villains that are comparable to others in the franchise, thus lowering the risk of incongruity for the new cast within the franchise’s landscape.

Finally, the reception chapter highlighted the more common issues that both fans and critics express over soft reboots. Accusations of repetition, ‘overwriting’ and generally creating an ‘inferior product’ to older films within the franchise were common, though other writers defended certain soft reboots in this area. The argument was made that it is reductive to call a reboot or sequel a mere ‘retread’ or remake when the intrigue within the film often comes from seeing how vastly different characters in terms of personality respond to circumstances the audience has seen before. More politically oriented criticism was levied at soft reboots for their perceived political correctness and focus on furthering social and political agendas, particularly regarding the issues of racial diversity on-screen and the presentation of women in major roles. Much of the criticism of the female leads, however, has been argued not to hold up when analysed alongside comparable male leads.

When considering the discourse around film reboots as a concept, there remains a great amount of scholarly uncertainty and disagreement. William Proctor, whose work on reboots is seminal and has proved incredibly influential on this thesis, continues to publish work that nevertheless contradicts the basis of the thesis itself: His 2023 book *Reboot Culture: Comics, Film, Transmedia* (Proctor, 2023) argues that legacy sequels, one of the most common types of soft reboot, do not fit the ‘reboot’ tag as ‘they unambiguously function as continuations, regardless of the belatedness between instalments, and therefore should not be viewed as reboots at all.’ (Proctor, 2023: pp 45) Furthermore, Proctor reiterates his statement from his previous work that ‘the core of the reboot concept is that it does not continue, illustrating that conflating sequels with reboots establishes a contradiction-in-terms, between distinct narrative temporalities, between continuity and discontinuity.’ (ibid: pp 46) Clearly, Proctor’s view of the reboot is at odds with the view posited by this thesis; whilst Proctor believes that a reboot cannot continue a franchise’s continuity, the key unifying characteristic of all soft reboots that is laid out throughout this dissertation is that they *must* maintain some amount of their franchise’s canon (in many cases this means that only the events of the first film in a franchise remain canon), even if that canon is ‘parallel’ to the soft rebooted film’s timeline as in the case of films such as 2009’s *Star Trek*. As a result of this, attempting to position the soft reboot within current academic discourse surrounding reboots can be challenging as

some academics argue that soft reboots do not exist, instead often functioning as sequels which alter their franchise's canon (aside from the sequel's axiomatic function of extending or adding to franchise canon).

Nevertheless, 'soft reboot' as an academic term continues to prove useful as a way of better understanding the way in which many modern franchise films operate (both diegetically and non-diegetically). 'Soft reboot', as this thesis has illustrated, is an umbrella term; the previous binary between reboots and sequels has continued to erode as writers and studios seek to utilise the audience's nostalgia both for beloved characters from their past and the actors that portrayed those characters. Furthermore, Proctor's delineation between sequels and reboots fails to properly address more complicated cases such as *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, a film which is, undoubtedly, a sequel yet also 'wipes the slate clean', neutralising the canonicity of many of the *X-Men* films it operated as a continuation of. In cases like this, the introduction of 'soft reboot' into more commonplace academic terminology would serve to better capture the various functions that the film is able to serve: a continuation of the original *X-Men* franchise, a continuation of the prequel films starring the younger cast and a reboot which eliminates some of the franchise's more controversial decisions, particularly the death of Jean Grey in *X-Men: The Last Stand*. The value of this (relatively) new term within academia is highlighted in instances such as this.

Future research in the field of soft reboots could be conducted using more textual and critical analysis of films that fit the soft reboot tag. This thesis, though it does contain a breadth of research conducted into the core twelve soft reboots, had the primary purpose of explaining what a soft reboot is and how it operates both industrially and textually, as well as examining some of the key areas of criticism and praise that these films receive from both general audiences and from film critics. Thus, it does not contain an extreme level of focus on a single text or franchise. As a result of this, it could be argued that the thesis lacks examination of the unique nuances within each of the soft reboots examined.

Audience studies also presents an opportunity for a variety of future research in this field. Though complaints and aspects of praise were examined in the reception chapter, future research could expand the scope of this element of the thesis to include interviews with members of the audience. This research could perhaps contrast existing 'hardcore' fans of a franchise with more casual or even non-fans, examining their differing responses to the texts.

Finally, an ideal improvement to the production section of this thesis would be to arrange interviews with writers of soft reboots. Though their thought processes have been examined in interviews contained within this dissertation, firsthand interviews may result in more detailed explanations of their writing process. Instructions given to them regarding targeted or weaponised nostalgia would also be illuminating should these be able to be shared, as it would further the examination of the soft reboot as a carefully crafted artifact, allowing for a greater understanding of the extent to which elements within these films are - perhaps cynically - included purely for nostalgia rather than any narrative or thematic significance.

## Bibliography

Adalian, J. (2015). 'Full House, Coach, The X-Files: Why TV Remakes Are Everywhere Right Now', *Vulture*. 8<sup>th</sup> of April. Available at:

<https://www.vulture.com/2015/04/tv-remake-full-house-coach-x-files.html>

(Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2023)

'An Audience With The King: James Cameron Interviewed By Hollywood's Finest', *Empire*. 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2022. Available at:

[https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/an-audience-with-the-king-](https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/an-audience-with-the-king-james-ronald-koenig-interviewed-by-hollywoods-finest/)

[james-ronald-koenig-interviewed-by-hollywoods-finest/](https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/an-audience-with-the-king-james-ronald-koenig-interviewed-by-hollywoods-finest/) (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Beddington, E. (2022). 'From Gogglebox to TikTok reaction videos, what's behind the rise in watching people watching people on screen?', *The Guardian*. 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. Available at:

[https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/aug/03/from-gogglebox-](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/aug/03/from-gogglebox-to-tiktok-reaction-videos-whats-behind-the-rise-in-watching-people-watching-people-on-screen)

[to-tiktok-reaction-videos-whats-behind-the-rise-in-watching-people-watching-people-on-screen](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/aug/03/from-gogglebox-to-tiktok-reaction-videos-whats-behind-the-rise-in-watching-people-watching-people-on-screen) (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Berlatsky, N. (2019). 'Feminists with a bullet: how the ageing heroine became screen gold', *The Guardian*. 30<sup>th</sup> of May. Available at:

[https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/may/30/action-heroines-linda-](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/may/30/action-heroines-linda-hamilton-terminator#:~:text=Sixty%2Dtwo%2Dyear%2Dold,%2Dstars%2C%20often%20by%20decades.)

[hamilton-terminator#:~:text=Sixty%2Dtwo%2Dyear%2Dold,%2Dstars%2C%20often%20by%20decades.](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/may/30/action-heroines-linda-hamilton-terminator#:~:text=Sixty%2Dtwo%2Dyear%2Dold,%2Dstars%2C%20often%20by%20decades.) (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2023)

Bernardin, M. (2018). 'Toxic Fandom Is Killing 'Star Wars'' *Hollywood Reporter*.

11<sup>th</sup> of June. Available at: [https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-](https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/solo-box-office-results-kelly-marie-tran-harassment-show-star-wars-has-a-fan-problem-1118898/)

[news/solo-box-office-results-kelly-marie-tran-harassment-show-star-wars-has-a-fan-problem-1118898/](https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/solo-box-office-results-kelly-marie-tran-harassment-show-star-wars-has-a-fan-problem-1118898/) (Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Breznican, A. (2015). 'Star Wars The Force Awakens: J.J. Abrams explains R2-D2's closing scene', *Entertainment Weekly*. 20<sup>th</sup> of December. Available at:

[https://ew.com/article/2015/12/20/jj-abrams-answers-burning-question-about-](https://ew.com/article/2015/12/20/jj-abrams-answers-burning-question-about-r2-d2-star-wars-force-)

[r2-d2-star-wars-force-](https://ew.com/article/2015/12/20/jj-abrams-answers-burning-question-about-r2-d2-star-wars-force-)

[awakens/#:-:text=%E2%80%9CIt%20just%20felt%20like%20every,%E2%80%9D](#)

(Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2022)

Burnett, D. (2016). 'Your film has ruined my childhood! Why nostalgia trumps logic on remakes', *The Guardian*. 1<sup>st</sup> of June. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2016/jun/01/your-film-has-ruined-my-childhood-why-nostalgia-trumps-logic-on-remakes#:~:text=This%20makes%20logical%20sense%2C%20but,the%20fans%20will%20be%20upset.> (Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2021)

Chang, J. (2021). 'Review: James Gunn's 'The Suicide Squad' proves there's life after 'Suicide Squad' *LA Times*. 28<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at:

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2021-07-28/the-suicide-squad-review-hbomax-margot-robbie-james-gunn> (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Chichizola, C. (2018). 'Why Laurie Strode And Michael Myers Won't Be Siblings In The New Halloween', *Cinema Blend*. 8<sup>th</sup> of June. Available at

<https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2431570/why-laurie-strode-and-michael-myers-wont-be-siblings-in-the-new-halloween> (Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2022)

Christian, R. (2023). 'Top 9 Mary and Gary Sues in Recent Films' *Movieweb*. 24<sup>th</sup> of May. Available at: <https://movieweb.com/mary-gary-sue-movie-characters/#rey-mdash-star-wars-sequel-trilogy> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2023)

Denning, T. (2008). *Legacy of the Force: Invincible*. New York City: Del Rey

Desowitz, B. (2015). 'Why J.J. Abrams and His Crew Went Back to 1977 for 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'', *IndieWire*. 13<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at:

<https://www.indiewire.com/features/general/why-j-j-abrams-and-his-crew-went-back-to-1977-for-star-wars-the-force-awakens-186278/> (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2023)

- Ebert, R. (2006). 'Superman Returns movie review' *RogerEbert.com*. 26<sup>th</sup> of June. Available at: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/superman-returns-2006> (Accessed 28th of September 2023)
- Evans, N. (2010). 'Undoing the magic? DVD extras and the pleasure behind the scenes' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4. pp 587-600
- Evans, N. (2018). 'John Carpenter Was Drunk When He Came Up With Halloween II's Sibling Twist', *CinemaBlend*. 17<sup>th</sup> of October. Available at: <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2459651/john-carpenter-was-drunk-when-he-came-up-with-halloween-iis-sibling-twist#:~:text=I%20think%20it%20was%2C%20perhaps,in%20an%20altered%20mental%20state>. (Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)
- Finsterwalder, J. Kuppelwieser, V. and de Villiers, M. (2012) 'The effects of film trailers on shaping consumer expectations in the entertainment industry—A qualitative analysis', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol. 19, 6. pp 589-595
- Fleury, J. Hartzheim, B. H. and Mamber, S. (2019). 'Introduction: The Franchise Era' in Fleury, J. Hartzheim, B. H. and Mamber, S.(ed.), *The Franchise Era: Managing Media in the Digital Economy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp 21-62
- Foundas, S. (2012) 'Cinematic Faith', *Film Comment*. Available at: <https://www.filmcomment.com/article/cinematic-faith-christopher-nolan-scott-foundas/> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2022)
- Gil, S. (2014). 'A Remake by Any Other Name: Use of a Premise Under a New Title' in Lavigne, C. (ed.), *Remake Television: Reboot, Reuse, Recycle*. Toronto: Lexington Books, pp. 21-36.
- Golding, D. (2019). *Star Wars after Lucas: A Critical Guide to the Future of the Galaxy*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press

- Golding, D. (2022). 'Star Wars Fans, Generations, and Identity', in Connor, M. and Kies, B. (ed.) *Fandom: The Next Generation*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press. pp 135-148
- Graser, M. (2014) '“Star Wars’ Theme Park Attractions to Be Based on New Films, Not Old’, *Variety*. 10<sup>th</sup> of December. Available at: <https://variety.com/2014/biz/news/star-wars-theme-park-attractions-to-be-based-on-new-films-not-old-1201376154/> (Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2023).
- Gray, J. (2019). "“Always Two There Are”": Repetition, Originality , and *The Force Awakens*'. in Proctor, W. and McCulloch, R. (ed.) *Disney’s Star Wars: Forces of Production, Promotion and Reception*. pp 153-166
- Gutiérrez, P. (2012) 'Remakes and Reboots Revisited' *Screen Education*, Vol. 64. pp. 46-51.
- Herbert, D and Verevis, C. (2020). *Film Reboots*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp 1-16.
- Hight, C. 2005. 'Making-of Documentaries on DVD: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and Special Editions. *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 56, Fall 2005: pp 4-17.
- IGN. (2021). *The Suicide Squad - Exclusive Trailer Breakdown with Director James Gunn*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNZC053cr6A&t=1s> (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)
- James M. (2021). Re: 'Superman Returns Reviews', *Rotten Tomatoes*. 22<sup>nd</sup> of August. Available at: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman\\_returns/reviews?type=user](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_returns/reviews?type=user) (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)
- Jameson, A. D. (2018). *I Find Your Lack of Faith Disturbing: Star Wars and the Triumph of Geek Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. pp 161-183



Lizardi, R. (2015). *Mediated nostalgia: Individual memory and contemporary mass media*. Lanham: Lexington Books. pp 6

Loock, K. (2016). "Retro-Remaking: The 1980s Film Cycle in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema," in Klein, A. and Palmer, R. *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots: Multiplicities in Film and Television*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016, pp. 277-298

Loock, K. (2020). 'Reboot, Requel, Legacyquel: *Jurassic World* and the Nostalgia Franchise' in Herbert, D and Verevis, C. (ed.), *Film Reboots*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp 173-188.

Lopez, J. (2015). 'The Force Awakens Box Office: Star Wars Is Bigger than Ever', *Vanity Fair*. 21<sup>st</sup> of December. Available at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/12/star-wars-force-awakens-box-office-totals> (Accessed 12th of April 2023)

Luke Eclipse-Ujano. (2015). *Daisy Ridley and John Boyega Reacts Side by Side to Official Trailer* [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXQBEBAoXjs&t=1s> (Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Kain, E. (2016). 'No, Rey From 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' Is Not A Mary Sue', *Forbes*. 4<sup>th</sup> of January. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2016/01/04/no-rey-from-star-wars-the-force-awakens-is-not-a-mary-sue/> (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Kernan, L. (2004). *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers*. Austin: University of Texas Press. pp 1-35

Konrad, Jeremy. (2018). 'Laurie Strode is Not Michael Myers Sister For a Reason in New Halloween Film', *Bleeding Cool*. 27<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at: <https://bleedingcool.com/movies/laurie-strode-michael-myers-sister-nope-new-halloween/> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2023)

Malas, R. (2023). 'The Film From 2016 That's Already Been Remade 24 Times' *Collider*. 21<sup>st</sup> of January. Available at: <https://collider.com/perfect-strangers-remakes/> (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2023)

Mattson, Kelcie. (2023). 'When Did the Idea of a Mary Sue Become Sexist?', *Collider*. 24<sup>th</sup> of February. Available at: <https://collider.com/mary-sue-sexist-rey/> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2023)

Marc Z. (2023). Re: 'Superman Returns Reviews', *Rotten Tomatoes*. 29<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman\\_returns/reviews?type=user](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/superman_returns/reviews?type=user) (Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2023).

McGovern, J. (2015). 'Colin Trevorrow on 'Jurassic World's monster star Indominus Rex'. *Entertainment Weekly*. 25<sup>th</sup> of May. Available at: <https://ew.com/article/2015/05/25/meet-new/#:~:text=COLIN%20TREVORROW%3A%20No%2C%20it's%20not,%2C%20faster%2C%20louder%2C%20better.> (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour*. New York: Oxford University Press

Mittell, J. (2016). 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television', *The Velvet Light Trap*, Vol. 58. Fall 2006, pp. 29-40

Moulton, C. (2018). "'Announcement" Trailers & The Inter-Temporality of Hollywood Blockbusters', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 22, 2. Pp 434-449

Naidoo, N. (2023). 'Movies Where a Cultural Agenda Killed the Plot' *Movieweb*. 16<sup>th</sup> of February. Available at: <https://movieweb.com/woke-movies-cultural-agenda/> (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Nerdwriter1. (2016). *Intertextuality: Hollywood's New Currency* [Online video]. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeAKX\\_0wZWY&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeAKX_0wZWY&t=1s) (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2022)

O'Connell, S. (2019) 'ReelBlend #90 - Our Interview With Terminator: Dark Fate Director Tim Miller', *CinemaBlend*. 31<sup>st</sup> of October. Available at: <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2483575/reelblend-90---our-interview-with-terminator-dark-fate-director-tim-miller> (Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Paramount Movies. (2012). *Star Trek - Trailer*. [Online video]. 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGAHnZ555nI&t=31s> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Paramount Pictures. (2019). *Terminator: Dark Fate - Official Teaser Trailer (2019)*. [Online video]. 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCyEX6u-Yhs&t=80s> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Pascale, A. (2019). 'Interview: Roberto Orci Talks Writing 2009's 'Star Trek' And The Roads Not Taken', *TrekMovie.com*. 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2019. Available at: <https://trekmovie.com/2019/05/09/interview-roberto-orci-talks-talks-writing-2009s-star-trek-and-the-roads-not-taken/> (Accessed 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2022)

Philip, T. (2019). 'Summer '19 Brought To You By Nostalgia-Bait Movies', *New York Times*. 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/opinion/hollywood-movies.html> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2023)

Proctor, W. (2012), 'Regeneration and Rebirth: Anatomy of the Franchise Reboot', *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, Vol. 22 (February), pp. 1-19

Proctor, W. (2017). "Bitches Ain't Gonna Hunt No Ghosts": Totemic Nostalgia, Toxic Fandom and the *Ghostbusters* Platonic. *Palabra Clave* Vol. 20, 4. pp 1105-1141

Proctor, W. (2017) 'Reboots and Retroactive Continuity' in Wolf, M. (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*. New York: Routledge, pp. 224-235

Proctor, W. (2023) *Reboot Culture: Comics, Film, Transmedia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

r/saltierthancrait. (2017). *Reddit*. 16<sup>th</sup> of December 2017. Available at: <https://www.reddit.com/r/saltierthancrait/top/?t=all> (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

REACT. (2010). *Kids React to Viral Videos (Double Rainbow, Obama Fail, Twin Rabbits, Snickers Halloween)*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDEQ6wmt8x0> (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

RedLetterMedia. (2015). *Mr. Plinkett's Star Trek 2009 Review (part 1 of 2)*. [Online video]. 27<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiHnqv098LY> (Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2022)

Rotten Tomatoes Classic Trailers. (2020). *Halloween H20: 20 Years Later (1998) Trailer #1 | Movieclips Classic Trailers*. [Online video]. 29<sup>th</sup> of October. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKJCTI-967E> (Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2023)

Rotten Tomatoes Trailers. (2015). *Terminator: Genisys Official Trailer #2 (2015) - Arnold Schwarzenegger Movie HD*. [Online video]. 13<sup>th</sup> of April. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNU\\_jrPxs-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNU_jrPxs-0) (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2022).

Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury Childrens Books.

Rubin, S. (1995). *The Complete James Bond Movie Encyclopaedia*. New York: McGraw Hill

Rubin, R. (2020) 'Global Box Office Hits New Record in 2019 With \$42.5 Billion' *Variety*. 10<sup>th</sup> of January. Available at: <https://variety.com/2020/film/box-office/box-office-us-misses-record-disney-dominates-1203453752/> (Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2021)

Rubin, R. (2020) "'Star Wars: Rise of Skywalker' Hits \$1 Billion Globally, But Trails Predecessors', *Variety*. 15<sup>th</sup> of January. Available at: <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/star-wars-rise-of-skywalker-billion-dollars-box-office-1203456857/> (Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2021)

Serafino, J. (2014) 'Five Ways "X-Men: Days of Future Past" Fixes the Franchise's Previous Mistakes' *Complex*. 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. Available at: <https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/a/jason-serafino/five-ways-x-men-days-of-future-past-fixes-the-franchises-mistakes> (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Sellin-Blanc, J. (2019). 'Priming the Multiverse: Contextualising the Kelvin Timeline Through Gene Roddenberry's Original Narrative' in Kapell, M and Pilkington, A. (ed.) *The Kelvin Timeline of Star Trek: Essays on J.J. Abrams' Final Frontier*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, pp 144-159.

Shoard, C. (2016). 'Ghostbusters trailer is most disliked in YouTube history'. *The Guardian*. 2<sup>nd</sup> of May. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/may/02/ghostbusters-trailer-most-disliked-in-youtube-history> (Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2024)

Star Wars. (2012). *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace - Trailer*. [Online video]. 6<sup>th</sup> of July. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bD7bpG-zDJQ> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2023)

Star Wars. (2014). *The Beginning: Making Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace (Full Version)*. [Online video]. 5<sup>th</sup> of April. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=da8s9m4zEpo&t=204s> (Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2023)

Star Wars. (2014). *Star Wars: The Force Awakens Official Teaser*. [Online video] 28<sup>th</sup> of November. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erLk59H86ww> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Star Wars. (2015). *Star Wars: The Force Awakens Official Teaser #2*. [Online video]. 16<sup>th</sup> of April. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngElkyQ6Rhs> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Star Wars. (2015). *Star Wars: The Force Awakens Trailer (Official)*. [Online video]. 20<sup>th</sup> of October. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGbxmsDFVnE> (Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2023)

Swan, A. (2018). 'Transnational Identities and Feeling in Fandom: Place and Embodiment in K-pop Fan Reaction Videos.' *Communication, Culture and Critique* Vol. 11, no. 4 (December), pp. 548-565.

Taylor, D. (2022). '“Spider-Man: No Way Home” Screenwriters on Wrangling the Superhero Epic', *The Wrap*. 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Available at:

<https://www.thewrap.com/spider-man-no-way-home-ending-writers-interview-chris-mckenna-erik-sommers/> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2022)

The Cosmonaut Variety Hour. (2017). *It's Okay to Like The Force Awakens*. [Online video]. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PurebGAtDUE&t=623s> (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

The Jonathan Ross Show. (2021). *Ewan McGregor Shares Hilarious Green Screen Story!*. [Online video]. 17<sup>th</sup> of November. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-z13BALb48> (Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2023)

The Stupendous Wave. (2015). *Star Wars: Episode 7 The Force Awakens Top 5 Kylo Ren Theories*. [Online video]. 4<sup>th</sup> of November. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppjCLRj8DAs> (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2023)

The Trailer Guy. (2011). *Star Trek (2009) - Teaser Trailer*. [Online video]. 21<sup>st</sup> of January. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkZFWr0vR8Q> (Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2023)

Tompkins, J. (2014). 'Re-imagining' the canon: examining the discourse of contemporary horror film reboots', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 12, no. 4 (October), pp 380-99.

Universal Pictures. (2018). *Halloween - Official Trailer*. [Online video]. 8<sup>th</sup> of June. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ek1ePFp-nBl> (Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2023)

Urbanski, H. (2013). *The Science Fiction Reboot: Canon, Innovation and Fandom in Refashioned Franchises*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, pp 13-37.

u/WelcomeFormer. (2023). 'Why do people hate dark fate so much?', *Reddit*. 6<sup>th</sup> of April. Available at: [https://www.reddit.com/r/Terminator/comments/12dmfvq/why\\_do\\_people\\_hate\\_dark\\_fate\\_so\\_much/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Terminator/comments/12dmfvq/why_do_people_hate_dark_fate_so_much/) (Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2023)

Vary, A. (2021), 'Spider-Man: No Way Home' Screenwriters Explain All Those Surprises and Spoilers: 'This Wasn't Just Fan Service'', *Variety*. 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2021. Available at: <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/spider-man-no-way-home-spoilers-tobey-maguire-andrew-garfield-aunt-may-1235144617/> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2022)

Veitch, T. (2010) *Dark Empire Trilogy*. Milwaukie: Dark Horse Comics

Verevis, C. (2017), 'Remakes, Sequels, Prequels', in Leitch, T. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 267-84.

X-Men Movies. (2013). *X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST - Official Trailer (2014)*.  
[Online video]. 29<sup>th</sup> of October. Available at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK2zYHWDZKo> (Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of July 2023)

Warner Bros. Pictures. (2021). *The Suicide Squad - Official Red Band Trailer*.  
[Online video]. 26<sup>th</sup> of March. Available at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1EbSXrZ34> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2023)



## Filmography

A Star is Born. [DVD]. Dir. David O. Selznick. Selznick International Pictures. United States. 1937. 111 minutes.

Batman. [DVD]. Dir. Tim Burton. Warner Bros. United States. 1989. 126 minutes.

Batman Begins. [DVD]. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros. Pictures. United States. 2005. 140 minutes.

Batman & Robin. [DVD]. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Warner Bros. United States. 1997. 125 minutes.

Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn). [DVD]. Dir. Cathy Yan. DC Studios. United States. 2020. 109 minutes.

Blade Runner 2049. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Denis Villeneuve. Alcon Entertainment. United States. 2017. 163 minutes.

Captain Marvel. [DVD]. Dir. Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck. Marvel Studios. United States. 2019. 124 minutes.

Casino Royale. [DVD], Dir. Martin Campbell. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. United Kingdom. 2006. 144 minutes.

Charlie's Angels. [DVD]. Dir. Elizabeth Banks. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2019. 118 minutes.

Creed. [DVD]. Dir. Ryan Coogler. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. United States. 2015. 133 minutes.

Creed III. [DVD]. Dir. Michael B. Jordan. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. United States. 2023. 116 minutes.

Ghostbusters. [DVD]. Dir. Ivan Reitman. Columbia-Delphi Productions. United States. 1984. 105 minutes.

Ghostbusters: Answer the Call. [DVD]. Dir. Paul Feig. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2016. 116 minutes.

Gogglebox. [Online]. Channel 4. United Kingdom. 2013-.

Halloween. [DVD]. Dir. David Gordon Green. Miramax. United States. 2018. 106 minutes.

Halloween. [DVD]. Dir. John Carpenter. Compass International Pictures. United States. 1978. 91 minutes.

Halloween II. [DVD]. Dir. Rick Rosenthal. Dino De Laurentiis Corporation. United States. 1981. 92 minutes.

Halloween III: Season of the Witch. [DVD]. Dir. Tommy Lee Wallace. Dino De Laurentiis Corporation. United States. 1982. 99 minutes.

Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers. [DVD]. Dir. Dwight H. Little. Trancas International. United States. 1988. 88 minutes.

Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers. [DVD]. Dir. Dominique Othenin-Girard. Trancas International. United States. 1989. 96 minutes.

Halloween H20: 20 Years Later. [DVD]. Dir. Steve Miner. Dimension Films. United States. 1998. 86 minutes.

Halloween: Resurrection. [DVD]. Dir. Rick Rosenthal. Dimension Films. United States. 2002. 90 minutes.

Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers [DVD]. Dir. Joe Chappelle. Dimension Films. United States. 1995. 87 minutes.

John Wick: Chapter 4. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Chad Stahelski. Summit Entertainment. United States. 2023. 169 minutes.

Jurassic Park. [DVD]. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures. United States. 1993. 127 minutes.

Jurassic Park III. [DVD]. Dir. Joe Johnston. Amblin Entertainment. United States. 2001. 92 minutes.

Jurassic World. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Colin Trevorrow. Amblin Entertainment. United States. 2015. 124 minutes.

Jurassic World Dominion. [DVD]. Dir. Colin Trevorrow. Amblin Entertainment. United States. 2022. 146 minutes.

Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom. [DVD]. Dir. Colin Trevorrow. Amblin Entertainment. United States. 2018. 128 minutes.

Mad Max. [DVD]. Dir. George Miller. Kennedy Miller Productions. Australia. 1979. 93 minutes.

Mad Max 2. [DVD]. Dir. George Miller. Kennedy Miller Entertainment. Australia. 1981. 96 minutes.

Mad Max: Fury Road. [Blu-ray]. Dir. George Miller. Village Roadshow Pictures. Australia. 2015. 120 minutes.

Perfect Strangers. [DVD]. Dir. Paolo Genovese. Medusa Film. Italy. 2016. 97 minutes.

Rocky. [DVD]. Dir. John Guiltbert Avildsen. Chartoff-Winkler Productions. United States. 1976. 119 minutes.

Rocky IV. [DVD]. Dir. Sylvester Stallone. United Artists. United States. 1985. 91 minutes.

Scream. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett. Spyglass Media Group. United States. 2022. 114 minutes.

Scream VI. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett. Spyglass Media Group. United States. 2023. 122 minutes.

Shazam! Fury of the Gods. [DVD]. Dir. David F. Sandberg. DC Studios. United States. 130 minutes.

Spectre. [DVD]. Dir. Sam Mendes. Eon Productions. United Kingdom. 2015. 148 minutes.

Spider-Man. [DVD]. Dir. Sam Raimi. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2002. 121 minutes.

Spider-Man 2. [DVD]. Dir. Sam Raimi. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2004. 127 minutes.

Spider-Man 3. [DVD]. Dir. Sam Raimi. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2007. 139 minutes.

Spider-Man: No Way Home. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Jon Watts. Marvel Studios. United States. 2021. 148 minutes.

Star Trek. [DVD]. Dir. J.J. Abrams. Bad Robot Productions. United States. 2009. 127 minutes.

Star Trek: Discovery. [Online]. CBS. United States. 2017-.

Star Trek: Enterprise. [DVD]. United Paramount Network. United States. 2001-2005.

Star Wars. [Blu-ray]. Dir. George Lucas. Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 1977. 121 minutes

Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace. [Blu-ray]. Dir. George Lucas. Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 1999. 133 minutes.

Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones. [Blu-ray]. Dir. George Lucas. Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 2002. 142 minutes.

Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith. [Blu-ray]. Dir. George Lucas.  
Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 2005. 140 minutes.

Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Irvin Kershner.  
Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 1980. 124 minutes.

Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Richard Marquand.  
Lucasfilm Ltd. United States. 1983. 132 minutes.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens. [Blu-ray]. Dir. J.J. Abrams. Lucasfilm Ltd. United  
States. 2015. 135 minutes.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Rian Johnson. Lucasfilm Ltd. United  
States. 2017. 152 minutes.

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker. [Blu-ray]. Dir. J.J. Abrams. Lucasfilm Ltd.  
United States. 2019. 142 minutes.

Suicide Squad. [DVD]. Dir. David Ayer. Warner Bros. Pictures. United States.  
2016. 123 minutes.

Superman. [DVD]. Dir. Richard Donner. Dovemead Ltd. United States. 1978. 143  
minutes.

Superman II. [DVD]. Dir. Dir. Richard Lester. Dovemead Ltd. United States. 1981.  
127 minutes.

Superman III. [DVD]. Dir. Richard Lester. Dovemead Ltd. United States. 1983.  
125 minutes.

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace. [DVD]. Dir. Sidney J. Furie. Cannon Films.  
United States. 1987. 90 minutes.

Superman Returns. [DVD]. Dir. Bryan Singer. Legendary Pictures. United States.  
2006. 154 minutes.

Terminator 2: Judgment Day. [DVD]. Dir. James Cameron. Carolco Pictures. United States. 1991. 137 minutes.

Terminator: Dark Fate. [DVD]. Dir. Tim Miller. Paramount Pictures. United States. 2019. 128 minutes.

Terminator Genisys. [DVD]. Dir. Alan Taylor. Skydance Productions. United States. 2015. 126 minutes.

Terminator Salvation. [DVD]. Dir. McG. The Halcyon Company. United States. 2009. 115 minutes.

The Dark Knight. [DVD]. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros. Pictures. United States. 2008. 152 minutes.

The Dark Knight Rises. [DVD]. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros. Pictures. United States. 2012. 165 minutes.

The Amazing Spider-Man. [DVD]. Dir. Marc Webb. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2012. 136 minutes.

The Amazing Spider-Man 2. [DVD]. Dir. Marc Webb. Columbia Pictures. United States. 2014. 142 minutes.

The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies. [DVD]. Dir. Peter Jackson. New Line Cinema. New Zealand. 2014. 144 minutes.

The Suicide Squad. [Blu-ray]. Dir. James Gunn. DC Studios. United States. 2021. 132 minutes.

The Terminator. [DVD]. Dir. James Cameron. Pacific Western Productions. United States. 1984.

The Wolverine. [DVD]. Dir. James Mangold. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2013. 126 minutes.

Watchmen. [DVD]. Dir. Zack Snyder. Warner Bros. Pictures. United States. 2009. 163 minutes.

X2. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Bryan Singer. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2003. 134 minutes.

X-Men. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Bryan Singer. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2000. 104 minutes.

X-Men: Days of Future Past. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Bryan Singer. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2014. 132 minutes.

X-Men: First Class. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Matthew Vaughn. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2011. 131 minutes.

X-Men: The Last Stand. [Blu-ray]. Dir. Brett Ratner. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. United States. 2006. 104 minutes.