

Mark
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THE BEST FILMS OF THE DECADE:

MAD MAX FURY ROAD

After thirty years is it possible to meet expectations, let alone exceed them? Truth be told, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) warranted no sequel. Though arguably the weakest of the trilogy, especially shadowing *Mad Max 2* (1981) or *The Road Warrior* as it's titled in the states—a film often heralded as one of the greatest action films of all time, it was a surprisingly heartfelt and bittersweet send-off to an iconic (anti)hero.

In 1985 Mel Gibson was on the cusp of international recognition and, though it was a role that aided in his celebrity, his lack of investment in the part was obvious on screen. It didn't help that the series' creator, George Miller, had also lost interest midway through *Thunderdome's* production (his collaborator and friend Byron Kennedy, of which the film is dedicated, died in a tragic helicopter accident) and co-directed only the more “kinetic” elements of the film.

Despite its lulls, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* was a fitting end to an unforgettable series. And given the excessive amount of influence, emulation, and blatant rip-offs that Miller's post-apocalyptic saga gave us over the decades (*Waterworld* (1994) anyone?) perhaps it's just as well that Max Rockatansky wander aimlessly into the fiery sunset as he did at that film's climactic conclusion.

Several cherished franchises sought rebirth (or continuation) after a lengthy hiatus. *Star Wars* is probably one of the more noteworthy endeavors, certainly the most imposing, but scarcely comes close to *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) which not only validates its predecessors but reinvents it.

When George Miller introduced us to the unforgiving world of Max Rockatansky in 1979's *Mad Max*, he established a direful and unblinking worldview: a planet ravaged by the destruction of atomic weapons and failed leadership, and the ordinary people therein who desperately attempted to maintain some semblance of order.

Top tier production and visual effects are enough to invite our attention, but it takes a central character (or in this case, two) to seal the deal and thoroughly involve us. Mel Gibson perfectly embodied the wounded soul of a former police officer-turned-vigilante, and it was his onscreen charisma that allowed us to believe.

Which leads me to Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron.

A gifted actor such as Hardy is more than capable of disappearing into the role that Gibson implanted, and he makes the most of it. Terse, commanding, and silent—a man of action and few words—Hardy effortlessly refurbishes the character of Max into his own.

But if Hardy is the heart of the film, then its soul belongs entirely to Theron who delivers one of the finest performances of her career. Every bit the Yin to his Yang, the magnetism emanating from this onscreen odd-couple runs the gamut from the subtlest of facial expressions to their most visceral actions.

Mad Max: Fury Road is high-octane entertainment at its most thrilling. In a decade with no shortage of action films, it is a framework for any non-stop white-knuckle spectacle to follow.

“Oh, what a lovely day,” indeed...



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MAD MAX: FURY ROAD (2015)

D: George Miller

C: Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, Nicholas Hoult, Zoe Kravitz, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, Hugh Keays-Byrne, Nathan Jones, Riley Keough, Megan Gale, Josh Helman, Richard Norton, Abbey Lee, Courtney Eaton, Debra Ades

