

Space Wars: The Battle for Your Viewing – Blockbuster Cinema and Streaming in 2020

With Coronavirus still front-and-centre in everyone's minds, the one thing helping people through isolation and constant government advice has not been zoom – but the streaming giants, Justin Time reports.

In just 5 months Disney Plus had scored 50 million subscribers (April 2020) – almost doubling its pre-pandemic launch number of 26.5 million subscribers (February 2020), as of this month it stands at 86 million subscribers globally – it's initial target had been 60 to 90 million by the end of 2024 – it looks like Disney Plus has been a must-have for 2020, as 4.3 million subscribers in the UK since it's launch back in March.

What then of Netflix? Netflix, as of November, has 195.15 million subscribers worldwide, up on 2019 by 27.25 million subscribers. 40% of UK household's subscribe to Netflix, so their growth is not nearly as impressive as Disney's brand-new shiny Plus. Nevertheless, across all streaming services, the UK public had spent a record £3 billion on on-demand streaming of music, tv and films in 2019 – it looks set to be another record shattering year for streaming services.

But what then of the cinema – that Saturday escape for teenagers? The UK from 2016 – 2019 saw an average of 761 movies released each year, with 800 in 2019 – in 2020, just 515 movies were released to the UK box office – a fall of 35.625% on 2019 – understandable in a pandemic, as movie companies opt to distribute online. Except the audience must have followed in their droves, as the fall in total box office sales is 73.95% on 2019, and the picture for per movie average box-office takings is just as poor with the fall from 2019's average of around 59.54%. Cinema has certainly halved as an industry this year. This can be seen with Children's favourite *Trolls World Tour*, an estimated budget of \$90-\$110 million wasn't even recouped in the box-office, making just \$49.1 million. And what of the real adult blockbusters, there weren't too many this year – perhaps Tom Hanks' *Greyhound* is an example from 2020, but then it was delayed and delayed until it went out via Apple TV+ in the USA, and hasn't officially made it to the UK yet – but what is interesting is the cost, the film was made for about \$50million, but was sold to Apple for \$70million, still a profit, but hardly the profits Hollywood and cinema is famed for.

I became an adult at the start of the 2008 financial crisis – my generation was told we were the lost generation (we probably still are in many senses) – but now I think its fair to say this generation coping with Covid will face the

same issues, and unlike 2008's year of cinema to see us through with films like: *The Dark Knight*, *Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Hancock*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, *Quantum of Solace*, *Iron Man*, *WALL-E* and *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, what have the young adults of 2020 got - *Trolls*?

Well it's not all doom and gloom, 2020 has been a great year for Chinese Cinema - as it tops the best seller list of 2020 literally the top two spots, and another two in the top 10, whilst Hollywood has given us such inspiring (used ironically) pieces as Harley Quinn's *Birds of Prey*, Robert Downey Junior's *Dolittle* (it did quite well on sales, but reviews are mixed); Jim Carey and James Marsden's *Sonic* (no thank you); Chris Nolan's *Tenet* (better); *Bad Boys for life* (return of a classic, did okay, still not writing home about it); and Disney's murder of *Artimis Fowl* (still Judie Dench is amazing, and Josh Gad surprisingly a highlight of an otherwise unfortunate movie - stick to the books). But none of these, not a single one has the stature of any of 2008's top movies, and even ones released online, like Disney's *Mulan*, panned by many for it's whitewashing of Chinese culture, has failed to achieve the iconic status of even *Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* - the worst *Indiana Jones* movie! Unfortunately 2020 is the year Cinema died, lets hope 2021 will see it's Lazarean resurrection, or we may find it relegated to a niche, like Opera and After-dinner Theatre Plays.