

The 21st century has been fantastic for comedy. We recently took a dive into the best characters in comedy TV, but now it's time to turn our attention to the film industry.

The past two decades have seen an incredible number of brilliant, future-classics. The likes of Judd Apatow and Adam McKay have been putting out consistently great features, leading to the successful careers of many actors. However, it's not been a great time for everyone. Poor Adam Sandler has suffered countless flops, finding success in dramatic roles rather than his regular comedic ventures.

Sandler's gap in the industry wasn't vacant for long though. We have seen the rise of superstars such as Steve Carell, Seth Rogen and Kristen Wiig, to name a few. The new wave of talent has brought new life to the industry and given it a much-needed boost.

Features such as *The Hangover*, *Crazy Stupid Love* and *School of Rock* have given us an incredibly varied genre that isn't afraid to step away from the generic tropes that unfortunately still plague it. Narrowing down the list of fantastic characters that have graced our screens in the last twenty years is no easy task. This list could have easily doubled in size when taking into account the sheer number of fantastic movies.

Shaun - Shaun of the Dead

Horror/comedy films are notoriously hit and miss. For every good flick, there are five dreadful attempts. Thankfully, in the hands of Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright, *Shaun of the Dead* had no chance of being a dud. The 2004 film was a financial and critical success, making five times its budget and winning multiple film awards.

The film acted as a huge jumping off point for the writing duo. Pegg went on to star and write in multiple Hollywood blockbusters, including regular roles in the *Star Trek* and *Mission Impossible* franchises. Wright however, would find work behind the camera much more appealing. The two would partner up again on future films, dubbing the run as 'The Cornetto Trilogy'.

Pegg's performance as Shaun is one of the most highly praised roles in British comedy. The film is centred around the titular character, a man stuck in a dead-end job and dull routine. He, at first, seems like the least likely person to take a leadership role in a zombie apocalypse, yet that is what he has to do as he tries desperately to save his friends and family. The film acts as a redemption story as he proves to everyone that he isn't the lazy, good for nothing loser everyone thinks he is.

Borat - Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan

Love him or hate him, Sacha Baron Cohen has been a vital part in the comedy world for 25 years. Sadly, due to the dramatically underperforming 'Grimsby', Cohen has been off the radar for the past few years. His last notable role being in Tim Burton's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

It's a sad fall from grace for one of Britain's finest exports, but in his defence, it is hard to top the cultural phenomenon that was Borat. Undoubtedly the best of Cohen's work, Borat stemmed from Cohen's breakthrough 'The Ali G Show' and was one of three characters from the TV series to make it to the big screen.

Borat is a self-professed bigamist, with multiple partners and at least seventeen grandchildren. During University, he managed to create five different plagues, killing over five million goats. He dabbled in all kinds of careers before settling as a TV personality, where he spends his time interviewing foreigners and learning about the world outside his home country.

The brilliance of Borat came from its unscripted nature, with the interviewees rarely aware of the true nature of the interview. The character plays on the ignorance of the people he meets, using the wacky personality to pressure them into very awkward situations.

Andy - The 40 Year Old Virgin

These days, it's hard to imagine the world without Steve Carell. The actor had just had started his tenure on The Office (US) when 'The 40 Year Old Virgin' premiered and sent him straight to stardom. The movie also acted as a spring-board for director Judd Apatow, who also went on to have a very fruitful career off the back of it.

The film was a smash hit, winning ten awards and made nearly seven times its budget. Not bad going for a film that Universal nearly canned completely. The studio criticised Apatow's work on the film as well as personal criticism towards Paul Rudd. Thankfully, the eventually saw sense and allowed filming to resume.

The character of Andy was based on one of Carrell's regular sketches at the Second City improv group. Despite being alone all his life, he enjoys the bachelor lifestyle and prefers to keep to himself. It's only when he is invited to socialise more with his workmates that peer pressure makes him realise how unusual his life is.

Carrell's lovable, down to earth performance made Andy a character that audiences loved. His rejection of peer pressure and social norms is something admirable, providing a clear message to viewers that it is okay to be yourself.

Ron Burgundy - Anchorman

For the longest time, the best comedy films all had one thing in common. Will Ferrell. The actor was inescapable during the first ten years of the century. Step Brothers, Blades of Glory, Elf, all starring the comedy great. His greatest work, without a doubt, has to be Ron Burgundy in 2004's 'Anchorman'.

Despite the immense success, the film isn't exactly the greatest. It boasts very middling reviews, with critics noting the tone and storyline end up varying wildly. Luckily, viewers didn't seem to care about the many flaws and often receives high billing in 'Best Of' lists.

It's undeniable that 'Anchorman' would have flopped entirely if not for Ferrell's performance. His endlessly quotable lines suckered viewers in and are still referenced today. The inappropriate, arrogant parody of the typical news anchor of the 70's was timed perfectly, coinciding with the political correctness boom in the mid 2000's.

Over fifteen years since its premiere, Ron Burgundy continues to grace our screen, appearing in adverts and even doing a tour of various late-night shows in 2019. Each appearance has been beloved by fans

and triggers calls for another 'Anchorman' sequel. It's unlikely a third film will be made but, we can dream, can't we?

Viago – What We Do in the Shadows

As one of the most precious beings on the planet, Taika Watiti is enjoying his well-deserved time at the top. Fresh off the award-winning JoJo Rabbit, the actor/director superstar is currently preparing the highly anticipated follow up to Thor: Ragnarok. Yet even in his early years, Watiti was pushing out some incredible characters.

The awkward group of vampires actually debuted back in 2005, almost a decade before the full-length release. Teaming up with The Flight of the Concorde co-founder, Jemaine Clement, the short offered a brief look into the lives of the three flat mates. Little did the creators know, it would go on to spawn a cult classic feature as well as two spin-off TV series.

With such a small cast, Watiti had a great chance to shine and did not miss the opportunity. His character Viago was a far cry from the original incarnation, yet - unlike most character retools – the change was a huge improvement. Embracing his awkward side, Viago became a shining light amongst the ensemble. A complete parallel to the usual vampire stereotype, fans became enamored with the characters innocence and quirks.

The character has appeared in the spin-off FX show and has even starred in a short film for a New Zealand based dating website, as well as promotional material by the New Zealand Board of Tourism.

McLovin - Superbad

There are few better examples of comedy brilliance than 'Superbad'. Bringing together the dream team of Judd Apatow, Seth Rogan and Evan Goldberg meant guaranteed quality, but the film still managed to exceed all expectations. The film kickstarted the careers of Jonah Hill and Emma Stone, while also providing a gateway into the film industry for Michael Cera.

Following the lives of two high schoolers, 'Superbad' offers a hilarious look into the trials and tribulations of trying to fit in. Seth and Evan are asked to bring alcohol to a party, but being underage throws a spanner in the works. The story is loosely based on the writer's own experiences, with the two actually penning the script during their teen years.

While the focus may have been on the two lead characters, Superbad had something else up its sleeve. A huge reason for the flick's popularity was Christopher Mintz-Plasse as Fogell. The awkward but strangely confident character provided endless quotes and viewers responded en masse to his ridiculous antics. Who in their right mind would attempt to pass off that ID as real? Fogell's alter-ego spawned a huge wave of merchandise and now it's tough to find someone who doesn't have at least a McLovin t-shirt.

Juno – Juno

While many comedies thrive in the messy lives of teenagers, vary rarely does a film try and tackle something as serious as teen pregnancy. Even though the 2007 film slate was crowded with accidental pregnancy storylines, only Juno sought to shed light on the issue in a young adult setting. Making such a

premise work in a comedic sense is no easy feat, yet the writers managed to pull it off. Producing a wholesome story with plenty of laughs along the way.

Moving away from the obvious choices, Juno comes to the decision that her child will be put up for adopting, rather than facing the huge struggle that comes with raising children. Critics praised the film for its work in demonstrating an alternative that is often ignored by the media. However, on the opposite side of the argument, campaigners argue the film dismisses the validity of abortion.

Politics aside, Juno is not only a cautionary tale, but an inspiring one. The titular character is a strong, intelligent young woman who is attempting to deal with a situation way above her maturity level. Watching her deal with everything so rationally and experiencing her emotional rollercoaster tugs on viewers heart-strings.

Stifler – American Pie

If there's anything the early 2000's are known for, it's dreadful fashion and raunchy teen comedies. While yes, the original film is from 1999 and not the 21st century, the series as a whole is so representative of the decade that followed. The success of the initial instalment was a worldwide sensation and spawned three sequels and four spin off movies, with a fourth currently in the works.

American Pie set the bar for teen comedies, laying out the formula that would be replicated time after time in the years that followed. What is surprising is how well the actors performed, considering most of them were unknown at the time. This worked strongly in the film's favour, as the cast were able to play on their inexperience to give a much more relatable performance.

The American Pie series is littered with amazing personalities, but none are more infamous than the Stiffmiester. Seann William Scott's feature film debut will forever be designated his greatest work, kick starting an impressive career. The cringeworthy jock was idolised by some, hated by others, yet through every instalment provided the most laughs and hooked viewers in with his character development.

Bridesmaids

Sometime between teaching teenage witches and giving us the tire fire that is the Ghostbusters reboot, Paul Feig was sitting pretty off the back of some brilliant comedy features. Having worked on Freaks and Geeks, Arrested Development and The Office (US) to name a few, the director moved into the film industry.

Feig had experimented with the new medium previously (releasing two films in 2003 and 2006), but neither had garnered much attention. Finally, with help from Judd Apatow and Kristen Wiig, the director managed to catch a break. With Wiig starring alongside fellow Saturday Night Live alumni, Maya Rudolph, Rose Byrne, Mellissa McCarthy and Ellie Kemper, the film offered up a female ensemble which many films have since tried (and failed) to imitate.

Not only did the actress take up the lead role, she also co-wrote the script with Annie Mumolo. This gave her a huge advantage when it came to her performance as Annie. Having written the character, Wiig was able to embrace her own personality traits and utilise them in expert fashion. The result was a character who not only shone on her own, but allowed her fellow cast members to steal the show on many occasions.

Elle - Legally Blonde

Based on the book of the same name, Legally Blonde set out to shoot down the negative stereotypes associated with women. Sadly, the film's lessons fell on mostly deaf ears and we are still fighting these same issues today. Yet that hasn't stopped it from being one of the most iconic film series of recent years.

The franchise boasts two mainline films and a spin off, as well as a musical adaptation. Despite being released nearly twenty years ago, a third film is set to grace our screens with the original producer and writers assisting Witherspoon.

The feature itself is hardly a unique experience. The storyline is predictable and offered little that viewers hadn't seen previously. Yet because of Witherspoon's incredible performance, Elle became a role model to women and girls everywhere. Her inspiring struggle against misogyny is an all too familiar situation for most, so to watch a character take the challenges head on gave viewers a welcome confidence booster.

The story builds up to a heart-warming climax, as Elle realises that she is capable of far more than people give her credit for and needs no help in becoming a success.