

Stranger Things 3: From nostalgia-driven to nostalgia drivel, but in a good way

Published: 📅 Jul 25, 2019 ⌚ 09:45 AM by Mohammed Hidayat

Stranger Things 3 takes place in 1985; the year 'Back to the Future' hit theatres. The latest season is peak obsession with western 'decadence' and retro nostalgia.



Chennai: Stranger Things burst onto the scene and became a global phenomenon for ideas that were elementary, a conventional plotline that got all the clichés right and a mystery adventure set to delve in the same way 80s American horror movies work. Banking on nostalgia and exhibiting blatant homagery in the form of all those endless film references, Stranger Things catapulted to fame. But it isn't all that different. We've seen such stories on television before. Yet, Stranger Things is somehow a rebel despite borrowing severely from pop culture.

The premise was simple - a secret experimental event befalls the community of the fictional town of Hawkins in the American hinterland. A bunch of kids come across a mystery that sets them on a course involving new friends, god-awful monsters and a summer full of adventure. One of the kids, Will (Noah Schnapp), go missing and at the same time, another kid - a girl named Eleven (Millie Bobby Brown) arrives at the scene and things get stranger and stranger. Teens, pre-teens and a few

adults pair up into groups and work together in revealing a storyline mimicking the tropes of the era of John Carpenter, John Hughes, Stephen King, Steven Spielberg and a little bit of David Cronenberg here and there.

To recap: The first season was about Dungeons & Dragons, fart jokes, the discovery of a parallel dimension called the Upside Down, the demonic beast 'Demogorgon', a girl with telekinetic powers and the search for a boy gone missing. Season 1 set the tone for a fun, scary teenage science-fiction drama.

Season 2 was more trouble. With the inclusion of new characters, the Duffer Brothers engaged Netflix audiences with more thrills and laughs. Will still has a strong connection to the Upside Down while Eleven goes out of town on a journey seeking truth. Season 2 showed signs of maturity with each character dealing with important decisions in their own way. It culminated in a nail-biting finale with 'demodogs' chasing through poorly-lit passageways and a portal threatening to let loose a sinister entity aka the Mind Flayer.



Boyz n the Mall...

Season 3, unsurprisingly, deals with the resurgence of a colossal monster. Sinister ~~American~~ Russian scientists have found a way to access the 'Gate' to the Upside Down this time. The Mind Flayer is back and more powerful than ever, searching and hunting for human hosts. The boys are no longer playing D&D (except Will), the girls are out shopping, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan have part-time jobs; everyone seems to have grown up. But then again, something's amiss in Hawkins which gives an opportunity for a mystery hunt. Squads are formed, adventures ensue, and all the characters come together in the penultimate episode culminating in a boss battle. ***Stranger Things is like a recurring role-playing video game dream and Netflix is not in a hurry to change the template b'coz it works.***

[The following contains mild spoilers from the 3rd season of Stranger Things. Use your Hawkins Lab access card to proceed further.]

To begin with, it is perfectly alright to dump this season's preposterous plotline, but it is absolutely essential to geek out about 'Starcourt Mall'. The all-in-one plaza represents the excess of the 1980s: overcrowded escalators, endless list of brands, a landscape of booming capitalism choking out small-scale enterprises and neon-lit signs. It is a throwback to the era when shopping malls were culture

centres where teenagers hung-out doing nothing, just passing time and dreaming of things to come; much like what we now do on social media. It's functioning as a meeting point of characters is reminiscent of **American Graffiti's Mel's Drive-In**. American Graffiti, like Stranger Things, is a coming-of-age story, set in Californian 60s. It is George Lucas' one true masterpiece and also one of the most culturally important American movies ever made.



Cherry cokes and cruising in California

Stranger Things 3 takes place in 1985; the year '**Back to the Future**' hit theatres. The latest season is peak obsession with western 'decadence' and retro nostalgia.

The show gets its '80s American political game on point by setting the first episode in Soviet Russia, making them the bad guys. The Soviets run a secret base right beneath Hawkins mall. There's Grigori, a Russian assassin who walks like the **Terminator** and resembles **Rocky IV's Ivan Drago**. Cold War paranoia runs deep and the threat of a communist takeover via the Upside Down propels the plot.

The Halloween costumes are gone, replaced by summer swimsuits. No more hide and seek in the woods, instead everyone is out in the open enjoying firecrackers and carnival rides. Mike (Finn Wolfhard) and Eleven discover the wonders of making out while Hopper (David Harbour) flips out every time their door is locked. Speaking of Hopper, the writers have gone to extreme lengths to ruin his relationship with Joyce (Winona Ryder) who keeps dodging his romantic advances. Hopper, when he's trying his best to be a good father, is one large cry-baby in Stranger Things 3. He screams his way through obstacles. He screams at kids and villains alike. He screams for reasons so absurd that even the Russians find it irritating. Maybe he's just angry that Hellboy sucked. His act alongside Joyce, who is now obsessed with fridge magnets instead of Christmas wall lights, ruins much of episodes 5 & 6.



Meanwhile, Nancy (Natalia Dyer) and Jonathan (Charlie Heaton) work as interns at the local newspaper. Constant patronising, gender discrimination remains the order of the day as Nancy struggles to survive in a male-dominated newsroom. Her story is a mirror to society and its treatment of women in workplace environment. Nevertheless, Nancy persists thanks to her journalistic vigour.

Steve and Dustin, as usual, are getting into all sorts of shenanigans alongside new entrant Robin (Maya Hawke) and child capitalist Erica (Priah Ferguson). Dustin is back from summer camp while Steve and Robin are servers at Scoops Ahoy, a popular ice-cream parlour at the mall. Erica hounds the establishment for free samples. Her witty sarcasm and loud-mouthedness are cause for a laugh riot. ***Team Scoops Troop, effortlessly, enters the 'best squad ever' hall of fame.***



What Team Are You On?

Girls lead the way in Season 3. It was Nancy's hunch and subsequent investigation that revealed what/how the Mind Flayer was building up. Robin's adeptness in decoding Russian radio transcripts reveals a much larger truth about Starcourt Mall and little Erica helps in infiltrating an underground Russian base.

As the season drowns in pop culture allusions, it is pulled back when *Stranger Things* 3 finally introduces its first LGBT character. The coming-out story is, perhaps, one of the best acting scenes in recent TV.

The haunting, hypnotic synthesizer score by Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein adds strength to action sequences and complements the supernatural elements of the story.

Nostalgia-baiting is in its glorious form here. The 'Back to the Future' references are inevitable. Every crackle of the static screams of more 80s' Easter eggs. ***But there's only so much that nostalgia can do in the absence of compelling storytelling.***

There is no sense of a real danger in season 3. Of course, there's extreme gore and fleshy goo filled with bones and blood a la Cronenbergian. But where is the gripping storyline of season 2, or for that matter, the familiar yet fresh beginnings of season 1?



Season 3 is fun for sure, but it is also repetitive. The characters are mere caricatures. The kids are growing up, but the plot isn't. The showrunners are stuck in an endless loop of figuring ways to open the goddamn Upside Down so that they can create scenarios around it, throw in a few extra characters and extend it to eight episodes. "It's all rigged", as Murray (Brett Gelman) says.

Billy's final shot at redemption and Dustin's secret girlfriend are some of the last-minute twists of the season.

Sometimes, all the world needs is a good old, nonsensical ride; a neon-hued americana escapade ladled with board games, synthwave and loud prints. A remainder of innocent times, of friends and families, of exciting adventures, of adolescent heartbreak: *Stranger Things* delivers its all, replete with the visual and auditory kitsch of the 80s.

Consensus

Favourite character: Robin

Favourite squad: Scoops Troop

Favourite dialogue: "You can't spell America without Erica"

Rating: 3.5/5

Stranger Things 3 is currently streaming on Netflix.

Conversations

[About Us \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/AboutUs\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/AboutUs) | [Terms of Use \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Terms\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Terms) | [Privacy Policy \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/PrivacyPolicy\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/PrivacyPolicy) | [Contact Us \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/ContactUs\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/ContactUs) | [Feedback \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/FeedBack\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/FeedBack) | [Sitemap \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/SiteMap\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/SiteMap)

[Paper Ad Tariff \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Papertariff\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Papertariff) | [Web Ad Tariff \(https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Websitetariff\)](https://www.dtnext.in/Footer/Websitetariff)

Copyright @ 2021, Daily Thanthi. | Powered by Vishwak (<https://www.vishwak.com/>)