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Captain America: The Winter Soldier. A Retrospective

By [Ryan Fitzmartin](#) | April 4th, 2024

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"Whose strong and brave, here to save the American way? Who vows to fight like a man for what's right night and day?" These are the opening lyrics to "The Star Spangled Man," the in-universe Captain America theme song from a glorious era of swashbuckling, swastika smashing, do-gooder action. In the 1940s, the bad guys were obvious – right and wrong never seemed so clear. It hasn't been quite the same since. The modern world is a complex, difficult place, and those 1940s ideals seem outdated. Or are they? Maybe we're still in need of a good Nazi-puncher.

These are the questions Captain America grapples with in *The Winter Soldier*, the seminal MCU film where the franchise grew up. Billed in advance by Marvel boss Kevin Feige as a "political thriller", *The Winter Soldier* was intended to stand out from the superhero crowd as a smarter, more thoughtful film, while also providing some bone-breaking action and top-notch thrills. I'm going to examine the twisty plot, intense shootouts, and moral quandaries to see if they hold up ten years on.

Starting with the action: there have been thirty three films released to date in the MCU, and yet this ten-year old film still has the best action in the entire franchise. There's an argument to be made for *Shang-Chi* topping it, but the *Winter Soldier* stands strong. Action in the MCU often feels overly CGd and weightless, but the *Winter Soldier* is refreshingly grounded. The gunfights and fistfights are shot with a relentless handheld camera, but edited coherently as to be completely seamless. The sound design is heavy and emphatic, and the fight choreography is masterful.

The assault on Nick Fury's van is still one of the tensest action scenes in the entire MCU. The rapid-fire editing between outside and inside of the van is brilliant. As the ram is brought in, the audience begins to sweat, and then the film ups the ante when Fury whips out his machine gun. The intensity ratchets as Fury waits for the exact right second to fire. When he finally does, the scene explodes off the screen. It's nail biting and directed with exquisite precision.

More complex to contend with, is the plotting. *The Winter Soldier* delivers some of the biggest twists in the MCU, with major pillars of the universe thrown into doubt. Die-hard comic fans may not have been surprised by the corruption of S.H.I.E.L.D., but to mainstream audiences it was surely a shock. Watching the film now, the pacing and story beats still create a strong sense of paranoia. The script doles out plot points in small tidbits before the big reveal, keeping the audience hooked throughout the film. The uncertainties around Fury and Widow's loyalties are nerve wracking, and there's a genuine foreboding dread that nobody can be trusted. When the big news drops that S.H.I.E.L.D. has been infiltrated by fascists from HYDRA, it's frightening, but by that point, it only makes sense.

The hardest thing to hold up to 2024 scrutiny is the political messaging. At the time, the film received mixed commentary, being both lauded for its attempts at depth, but also facing criticism for its superficial critiques. In some ways, *The Winter Soldier* was a prescient film, but it also doesn't sufficiently answer all the questions it sets up. The main ideological thrust of the film is centered around Project Insight, a powerful weapon that can strike anywhere on earth, killing anyone instantly. At the time, it played like a commentary on America's controversial drone strike policy – then the subject of hot debate. When Captain America criticizes Project Insight to Fury, warning that Insight entrenches fear instead of freedom, he makes a strong point. However, the revelations about HYDRA undercut his point. Is a super weapon only evil because bad guys are the ones using it? The movie dodges the question as to whether weapons of mass destruction like Project Insight are inherently evil, or only evil when used by evil people.

At the climax, the villain of the film, Alexander Pierce, hands a dilemma to his opponent, Councilman Singh. He presents Singh with a quandary, supposing that a terrorist held his family and a stadium full of people hostage, and that with the firing of one gun, he could kill the terrorists and save his family. Surely Singh would shoot, right? Singh replies "Not if it was your gun". This answer ducks the complexity of the question, avoiding any substantive commentary on American foreign. Singh implies that certain weapons are bad only if being used by Nazis like Hydra. It's a cop-out, and in 2014 it seemed egregious to me. However, in 2024 it plays a little different.

Ten years ago, the threat of HYDRA and Nazis infiltrating the government and taking control seemed fanciful. Saying that drones are only bad because Nazis could gain control felt a little implausible, and not a real criticism. However, in light of 2017's Unite the Right rally, 2021's Washington DC Riot, and a massive rise in hate crimes across the U.S., the threats outlined in *The Winter Soldier* are frighteningly realistic. Suddenly, a Nazi fighter isn't irrelevantly quaint in the modern era: he's something we sorely need.

Ten years later, *The Winter Soldier* is more powerful than ever. As the MCU and US politics have evolved, the film has only gained relevance—not just as entertainment, but as a political statement and a symbol of resistance. Captain America stands not just as a hero of the 1940s, but as somebody who we can look to and find inspiration in right now. *The Winter Soldier* remains today, as it was in 2014, one of the very best films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

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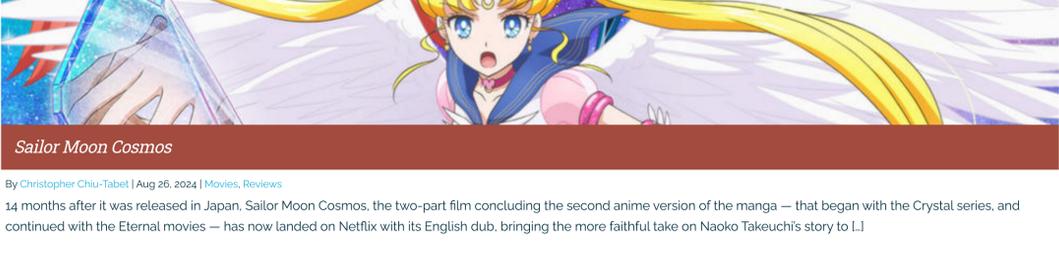
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Sailor Moon Cosmos

By [Christopher Chiu-Tabet](#) | Aug 26, 2024 | [Movies](#), [Reviews](#)

14 months after it was released in Japan, *Sailor Moon Cosmos*, the two-part film concluding the second anime version of the manga — that began with the *Crystal* series, and continued with the *Eternal* movies — has now landed on Netflix with its English dub, bringing the more faithful take on Naoko Takeuchi's story to L.J

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Deadpool & Wolverine

By [Christopher Chiu-Tabet](#) | Jul 26, 2024 | [Movies](#), [Reviews](#)

No spoilers, but there is one pretty handless post-credits scene.Well, here we are at long last. 15 years since X-Men Origins: Wolverine, the movie this site was founded to defend, with Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman finally reunited, and making their way into the MCU five years after the sale of 20th Century Fox/Studios. For L.J