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By Rachel Sandell

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Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...

SUMMARY

- 'Toy Story' has always taken creative risks with its animation and storytelling, and the franchise balances child-friendly stories with darker, intense moments.
- The storyline of 'Toy Story 3' incorporates elements of the prison movie genre, with the toys facing the corrupt system of a daycare run by a nefarious teddy bear.
- 'Toy Story 3' is influenced by prison break films like 'The Great Escape' and 'Cool Hand Luke', with references and Easter eggs that show a deep respect for the genre.

Toy Story is a franchise that's always taken risks from the outset. Its first installment in 1995 was the very first fully **CGI animated film**, and that bold move in terms of animation, visuals, and storytelling ended up being a creative and fresh way of visual storytelling (it didn't hurt that the CGI, even back in the '90s, paired well with the waxy plastic texture of toys). The most interesting creative risks, however, can be found in the franchise's storylines and tone. *Toy Story* artfully balances child-friendly stories with darker, more intense moments. The inspiration for **Toy Story 3**, for example, was the suspenseful genre of prison break movies. What's even more surprising than the attempt to incorporate a **prison break storyline** into a kid's movie about toys at a daycare, however, is that it worked so naturally.

Toy Story 3

G Animation Family Comedy

Release Date
June 18, 2010

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The 'Toy Story' Movies Excel at Combining Fun Characters With Dark Storylines



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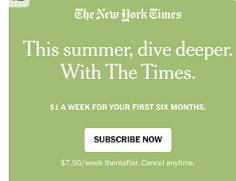


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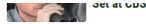
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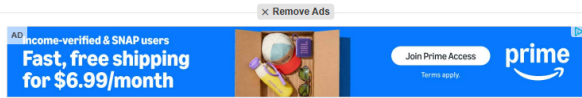
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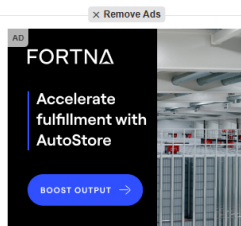
Toy Story began the franchise by telling a story of jealousy, disillusionment, and the fear of being replaced—all through the eyes of children's toys Woody (**Tom Hanks**) and Buzz (**Tim Allen**). Despite the colorful, fun surface, ***Toy Story's* main antagonist, Sid (Erik von Detton)**, is a child who literally tortures toys for fun. So, when Woody and Buzz accidentally find themselves trapped in Sid's home, they're forced to work together to survive. A story about two enemies surviving together amid torturous and perilous villains: that's the plot of *Toy Story*. Though the movie remains steadily light-hearted throughout, the underlying intensity and threat of danger are always lurking. The tone is tense, and the stakes are high.



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Similarly, ***Toy Story 2*** sees Woody getting kidnapped by Al (**Wayne Knight**), a thieving toy store owner looking to make big bucks off an antique toy, and suddenly Woody is faced with whether it's worth sticking around and watching Andy grow up if he's just going to be left behind. Again, this is a deep-rooted fear in Woody as a character, and the plot reflects that intensity. Woody and his new friends, cowgirl Jessie (**Joan Cusack**), and trusty horse Bullseye (**Frank Welker**) are nearly packed on a flight to Japan before escaping their kidnapper and returning home. Already, *Toy Story* as a franchise was exploring dark themes such as torture, survival, peril, kidnapping, rejection, and growing old. It stands to reason that the third installment would include a plot line with stakes that were just as high.

The visually stunning *Toy Story 3* follows a well-laid pattern in that it pairs the inner conflicts of the main characters with what's happening in the story externally. When Andy moves away to college, Woody, Buzz, and the gang find themselves mistakenly taken to Sunnyside Daycare, and are subjected to the corrupt system run by nefarious teddy bear, Lotso (**Ned Beatty**). This time, the story explores another fear that even its antagonist shares: abandonment and rejection. Woody's worst fear from the first *Toy Story* movie becomes Lotso's reality in the third, as we learn that Lotso was lost and subsequently replaced by his owner, and he now takes out his anger on innocent toys. Woody and Lotso are at odds as Lotso tries to drag everyone else down to his level of misery, and Woody remains the steadfast ray of hope leading the way to escape. As the sheriff tries to lead his loyal band of friends out of Lotso's totalitarian regime, what better genre to explore these themes than a prison break?



'Toy Story 3' Is Influenced by Prison Break Movies Like 'The Great Escape' and 'Cool Hand Luke'



When you think of *Toy Story*, you probably don't automatically associate the franchise with movies like ***The Shawshank Redemption***, ***The Great Escape***, or ***Cool Hand Luke***. Yet, as part of the prison break genre, all three of these movies did their part in inspiring *Toy Story 3*. According to director **Lee Unkrich in an interview with Digital Spy**, "The only films we referenced, really, were prison movies...we knew that a big part of the film was going to be a prison break."

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In terms of prison breaks, *The Great Escape* (1963) is probably one of the most popular films of the genre and what most people think of when the topic is brought up. The film follows a group of prisoners of war imprisoned by the Third Reich, and the large cast of characters puts together a plan of escape, with each person contributing something. The details of the **well-thought-out escape plan from *The Great Escape*** appear as breadcrumbs in *Toy Story 3*. By the time of **the franchise's third installment**, *Toy Story* had accumulated a large cast, as each movie brought new characters to the growing list of toys with the name Andy written on their foot. Woody may be the one leading the escape, but he uses the skills of his friends to make the plan work. Little details like the fence and the blind spot in the playground of Sunnyside point back toward similar plot points in *The Great Escape*.

Unkrich also cites the iconic prison break film, *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) as an especially big influence. The movie stars **Paul Newman** as the titular character who gets sent to a Florida prison and refuses to submit to the Captain (**Strother Martin**) and Boss Godfrey (**Morgan Woodward**), known as the man with no eyes. Luke's strong-willed personality and **numerous escape attempts** earn him the respect of his fellow inmates, and though he is never a free man for long, he ends the movie somewhat triumphantly by never succumbing to the warden or the authority of the brutal prison.

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The yearning for freedom and defiance of an unjust or particularly brutal authority is one of the main draws of the film, and details from the movie appear in Lee Unkrich's film as well, like the need to break free, the camaraderie among prison mates, and even the threat of spending the night "in the box." *Cool Hand Luke*'s "box" (somewhat similar to the concept of *The Great Escape*'s "cooler") served as a place of punishment where prisoners would be sent to a small wooden booth for the smallest infraction. *Toy Story 3*'s version of the "box" is the sandbox in the playground, where Mr. Potato Head (**Don Rickles**) is repeatedly sent to spend the night as punishment for talking back. It sounds silly to compare an intense and highly emotional film like *Cool Hand Luke* to the kid-friendly, goofier *Toy Story 3*, but the references and **Easter eggs placed in the movie** point to an understanding of the heart of prison break movies, and a deep respect for them as well. Even the sillier references like "the box" are done lovingly—it may be a joke, but "the box" also serves as a plot point. The inspiration that *Toy Story 3* uses for its tone and plot meshes well with the toys that take themselves just seriously enough.

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How 'Toy Story 3' Works as a Prison Movie



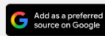
As a genre, prison break stories come in many varieties, and *Toy Story 3*, despite its status as a children's movie, absolutely falls under this category. Usually, a prison break story will feature a new guy or a ringleader, who gathers allies and puts together a plan of escape. There are typically one or more very intimidating antagonists in the form of authority figures and an underlying sense of danger and longing for freedom. Whether the prisoner is innocent or not, there's usually a sense of unfairness to their time in prison in the form of unfair brutality or some other injustice.

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Other features of the genre include flaws in the grand plan and unforeseen complications that lead to the plan not completely succeeding—at least, not at first. *Toy Story 3* also follows this pattern by including the roadblock of Lotso finding out about the escape through an unwilling snitch (the snitch also being a staple of the genre) and cutting the escapees off at the dumpsters. Unfortunately for the main characters, and for Lotso as well, they are taken to the dump and face the incinerator before finally escaping at the last possible second. The film could have ended with Woody, Buzz, and the gang fleeing through a completely successful plan, but it stayed true to its genre of influence, and the film is all the better for it.

Toy Story 3 follows the pattern of its preceding movies by incorporating a certain level of darkness, depth of emotion, and tight writing with its prison-break storyline. Thanks to its previous two films already laying the groundwork for familiar and beloved characters, *Toy Story 3* was able to find time and space to creatively explore this new storyline, while keeping in line with the installments that came before. Thanks to the cohesion between inner conflict and external plot, the writers were able to incorporate this inspiration in natural ways. *Toy Story* remains a **fun, child-friendly franchise** that walks the line between incinerator-intense moments and creative fun, with the through line always being the toys' unwavering love for their child. Despite its status as a kid's movie, *Toy Story 3* delivers a story that is undeniably a prison-break film, and this was a risk that paid off wonderfully.

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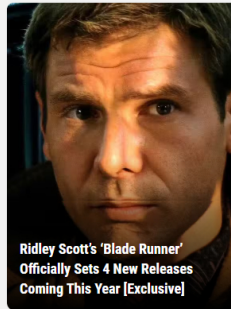
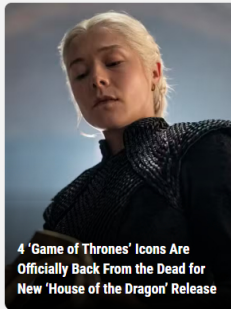
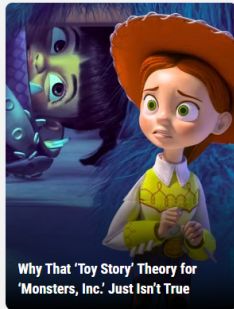


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