

# The Washington Post

## No, nobody has to feel bad about watching ‘Bright’ instead of ‘Mudbound’

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I’m not particularly fond of New Year’s resolutions. If something is worth doing, it was well worth doing three months ago, dagnabbit; also, please get off my lawn. But I do have one for the new year, and I’ll hope you’ll join me in it. Given the immense variety of cinematic and televisual offerings, and the ease of acquiring both, it’s time to stop worrying about what other people like, or don’t like, to watch.

Don’t get me wrong: This isn’t a plea for populism or a cri de coeur for critics to set aside their faculties and hop on the blockbuster train. Rather, it’s an acknowledgment that in our fractured media landscape there’s something for everyone and we shouldn’t find it especially troubling that our fellow viewers have different preferences.

For instance, if you’re going to write about the success of the new Netflix original, “Bright” — a cop drama with fantasy elements; think “Training Day” meets “Lord of the Rings” — you shouldn’t really feel the need to lament that people prefer it to other, more acclaimed programming.

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“Nielsen was able to give an estimate of about 11 million subscribers who chose to watch ‘Bright’ over yanking out their own teeth with pliers or jumping into a frozen lake,” a writer for ScreenCrush recently snarked. “To compare, that’s less than the second season of ‘Stranger Things’ (15.8 million views in the same three-day time period) and way more than the premiere of ‘The Crown’ Season 2 (nearly 3 million views in the U.S.). That’s an impressive get for Netflix, who have now proven themselves contenders in the blockbuster arena.”

So, Netflix is finding success in the blockbuster business, bringing entertainment to people who’d rather stay in for the evening and take advantage of their \$11-per-month Netflix subscription than blow a hundred bucks or so on a sitter and tickets to a different intellectually shallow (but explicit!) fairy tale for adults. Of course, “Bright” has been deemed very bad and

unserious, so its success is a damning indictment of the people's inability to get with the program.

"It's pretty disappointing that watchers have chosen to grant this distinction to what some critics have been calling Netflix's worst movie ever made, and leaving films like Dee Rees' 'Mudbound' — which, among other things, is actually good — to languish amongst the other unpopular indie dramas," ScreenCrush's writer laments. Yes, it's terrible that they want to watch the lighthearted action-fantasy with their free time instead of another dour reminder that racism is bad. I for one am shocked by this turn of events; I'm sure this hectoring will change their minds.

Similarly, I couldn't help but roll my eyes a bit while reading Deadline when I see that Jodie Foster complaining to Radio Times that, "Going to the movies has become like a theme park. ... Studios making bad content in order to appeal to the masses and shareholders is like fracking — you get the best return right now but you wreck the earth."

As Scott Lincicome, of the Cato Institute and Duke University, joked about that fracking jab, "Jodi [sic] Foster thinks superhero movies are technical marvels that generate abundance, jobs/growth & geopolitical stability?" (Spoiler: they actually do all these things, as anyone who tracks box office figures and has sat through a Marvel movie's credits knows.) And sure, it'd be nice to go back to the halcyon days of 1976, when Foster's "Taxi Driver" was released and films like the "King Kong" remake and "Dirty Harry" sequel "The Enforcer" were dominating the box office.

I kid, of course: "Rocky" was that year's highest-grossing film (and best picture winner at the Oscars) and Watergate drama "All the President's Men" was also one of the 10-best-grossing movies of the year. But this year wasn't all bad: "Dunkirk" and "Get Out" are legitimately great, high-grossing films. If you loved "All the President's Men," you'll probably dig its prequel, "The Post." And awards season entries like "Darkest Hour" and "Molly's Game" and "Lady Bird" and "The Shape of Water" provide something for every variety of adult.

Foster's frustration is understandable; she wants to make art that challenges her and helps her grow. I hope she accomplished that while directing an episode of the new season of "Black Mirror." But the good news is there's something out there for everyone, even adults looking for quieter, more mature works. Just consider Netflix, which this year has released a whole bunch of good stuff that probably wouldn't have found an audience in theaters: "Okja," an eco-drama about a girl and her pig; "The Meyerowitz Stories," a dark family comedy; and "First They Killed My Father," Angelina Jolie's harrowing tale of life in the early stages of the Cambodian revolution.

Yes, it's annoying when people don't like what we like. Sure, it's aggravating that directors like James Gunn have to pretend that their prepackaged Disney entertainment is something deeper and more meaningful than, let's be honest, it really is. But there's *so much good stuff out there* — projecting in theaters; available 24 hours a day via OnDemand; streaming nonstop on Netflix and Amazon and Hulu — that it doesn't really make much sense to complain about a paucity of options or to lament that some people are watching programs you don't like.

So, let it be resolved: In this new year, we will celebrate what we have, instead of kvetching about other people's preferences. Unless they're avid fans of YouTube celebrities, of course. Don't even get me started on those monsters.