

There's Something About Minecraft

-Written by Sam Sullivan



I've never written a movie review in my entire life...

But I have never been so compelled to sit down and hash out such an amateur critical analysis of a work of art, particularly film. I figure what better movie to start with, other than, of course, *A Minecraft Movie*.

Before we go any further, if you are anything like me, a rather selective reader, you would probably like to know my credentials. Before you waste another second of your precious time, I should mention that I am a 34-year-old regular guy, working towards getting an English degree. I am a husband, a father, the manager at a big brand corporation, a YouTuber (not in the classic sense but in the sense that I have *YouTubed* and still, currently, randomly, will *YouTubed* from time-to-time) and apparently, now...a film critic.

My knowledge of the Minecraft subculture

First off, **I don't know jack shit about Minecraft**. My son is into it and we've played together a bit, but I've never really been sure of what I was even doing or what I was even supposed to be trying to do. At any rate, right away I got *it*, I could see the appeal; a vast, seemingly endless world to explore, a space to play and create, with a tranquil, almost meditative quality within every configuration of the game. Basically, a digitalized, boxy, Lego-ish world with no clear directions or story, a limitless canvas for the child architect, a boundless, pixelized, cartoonish universe, intended to encourage and nurture the imagination. A game where you build houses and castles and towers and shit...using large blocks. Children love to play with blocks, this has been a thing since the early days, playing with little alphabet blocks on the floor, playing in the playpen with wooden blocks and stacking them up into a pyramid and then smashing them down. Minecraft is basically **advanced blocks**.

Minecraft has gathered a strong following for the past 15 years now, bridging today's young teenagers & young men, the original fans, with today's preteens, the second gen fans, uniting them together through the collective spirit of crafting. Although the OG fans seem to have moved on from actually *playing* Minecraft, they still seem to be holding on to nostalgia and an appreciation for the brand. But there is something ironic about their interest in the new film. It's

like now they think it's funny to be into Minecraft even though they still kind of like it. Similar to how, in the 90's, everybody watched *Barney* but when they grew up and moved on to more mature child entertainment programs, they made fun of the younger kids that still, in fact, watched *Barney*.

At any rate, Minecraft seems like a good thing for the kids.

The theatrical experience

On Sunday April 6th, 2025, at 1:25 PM, twenty minutes before showtime, we waltz into the theater, welcomed in by a packed lobby of anxious consumers. We, being my 8-year-old son and my good friends Zackary Scott Swann and Timothy Chance Butler, shuffle along into a constantly reforming snake of a crowd; the crowd being lots and lots of children, all sporting some variation of a Minecraft t-shirt, dads, all sporting some variation of gym clothes and a ballcap, and moms, also sporting some variation of gym clothes and a ballcap, and even a few young teenage boys in two-piece suits (*more to come on these little shirts later), pretty much the obvious crowd you would imagine that would be in line to see *A Minecraft Movie*. A lot of big people wrangling groups of little people, corralling and calming their insanely excited children, attempting, frantically, to tame them with promises of candy and popcorn and soda, and maybe if they were *extra* good, they could get a prize from the merchandise rack that sat in the middle of lobby. Perhaps they could get the exclusive keychains or the special edition pillow, with 3 variants, or the official Minecraft movie t-shirt with 2 different styles or the ever-popular squishy mystery packs which are 6 different squishies packaged individually and sold separately. Amongst all the high-pitched, constant and endless squealing, giggling, snickering, the random shouting, some kid going: "chicken jockey!" and some other kid reacting with something as equally stupid, some other nonsense, I noticed that there were these *signs* posted everywhere. Signs informing us, patrons, that any disturbance within the theater will not be tolerated. The warning was printed on pink paper and taped, hanging, propped up in plastic sign holders throughout the entire building. The signs read, verbatim:

"Minecraft Guests

If you cause any disturbance in this theater, you will be removed without a refund. This is your only warning. Thank you!"

Reading this caused little concern, I really just had some minor critiques of their presentation. Below are the corrections I suggest, followed by a detailed explanation of each: (just skip over this part if you think this kinda shit is stupid, just like over-analyzing small details)

"If you cause any disturbance..."

"any" is too vague, there should be specific examples included, maybe in parenthesis (loud/offensive language, throwing things, dancing up and down the aisles). Disturbances should be clearly defined so the audience knows what they are supposed to do.

The moviegoing experience for Minecraft was very involved, almost like watching the Rocky Horror Picture Show back in the 1970s or something and there was a lot of

cheering and yelling and clapping, pretty much right when the movie started. And I instantly looked around for these supposedly really strict theater ushers, but nobody ever showed up and people kept cheering and yelling and clapping but nothing ever happened. So, their little warning that they posted at the ticket booth, at the concessions counter, at the auditorium entrance was pretty much bullshit and I didn't believe that anything would actually happen if there was an actual like major disturbance.

“without” should be italicized, to emphasize the consequences of causing a disturbance. Maybe even bold text. This would add a subtle yet dramatic effect to their threat. Same thing with “only.” Again, to emphasize the significance of this zero-tolerance attitude they were trying to express. Either way, there were lots of “disturbances” or what someone who has been to the movies before would consider a disturbance and nothing was ever done about any of it. So, the sign was pointless. The sign might as well of said, “It is ok to clap and yell as much as you want, and we won't do anything about it.” At least this would set a more realistic expectation for the “Minecraft Guests” and the unforgettable experience we were all about to...experience.



Why Jack Black is the perfect guy to carry this movie

A film adapted from a plotless source doesn't really have much to work with. The film, at its core, is basically a *Jack Black* comedy. In his role as Steve, J. Black has stepped into a Bill Murray-type thing with the audience, where it's like he's in on the joke, the joke being that they actually made a Minecraft movie. His over-the-top delivery is so ridiculous that it is like a parody of someone trying to be funny, but also, it *is* actually funny. His trademark performative moves: the dancing eyebrows, the rapid head jerks, the aggressive hair flips; are all here and stretched to their absolute maximum potential, pushing Jack Black to his ultimate physical limitations as an actor, and probably even just as a person, too. He packs so much emphasis into each word, with an endearing intensity, so much that in one scene you can even see spit shooting out of his mouth when he sings an impromptu jingle, titled “Steve's Lava Chicken.” Somewhere between the “ch-” and the “-i” you clearly see a rocket of mouth spit launch across the screen. That and every other line is delivered with a spastic enunciation, that only could belong to J. Black and his somewhat unpredictable hilarious comedic timings. With most of his lines simply introducing an item or an entity from the Minecraft world, they use the character Steve to jam as much Minecraft lingo into the thing as possible. I mean at this point; they could make a movie out of anything, any plotless videogame, and just stick Jack Black in there and it would somehow work. I wouldn't be surprised if eventually we get *A Tetris Movie*, starring J. Black, and throughout the half-baked, virtually irrelevant plot, Jack Black, in his comical over-the-top twang randomly shouts throughout the movie: “Tetrominos!” or “hard drop!” or “soft drop!” or even, “topping out!” (*these are Tetris terms.)

There are other people in *A Minecraft Movie* and other elements that are important to explore, but I just can't stop thinking about Jack Black. None of this is to discredit the director, Jared Hess, but really to just emphasize how incredibly powerful J. Black's performance is here. He has crossed the threshold into some ironic thing where he is like a **parody of himself**. As my friend Zackary Allen Scott commented, leaning over in the seat next to me: "This is post-post-post irony." I thought this sounded pretty accurate, that maybe this style of comedy was breaking ground in new territory, intentional or not. That could be the genius behind it, not to say that *A Minecraft Movie* is genius or anything, but it's probably worth a second thought.

The other stuff about the movie, other than Jack Black

Obviously, a lot of heads are involved in making a 150-million-dollar budget movie, especially one with such widespread, global fandom as Minecraft. For simplicity's sake, I will just pick one head, the director, Jared Hess, and aim my remaining claims at it.

J. Hess films share a similar tone, a similar world, visually: a vibrantly colored world, where the characters are all clothed in goofy late 1980's style clothes, (which are ridiculous but somehow still fashionably relevant and cool in a way) offset by deadpan deliveries and awkward human interactions. This balance between bright/fun and dark/dull keeps his auteuristic visions from becoming full-on zane-brain comedies (think 2010 Adam Sandler movies, think fucking Larry the Cable guy). Thematically, his movies are full of characters who suffer a great deal from delusions. Some of his characters are just totally eaten up with it, engulfed by an obvious, hit-you-over-the-head delusion that fuels their motives, behaviors, and above all, their worldview (think Napoleon Dynamite, from *Napoleon Dynamite*, or Uncle Rico, also from *Napoleon Dynamite*), and *A Minecraft Movie* delivers once again, a delusional main character for us to all laugh at.

Take Jason Momoa's Garrett Garrison, probably Hess's most deadpan-delusional creation yet; a washed-up, ex-competitive arcade game champion, stuck in the past, hiding behind a braggadocious macho persona, played totally straight by Momoa, who, physically is just a huge, towering muscle of a man. His portrayal is about as generic as you could get with some cheap laughs sprinkled in for the kids. But something happens halfway through the film; he becomes so pathetically wrought with himself, that he just openly admits to being a loser, shattering the delusion, if only for the scene, breaking free of his exhausting macho man act for a moment.

I guess I should mention the other people in this thing; we've got Henry (Sebastian Eugene Hansen), his sister Natalie (Emma Myers), their real estate agent Dawn (Danielle Brooks), and Vice Principal Marlene (Jennifer Coolidge) who are just shoved in there to give us varied personalities and see them react to the Minecraft universe. I don't want to say these characters were unnecessary, but it did kinda feel like they were just jammed in there. It certainly didn't hurt the film.

For the sake of being able to call this a movie review I have to mention all that crap. In all reality, here's how a movie review for *A Minecraft Movie* should go:

“Jack Black as Steve is the most Jack Black the big screen has ever seen, a perfectly zany, unpredictable, endearing, and enthusiastically intense tour guide through the Minecraft world.” And that’s that. Nothing else should be said.

It would almost be best described in the style of 1930s film trailers: See Minecraft! The Spectacle Show of the Year! Action! Adventure! Laughs! Thrills! Romance...(that kinda thing...classic).

My friend Timothy Chance Butler, while we were chowing down after the show, feasting on our exclusive McDonald’s Minecraft Meals, summed it up in his perfectly simple Timothy-Chance-Butler way. He said: “They did about as good as you could do.”

More on the theatrical experience

I’m not sure I have ever been to a completely sold-out picture show before seeing *A Minecraft Movie*. The feeling of being stuck; wedged in between people, constant shuffling and crunching popcorn, echoing across the vast rows of darkness, dreading the urge of having to get up to go take a pee, doing the sideways scuffle past 15 people to get to the end of the row, claustrophobic sensations surrounding my every glance that wasn’t of the huge, 70-foot screen; left a surreal impression on my short term memory. For an hour and 40 minutes, I was a small component of a living, breathing, giant collective organism of eyes and ears; a spectator. The cheering and clapping that immediately erupted during the opening scene, enthusiastically upheld throughout the entire showing, brought forth an infectious excitement that sustained throughout our united spectation of the show. Anotherwards, we had such a kick-ass time. I think the instigators of this crowd participation act came from a couple rows back, from the kids I saw in the lobby, dressed in two-piece suits. They had either seen the movie already and were quoting it, reciting parts from the trailer, or knew the lines from clips posted online. Either way, they made the experience their own, leading the way for us fellow crowd-yellers to join in. I say let the kids have their fun, let them yell and clap and enjoy what is theirs. After all, this is their world, too.

And so here we are a week and a half later and I’m finding myself, waking up in the morning, at random times throughout the day, calling out to my son: “Chicken jockey!” and him calling back: “Flint and steel!” For something to give us these moments, this comical, cosmic bond, an inside joke, a quote, something to remind us of the humors of life; I am extremely grateful for. And with this, I would consider *A Minecraft Movie* a phenomenal work of art and even... a great movie.

And that’s that.