

# 10 out of 10

With a new decade upon us, there are plenty of record-shattering Box Office smash hits to look back on, writes Sean Wilson, as he reviews fun films from last year

The biggest releases may have fallen outside of the 'traditional' summer box office period, but 24 comic book extravaganzas (or variants thereof), and a number of thrilling franchises kept audiences pinned to their seats. One particular movie toppled *Avatar* to become the highest-grossing of all time, established film stars continued to prove their mettle, and darker, more controversial material struck a chord with huge crowds. Here are just some of 2019's most notable success stories.

## JOKER

**Released:** October  
**Directed by:** Todd Phillips  
**Starring:** Joaquin Phoenix

Talk about a movie that had the last laugh. Director Todd Phillips' *Joker* original story has emerged as the most profitable comic book movie of time, with grosses of \$1bn against a relatively modest \$55m budget. The film's success is all the more impressive when one considers its dark and tortured nature, largely embodied by a sensational Joaquin Phoenix as conflicted wannabe

stand-up Arthur Fleck. The actor's intense commitment to the role, combined with powerful mystique exerted by the DC villain, made *Joker* the biggest pop culture talking point of the autumn, keeping viewers gripped, even as it prompted queasy questions about the nature of violence and morality. Phoenix builds on the legacy of previous actors such as Jack Nicholson and the late Heath Ledger, ultimately emerging with a portrayal that is uniquely his own. So are we going to get a sequel? Looking at those box office figures, it's hard to imagine otherwise.



## FAST & FURIOUS: HOBBS & SHAW

**Released:** August  
**Directed by:** David Leitch  
**Starring:** Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham

As the tyre-burning *Fast & Furious* franchise reaches new heights of entertaining ludicrousness (the ninth movie is coming in 2020), the movies are also starting to career down brand new avenues. The first test came this year with spin-off *Hobbs & Shaw*, pairing Dwayne Johnson's burly Luke Hobbs with Jason Statham's devious Deckard Shaw, and it proved a massive success. Grossing \$758m worldwide against a \$200m budget, *Hobbs & Shaw* left boring concepts like gravity and logic by the side of the road, whisking

Left and Above: Joaquin Phoenix starred in *Joker*  
Top: Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Jason Statham in *Fast & Furious* spin-off *Hobbs & Shaw*



audiences on a globe-trotting smash-em-up adventure that owed no concessions to reality. Indeed, Johnson and Statham's enjoyably bickering frenemies are, to all intents and purposes, superheroes, and *Deadpool 2* helmer David Leitch seemingly knows no bounds as far as the action scenes are concerned. Johnson even manages to lasso a helicopter and run down the side of a London skyscraper in the

course of one movie – are we having fun yet?

## AVENGERS: ENDGAME

**Released:** April 2019  
**Directed by:** Joe and Anthony Russo  
**Starring:** Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Scarlett Johansson, Paul Rudd

Blockbusters didn't come more ambitiously staged in 2019 than *Avengers: Endgame*. Put simply,

this was a once-in-a-generation event that marked the culmination of Phase Three of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), rewarding 10 years' worth of fan loyalty in funny, emotional and thrilling style. The time-travel canvas staged by directors the Russo brothers is, refreshingly, played for laughs (how many of us have scrutinised *Back to the Future*'s science that closely?). And this means we can become further invested in the classic Marvel characters with whom we've grown for the past decade, not least Robert Downey Jr.'s Iron Man. The actor's brilliant blend of snark and heart embodies the success of *Avengers: Endgame*, and the MCU as a whole: this is not a franchise about the suits, but the characters who wear them. Little wonder that *Endgame* toppled James Cameron's *Avatar* to become the highest-grossing movie ever made, with grosses of almost \$2.8bn worldwide. Marvel's Phase Four period can't start soon enough.



## JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 3 – PARABELLUM

*Released: May*

*Directed by: Chad Stahelski*

*Starring: Keanu Reeves*

2019 was officially Keanu Reeves' comeback year. Not only did he voice the endearing Duke Caboom in Disney-Pixar's *Toy Story 4*, he also re-asserted his action icon credentials with the third instalment of the hard-hitting John Wick franchise. Picking up where the first two stylish thrillers left off, director Chad Stahelski (stunt co-ordinator on *The Matrix*) contrives some genuinely jaw-dropping set-pieces that push Reeves to the limit, including elaborately staged shootouts, a bike chase and a brilliantly wince-inducing, knife-throwing assault that has to be seen to be believed. As with *Speed* and *The Matrix*, Reeves once again proves that he's in a league of his own as far as unflinching, jaw-dropping



stoicism is concerned. Little wonder we're all hungry for a fourth instalment. Impressively, in a continued display of Reeves' revived star power, *Parabellum* is the biggest hit in the series so far with global takings of \$326m. So what about 2020? It's set to be a year of comebacks and farewells, starting with Daniel Craig's final movie as James Bond. Due for release in April, *No Time To Die* is the 25th movie in the 007 franchise.

Phase Four of the MCU officially gets underway with Scarlett Johansson's *Black Widow* movie in May, followed by *Eternals* in November. Christopher Nolan returns in July with mysterious espionage thriller *Tenet*, Disney-Pixar present two animations, *Onward* and *Soul*, and Tom Cruise feels the need for speed (again) in *Top Gun: Maverick*.

Notable by its absence, however, is Star Wars, which takes a hiatus following *The Rise of Skywalker*.

So which of 2020's blockbusters will be racing to fill the Star Wars gap? It remains to be seen, but there's no denying it's set to be another bonanza year for rip-roaring popcorn cinema. ■

**Top:** Super-assassin John Wick (Keanu Reeves) on the run with a \$14m price tag on his head

**Above:** The Avengers: Endgame cast includes Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Paul Rudd and Scarlett Johansson