

regular joe would spit on the endsem week as the single most dreadful part of a semester, but spring 2020 had different plans. Following great buzz around the movie 'Cats', five of us at IIIT decided to watch the cinematic version of the Broadway classic. By then, it'd become a pop culture monstrosity - cat lovers and furries alike derided the movie, questioning how this "unholy picture" came to be. Nothing was more shocking than the cast that would lead one to expect the exact opposite - Oscar winners, knighted individuals, Grammy-winning pop stars, and the prima ballerina of the Royal Academy of Ballet. To top it off, the movie was directed by acclaimed Oscar-winning director Tom Hooper (The King's Speech, Les Miserables). Strangely, this roster wasn't enough to convince theatres in Hyderabad or elsewhere to screen the movie for long.

*Fun fact: It's estimated that Cats lost around \$100 million in revenue when accounting for production and marketing budgets.*

But, as theatres worldwide stopped their screenings, a lone cinema in Hyderabad prepared for its near-final show - unprepared for the hysterics that the five of us would cause. The couple that sat in front of us was likely even more unprepared to have five loud students interrupt an otherwise private cinema screening. Though we suspect they had little to no interest in the movie.

*Aside: INOX GVK One also had the best nachos we've had in any theatre in Hyderabad. Great cheese too. A tad bit pricey though. 10/10 should try it.*

We spent forty minutes questioning if this was worth the bucks during the ride to the theatre. This review was born out of the discussions in the forty minutes it took us to return to IIIT - albeit as different and new individuals. There are few experiences in life that are forgettable, there are some that demand conversation, but none in our experience necessitated a deeper questioning about why certain choices were made along with a sparked curiosity about the character's resemblances to 'furries'.

Few movies get straight to the point. Cats does. It opens with a

grand song about 'Jellicle cats' and their varied activities. They sing. They dance. They do magic. "Jellicles can and Jellicles do. Jellicles Do and Jellicles Can" That's a lyric from the song.

Imagine them to be a different species of cats. Throughout the movie, they sing and dance with a personality that is conveniently described by their names - the magician cat, the theatre, the mystery cat (If only we could figure out our life's purpose as easily). These cats compete for the ultimate prize - a ticket to be reborn.

The idea of starting over in a new life is an ancient fantasy. To be cleansed of one's sins, and be given a chance to begin anew with a newfound innocence and sense of wonder in the world. Cats are the quintessential 'rebirthers'. And the movie is no exception. In its quest to tread the emotional tension of life's worth, the movie gave us.... Jason Derulo sucking toes and slurping milk sensually with an underage kitten. It is not a pleasant sight. This was meant to be a Christmas movie that competed with Star wars. Strangely, this theme of a good premise and creepy acting make up the bulk of the movie. It's also precisely why this is the best movie we've watched in 2020.

While Inception nested its plots intricately, changing the meaning of time, Cats goes a step further and disregards its importance altogether. Truly. Shuffle a few songs here and there, and it's unlikely to make a dent in the larger story. The character's title songs already have a rambling style to them, but the rambling plot truly shows a commitment to artistic style unlike any other. In its 110 minute runtime, we see a slew of cats pop in and out, singing songs about themselves as they make a case to win the prize. The contest to be reborn is judged by an old cat that only shows up after half the contestants have performed. Worst judge ever. Wait, this plot feels familiar...

The first thought that comes to mind when watching Cats (apart from questioning life, certain death, and everything in between) is how eerily similar it is to America's Got Talent. There's a contest with a grand prize, with random contestants from all over the country hoping to get their hands on it. The characters also fit some of the stereotypical contestant profiles a little too well.

# AMERI-C TAL



**JENNYANYDOTS**



**VICTORIA**



**MR. MISTOFFELEES**

She fits into a lot of different act archetypes. The costume changing act, the clumsy dancing act, the teaching pets to dance act, and also the terrible singing act. While she may not be very talented, the act is very entertaining and so is kept on the show to get more views.

*When the day's hustle and bustle is done  
Then the Gumbie Cat's work is but hardly begun  
As she finds that the mice will not ever keep quiet*

She's the host and fits right into the profile. Young, quirky, white. Yes, we just said that. She dances around once in a while, listens earnestly, and plays along well. The one question we all wonder though - why do we have to be invested in her? As the primary character, we see the plot through her lens.

*Visions of dazzling rooms I'll never get let into*

*And the memories were lost long ago  
But at least you have beautiful ghosts*

Anyone who's seen a competition show knows that the most frequent contestant (after the singers and the dancers) is the magician. Mistoffelees fits perfectly into this archetype. His tricks are pretty lame at first, but he might be the only contestant who actually improves during the show. Truth be told, his trick for the finale (spoiler alert: teleporting Old Deuteronomy back) was actually pretty amazing.

*When he was curled up by the fire  
And he's sometimes been heard by the fire*

*When he was about on the roof  
At least they all heard that somebody purred*





*Old Deuteronomy's buried nine wives  
And more -- I am tempted to say  
                  ninety-nine  
And his numerous progeny prospers  
                  and thrives  
And the village is proud of him in his  
                  decline*



*Daylight*  
*I must wait for the sunrise*  
*I must think of a new life*  
*And I mustn't give in*  
*When the dawn comes*  
*Tonight will be a memory too*  
*And a new day will begin*



*Macavity's a mystery cat: He's called  
the Hidden Paw  
For he's a master criminal who can  
defy the law  
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard,  
the Flying Squad's despair  
And when you reach the scene of crime  
Macavity's not there!*



# WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?

Clearly, the movie has a lot of flaws (the reviews are hilarious).

*"I truly believe our divided nation can be healed and brought together as one by "Cats" - the musical, the movie, the disaster. In other news, my eyes are burning. Oh God, my eyes"*

*"Nine may not be enough lives for some of the stars to live down their involvement in this poorly conceived and executed adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's hit musical."*

*"I felt the light inside me slowly fading."*

Identifying what these flaws are may help provide those unfortunate souls who decided to watch the movie some amount of closure.

For starters, there wasn't exactly a main character in the story. Although stories don't always need a protagonist, there's always some party which we can root for. In the case of Cats, the only thing we rooted for was the credits to roll up. Some believe that Victoria was the protagonist, but that doesn't make too much sense since there's zero character development (except maybe she moves more weirdly towards the end). Grizabella did have some sort of redemption, we couldn't really relate with her since she was barely shown, and the reason she was banished wasn't too relatable either. If there was a character we could cheer for, maybe the movie would be slightly less unbearable.

Pixar, the maker of heartwarming timeless movies, follows one rule - "A good story makes up for all flaws". Sadly, the story of Cats was possibly the biggest flaw of all. The story revolves around a competition to be the "Jellicle Choice", and the winner goes to the Heaviside Layer, which is a metaphor for rebirth. While this is sort of a plot, the movie mainly consists of

character introductions (literally 80% of the movie). There is a villain in the story - Macavity - portrayed by Idris Elba. He has one of the most swoon-worthy voices but gets around 10 lines. That's it. Strangely, he is the character we would root for because he constantly kidnaps the contestants, stopping them mid-song. Maybe Macavity was aware of how dreadful the characters were.

We've saved the biggest flaw for the last, the CGI. To be completely honest, the movie would've looked better before the special effects were added.



*What we were promised*



*What we got*

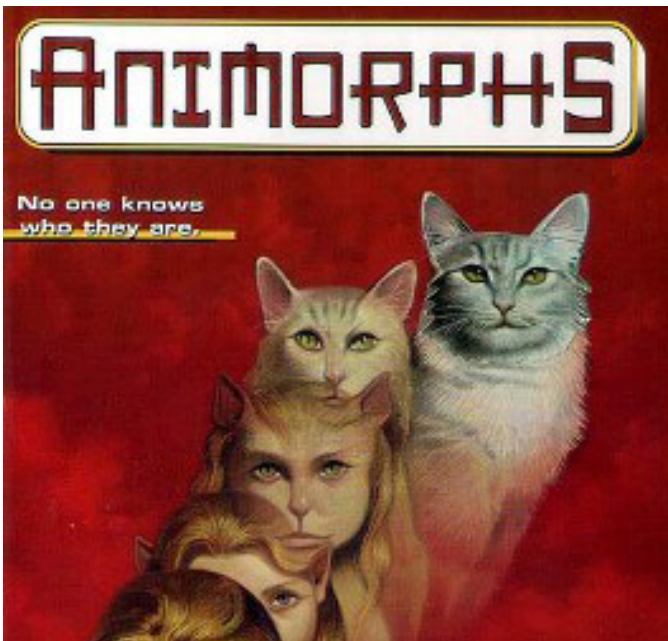
*Fun fact: "Cats - A Look Inside" was released a day before the actual trailer and it didn't have any CGI at all.*



To be fair, the bar was high. Cats in real life are adorable. Not that this is something to be debated on, but we offer evidence below:



What we were met with was a halfway transition of a character from Animorphs.



The characters looked too human to be cats but too cat-like to be humans. The cats had fingers. **FINGERS. FINGERS!** Rule #1 of adorable cats is paws for the win. Some wore high heels! Further, The movement of the tails was downright unnerving, not to mention their ears. The most horrifying part wasn't the cat CGI though, it was the cockroaches and mice that appeared in the first 15 minutes or so. Innocent children do not belong on tiny mice heads. A good CGI might've been able to maybe slightly make up for the awful story, but all it did was leave us horrified and disgusted.

Perhaps we've been a bit too harsh.  
Nope. Not at all.

*The authors couldn't settle on this.*

Unpleasantries aside, there are some light and beautiful moments as well. Ignoring the poor plot, some actors do put up a great performance. Jennifer Hudson and Taylor Swift have some great moments despite showing up mainly at the end. Their vocals and comparably enjoyable songs play well into the characters they represent. What's better than the songs from the Broadway show strangely is the sole original song written for the movie - Beautiful Ghosts. The chilling musicalesque original has great lyrics and vocals. It is one of the few songs in the movie that actually enhance the story.

*Fun fact: Taylor Swift appears in more promotional material for the movie than the movie itself. Considering that she wrote the song that earned the movie its only nominations, there should have been more TS.*

Calling this movie bad would be 'incomplete'. Bad things do have value, and in hindsight, no movie had better value for money than Cats. In the end, personal taste is likely going to determine one's reaction to the movie. What that means is people who appreciate terrible CGI, barely any story writing and cringe humour will enjoy this movie. At the end of the day, humour is humour even if you end up laughing at the person cracking the joke. The movie deserves terrible ratings but it is also the most enjoyable group comedy you can watch. While this movie may not be the best choice if you're looking for an objectively good movie, it's still an enjoyable experience when seen with friends, and also a journey into a serious existential crisis. Have fun!

Like the writers of Cats, the authors of this article don't know how to end well either soooooo, byeeeee! ■

