

Gaming

'Big surprise'

Geeks swarm unique event

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 2, (RTRS): Thousands of geeks from Italy and abroad poured into the medieval Tuscan town of Lucca over the weekend for the Lucca Comics & Games fest/convention which served as a platform to promote several hot upcoming US titles, including "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," "The Peanuts Movie," "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2," and "The Hateful Eight."

This unique event dedicated to fandom, cosplay, role-playing games and the entire cross-media universe of comics is increasingly becoming an integral part of the Hollywood studios' promotional push in Europe, ever since its "Area Cinema" section started five years ago. Ticket sales totalled at least 180,000 for the four day meet, though figures are not final.

Disney disappointed legions of "Star Wars" fans who had been promised a "big unexpected surprise." They waited in line for hours at dusk Saturday merely to be shown Kylo Ren's new crossguard lightsaber, more-than-sixteen feet tall, being unveiled with plenty of fanfare and nothing else to follow in the garden of Lucca's palatial Villa Bottini. This letdown sparked some negative Italian press and social media rumblings. Still, reflecting the meet's mellow atmosphere, fans mostly took it in stride.

Engaged

Earlier in the day hundreds of "Star Wars" cosplayers engaged in a massive flash mob lightsaber battle organised by Murdoch-owned Sky paybox's Sky Cinema unit to launch a dedicated "Star Wars" event channel they will beam Nov 7-15 in the run up to the release of "The Force Awakens," out in Italy on Dec 16.

Fans who on Saturday had lined up for hours to celebrate "Doctor Who" were rewarded with a live presentation by showrunner Steven Moffat and scribe Jamie Mathieson of the Italo launch of "The Magician's Apprentice" episode that opens the ninth series of the BBC flagship show.

Japanese anime and manga director Mamoru Oshii made the trek to Lucca to screen his live action/CG effects hybrid "Garm Wars: The Last Druid," hold a master class, and get a prize, with his producer and longtime collaborator Mitsuha Ishikawa in tow. Ishikawa is co-founder and CEO of Tokyo-based anime production powerhouse Production I.G., which, like Lucca Comics, is also involved in television series, video games and music.

Universal promoted the latest "Hunger Games" instalment with a packed presentation comprising a never shown before fifty-second scene featuring Katniss, Liam and fellow fighters running from a toxic oil wave. Something that in shorter form has already been revealed in the pic's trailer.

Presented

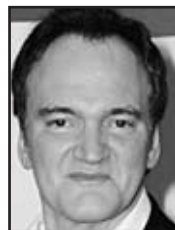
To celebrate Halloween, Italian horror fans got the bow of the fourth episode of series six of "The Walking Dead," thirty-six hours before its being aired in the US on AMC. Robert Kirkman's upcoming paranormal drama "Outcast," based on the eponymous comic book title, was presented by its co-creator Paul Azaceta.

Italy's 01 Distribuzione stoked buzz on **Quentin Tarantino's** "The Hateful Eight" with eight minutes of footage previously shown only at Comic-Con in San Diego. Warner Bros. tubthumped "Batman V. Superman: Dawn of Justice"; David Ayer's "Suicide Squad"; "Spectre"; "The Angry Birds Movie" based on the popular mobile game app; and also Ron Howard's "In The Heart of the Sea," about the mammoth whale that inspired Herman Melville's "Moby Dick."

Italian distributor Koch Media bowed Japanese anime auteur Isao Takahata's 1988 classic "Grave of the Fireflies," which is getting an Italian reissue release on Nov. 10.

Those who can't wait for "The Good Dinosaur" — the Thanksgiving weekend offering from Pixar Animation Studios — could get an unusually-early look Nov 3 with the release of a Disney Infinity toy/video game set based on the film.

Fans will be able to buy a figure of tiny hero Spot with "The Good Dinosaur" power disc pack, which also features caveboy Spot's new-found pal, Arlo the apatosaurus, along with a trio of T-Rexes — Nash, Butch and Ramsey. The merchandise will be available at major retailers.



Tarantino



In this photo provided by Twentieth Century Fox & Peanuts Worldwide LLC, Charlie Brown and Lucy play in the new film, 'The Peanuts Movie'. The movie releases in US theaters on Nov. 6. (AP)

Film

Toon feels like first day of new school year

'Peanuts' amuses with simple romance

By Peter Debruge

You're in love, Charlie Brown (and wouldn't you know it, so is Snoopy). That's the simple, slender premise behind "The Peanuts Movie," Blue Sky's gorgeous fan's best-friend adaptation of a comicstrip that is beloved by so many around the world, director Steve Martino's biggest challenge was simply not to screw it up. The late Charles M. Schulz almost surely would have appreciated the result, which presents a wholesome, goody-goody view of childhood emotional challenges barely advanced since his "li'l folks" first graced the bigscreen back in 1969's "A Boy Named Charlie Brown," apart from the risky move or transforming the cartoonist's hand-drawn bobble-headed characters into complex computer-generated models of themselves — in 3D, no less. While the old-fashioned story barely feels adequate to fill a half-hour TV special, the new look positions all involved to make as much in tie-ins and merch as they do in ticket sales.

Over the course of nearly 90 minutes, incorrigible romantic Charlie Brown develops a crush on his new neighbor, the otherwise nameless (and until now, virtually faceless) Little Red-Haired Girl, while his high-flying beagle falls for a little pink-haired poodle named Fifi, an entirely new character he imagines

rescuing from the Red Baron. Both the boy and his dog set their goals high, though Snoopy has the self-confidence to follow through, while Charlie Brown suffers from near-constant insecurity — feelings exacerbated by longtime rival (and resident know-it-all) Lucy, who gladly enumerates his shortcomings, only to turn around and offer psychiatric help from her makeshift lemonade stand at a nickel a session.

Characters

For those who know the strip well, "The Peanuts Movie" should feel like the first day of a new school year, reunited with a classroom full of familiar faces. With the exception of Fifi (who looks like Snoopy with pink pom-poms stuck to her head and ears), everyone here is a well-established member of the Peanuts ensemble, and though their personalities come across ever so slightly different (more by virtue of voice casting than by design), the kid characters are performed by actual kids: Noah Schnapps for Charlie Brown, Hadley Belle Miller for Lucy and so on. The grown-ups still speak via muffled trombone, while Snoopy and Woodstock's voices have been resurrected from archival recordings by Bill Melendez, who directed nearly all the "Peanuts" features and TV specials (yet another of the pic's many strategies for not straying far from the canon).

Over the course of an often-repetitive 50-year run, Schulz's haiku-like strips were inherently too short to develop much more than recurring dynamics or themes, so in narrative terms, the film is obliged to lean more heavily on the property's many previous animated incarnations (with certain lines, like Lucy's disgusted "I've been kissed by a dog!" lifted directly from "A Charlie Brown Christmas"). What for adults will feel like nostalgia should play as fresh to younger aunts, as they discover the origin of Snoopy's Red Baron obsession, his invention of the Flying Ace character and his first appearance in Joe Cool mode. Meanwhile, carrying on futile pursuits that have dogged him for half a century, Charlie Brown struggles to fly his kite, fails to kick his football and repeatedly makes a fool of himself in school.

One can only imagine the countless hours that must have been spent debating every little detail — from script to skin texture, the density of Pigpen's dust cloud to the bounce of Frieda's curls — although the creative team has been shrewd enough with nearly every one of its choices that audiences should have no trouble enjoying the film at face value. After all, is there any face in cartoon history more apt than Snoopy's to answer the classic joke, "What's black and white and read all over?"

Like most classic jokes, "Peanuts"

isn't so much funny as mildly amusing, which is evidently one of the many aspects of Schulz's legacy that his son Craig and grandson Bryan fought to protect as screenwriters and producers on the film (evidently trumping genuinely hilarious collaborator Paul Feig). But a little modernization wouldn't have hurt, especially in the diversity department. While Franklin remains Charlie Brown's only brown friend, a non-white love interest would have been as progressive as Schulz's tomboyish depiction of Peppermint Patty was back in the day.

From the very outset, following a version of the Fox fanfare delivered by none other than resident piano prodigy Schroeder, the film sets the stage with a hand-doodled snowfall: squiggly black balls loosely sketched in a rectangular frame, which fades from what could be one of Schulz's comicstrip panels into a pleasant-looking CG alternative. As in "Horton Hears a Who!" (which Martino co-directed), we have entered a dynamic realm directly inspired by a visionary children's artist, except that this time, instead of replicating the fantastical colors and creatures of Dr Seuss's imagination, here we have the stripped-down, hyper-simplified Midwestern world of Charlie Brown, who is himself a glorified circle with ink-spot eyes, bulb-like nose and an unruly curlicue for hair. (RTRS)



Ashley Jones and Joel Henricks attend the premiere of Peanuts Movie on Nov 1 in Westwood, California. (AP)



Swift



Menzel

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Taylor Swift was performing on Halloween, but don't worry: She still got to wear a costume.

The megastar closed the US leg of her "1989" tour Saturday night and, in something that should shock no one who has been following the tour, brought along a special guest for the **Tampla, Fla.** show. **Idina Menzel**, who voiced Elsa in "Frozen," joined Swift to sing "Let It Go" from the Disney hit.

If that wasn't all, the two were in full costume. Menzel donned a sparkly blue dress to look like the ice queen she voiced, and Swift was decked out in full Olaf costume.

"Frozen totally happened tonight," Swift wrote on Instagram that night. "And 55,000 people sang 'Let It Go' so loudly, it nearly took my breath away."

Swift and Menzel shed their costumes halfway through the performance, going for more concert-fitting outfits.

"Thank you Taylor Swift!" Menzel wrote on her Facebook page. "That was definitely an out of body experience. Or out of Elsa's body experience!"

Swift also welcomed another special guest to the stage that night: **Alessia Cara**, who covered Swift's "Bad Blood" on BBC Radio and impressed Swift so much that the pop star tweeted about it. Cara performed her hit "Here" in front of the massive crowd. (RTRS)

SEOUL, South Korea: The most widely used child surveillance app in South Korea has been pulled from the market after security specialists raised serious concerns about the program's safety.

Moon Hyun-seok, a senior official at the Korea Communications Commission, told The Associated Press that "Smart Sheriff" has been removed from the Play store, Google's software marketplace, and that existing users are being asked to switch to other programs.

The government plans to shut down the service to existing users "as soon as possible," he said.

Smart Sheriff's maker, an association of South Korean mobile operators called MOIBA, declined comment.

Smart Sheriff's disappearance is a blow to South Korea's contentious effort to keep closer tabs on the online lives of its youngest citizens. Less than a year ago, the government and schools sent letters to students and parents to encourage them to

download Smart Sheriff.

While security was one of the reasons that led to the removal of Smart Sheriff, the KCC official said the regulator had decided earlier this year to suspend the app at the end of December. The faster-than-expected availability of free monitoring apps from private companies prompted the regulator to remove the app two

months sooner than scheduled, he said.

A law passed in April requires all new smartphones sold to those 18 and under to be equipped with software which parents can use to snoop on their kids' social media activity. Smart Sheriff, the most popular of more than a dozen state-approved apps, was meant to keep children safe from pornography,

bullying and other threats, but experts say its abysmal security left the door wide open to hackers and put the personal information of some 380,000 users at risk.

Pulling the plug on Smart Sheriff was "long overdue," said independent researcher **Collin Anderson**, who worked with Internet watchdog group Citizen Lab and German software auditing firm Cure53 to comb through the app's code.

In a pair of reports published in September, Cure53 described the app's security as "catastrophic." Citizen Lab, which is based at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, said the problems could lead to a "mass compromise" of all users.

MOIBA said in response then that the vulnerabilities had been dealt with in the six weeks preceding publication of the reports. But the researchers said in new reports published Sunday that the fixes were mainly cosmetic. Anderson said they were "akin to putting a lock on a few of the doors but then leaving the keys to the locks outside."

Mario Heiderich of Cure53 said it wasn't his place to say whether it was right to mandate the installation of monitoring apps on children's phones. But he said Smart Sheriff's implementation of the surveillance was disastrous.

"If you are going to do it at all, you have to do it right," he said. "And this was not done right at all." Anderson said there was no guarantee that the other monitoring apps didn't also have security issues. (AP)



The Los Angeles Police Emerald Society Pipes and Drums band plays for guests of the world premiere screening of the documentary film "Battle Brotherhood" on the stars of the Hollywood Walk of Fame and hand and foot prints of famous stars outside the TCL Chinese Theatre on Nov. 1, in the Hollywood section of Los Angeles, California. The film depicts the journey of both American and Russian veterans through their experiences in combat and life after war. (AFP)

Singer Jones ready to take a DNA test

LONDON, Nov 2, (AFP): After being told that he is "just passing as white", Welsh crooner Tom Jones says he is ready to take a DNA test to find out once and for all if he has black ancestry.

The star, whose hits include "It's Not Unusual", "Delilah" and is often thought to have black heritage for his booming baritone voice, tight curly hair and olive complexion. "A lot of people still think I'm black."

When I first came to America, people who had heard me sing on the radio would be surprised that I was white when they saw me," Jones was quoted as saying by the Times.