**Movie**

**‘Guardians of the Galaxy’**

By Sean P. Means | The Salt Lake Tribune

Compared with Iron Man, Captain America and the other earthbound heroes of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the maniacally entertaining "Guardians of the Galaxy" is definitely a wild child.

Director James Gunn ("Slither," "Super") tosses together a dizzying blend of superhero bravado, outer-space adventure and off-the-wall comedy that introduces the strangest and most enjoyable bunch of rogues ever to inhabit the same spaceship.

This being the Guardians’ screen debut, Gunn and his co-screenwriter Nicole Perlman spend the first half getting the band together. In the lead is Peter Quill (Chris Pratt), a rakish thief from Earth who insists on being called "Star-Lord." There’s Gamora (Zoe Saldana), the battle-hardened rebel daughter of the galaxy-destroying Thanos, and the vengeance-seeking Drax the Destroyer (wrestler-turned-actor Dave Bautista). And, finally, there is Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper), a cybernetically altered talking raccoon, and his bodyguard, the walking tree Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel).

The story throws these five together in prison, à la "The Usual Suspects," to join forces to bust out and fight a common enemy: Ronan (Lee Pace), a planet-ravaging zealot who has a deal with Thanos to destroy the high-tech planet Xandar. Thanos’ price is a mysterious orb, one whose power Ronan covets. The orb also happens to be something Quill just stole and is hiding from his pirate boss, Yondu Udonta (Michael Rooker).

(The orb and Thanos, by the way, link "Guardians" to the rest of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Thanos, a major Marvel baddie, appeared in a midcredit scene in "The Avengers." The orb brings the Guardians in contact with Taneleer Tivan, alias The Collector, a trader in rare objects. The Collector, played by Benicio Del Toro, first appeared in a midcredits scene in "Thor: The Dark World.")

The plot, though, takes a back seat to the oddball characters, each with a solid backstory. Quill projects himself as a confident hero, though his past is that of a scared child kidnapped from Earth. Gamora, trained to become a humanoid weapon, has turned against Thanos and her cyborg half-sister, Nebula (Karen Gillan of "Doctor Who"), Ronan’s loyal lieutenant. Drax lost his family to one of Ronan’s attacks, while Rocket and Groot share a familial bond that’s funny and touching. (It’s interesting that the characters with the most heart are the computer-generated ones.)

Gunn cut his teeth at the exploitation-movie factory Troma Films, and the rule he learned there — you can get away with anything as long as it’s funny — is well-observed here. One smart move was casting Pratt, known for his comic roles in "Parks & Recreation" and "The LEGO Movie," as Quill, a rogue in the Han Solo mold but with more wisecracks. Another prime source of humor is the goofy soundtrack of ’70s pop songs, from a mixtape that is Quill’s only souvenir of his life on Earth, that provides ironic counterpoint to the action (for example, when Rocket shoots up the prison during their breakout, the accompanying music is Rupert Holmes’ "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)").

Being an origin story, "Guardians of the Galaxy" sets things in motion nicely for a sequel (which is already in the works). That’s great, because this ragtag crew is one you’ll want to see in action again and again.

Music

Eminem *Marshal Mathers LP 2*

Review: Jon Dolan *Rolling Stone*

The Marshall Mathers LP 2 is the kind of sequel that gets people shouting at the screen in disbelief before their seats are warmed up. The first song, "Bad Guy," is seven white-knuckled minutes of psycho-rap insanity in which Stan's little brother comes back to chop Slim Shady into Slim Jims, tossing him into the trunk and driving around Detroit – listening to The Marshall Mathers LP, of course. "How's this for publicity stunt? This should be fun/Last album now, 'cause after this you'll be officially done," Em raps, playing his own killer.

Eminem could use a publicity stunt, and The Marshall Mathers LP 2 is just what the therapist ordered. During the 13 years since The Marshall Mathers LP, he's never lost his acrobat-gremlin skills on the mic. But some subsequent albums felt hermetic, perverting rage into rock-star griping on 2004's Encore, horror-show shock tactics on 2009's Relapse and 12-step purging on 2010's Recovery. The Marshall Mathers LP 2 is about reclaiming a certain freewheeling buoyancy, about pissing off the world from a more open, less cynical place; he even says sorry to his mom on "Headlights," where he's joined by Nate Ruess of Fun.

Nostalgia is everywhere. Em surrounds himself in allusions to classic hip-hop, like the Beastie Boys samples producer Rick Rubin laces together on "Berzerk." It's telling that the only guest MC is Kendrick Lamar on "Love Game," probably because his slippery syllable-juggling owes a lot to Eminem.

Yet Em's former obsession – his own media image – has been replaced with a 41-year-old's cranky concerns. He's still a solipsistic cretin, but in a more general, everyday sort of way. He raps about how he can't figure out how to download Luda on his computer and waves the Nineties-geek flag with references to Jeffrey Dahmer and the Unabomber. He's playing his best character: the demon spawn of Trailer Hell, America, hitting middle age with his middle finger up his nose while he cleans off the Kool-Aid his kids spilled on the couch.

Much of the album hews to the stark beats and melodies he loves rapping over. But the tracks that lean on classic rock are loopy and hilarious. "Rhyme or Reason" brilliantly flips a sample of the Zombies' "Time of the Season"; when the song asks, "Who's your daddy," Em answers, "I don't have one/My mother reproduced like a Komodo dragon." "So Far . . ." shows some love for a Rust Belt homey by rhyming over Joe Walsh's "Life's Been Good": "Jed Clampett, Fred Sanford, welfare mentality helps to/Keep me grounded, that's why I never take full advantage of wealth/I managed to dwell within these perimeters/Still cramming the shelves full of Hamburger Helper/I can't even help it, this is the hand I was dealt to."

MM LP 2 fits in well in the year of Yeezus and Magna Carta . . . Holy Grail, records by aging geniuses trying to figure out what the hell to do with their dad-ass selves. (It's like hip-hop is the new Wilco or something.) Since Em has always been a mess, he'll probably still be able to give us pause when he's rhyming about retirement ventures through dentures and cleaning out the colostomy bag he wears up inside his saggy drawers. MM LP 3, 2026. Let's do this.

**Video Game**

***Destiny***

**Review by: Matt Miller (*Game Informer)***

Great expectations have followed Destiny since its announcement. As the latest brainchild from the Halo creators at Bungie, the game has garnered a level of anticipation only exceeded by the massive hype machine that declares its not-to-be-missed potential. Bungie’s new game is not as gigantic or revolutionary as that hype may have led some to believe. In fact, it has several features that feel like missteps or problems. But that doesn’t change the fact that the more I play it, the more I love it.

A benevolent alien intelligence arrives on Earth to gift humanity with its wisdom, and leads us into an unprecedented period of expansion and advancement. When our benefactor’s ancient enemy arrives, humanity is beaten back to near extinction. Hundreds of years later, you stand as a guardian of humanity, finally ready to push back against the tide of darkness. Destiny has the seeds of a thoughtfully imagined universe, characterized by a humanistic and idealized vision of mankind’s heroism and potential. The universe is supported by gorgeous art and one of the best soundtracks in years. Unfortunately, the story set within that backdrop is anemic. With little to no character development, a disconnected plot thread about alien attackers, and uneven narrative pacing, it seems that many of the fundamental staples of storytelling have been abandoned in the name of continuous action and discrete, standalone missions. Encyclopedic grimoire entries unlock with a modicum of additional story explanation, but the odd decision to include those only on the game’s website means few will ever see these tidbits.

Thankfully, the story-sparse missions are a blast, offering a mix of activities for solo, cooperative, and competitive play. Destiny excels at providing activities for different moods and moments, from short planetary patrols to lengthy three-person instanced dungeons. These tasks often take you to interesting corners of the game world, but it’s too bad that so many missions start in the same places, leading to a needless sense of repetition. That sense of repetition extends to mission objectives, which too often fall back on the same setup of your AI companion needing time to hack something while you fight off attackers; thankfully, the stage layouts and enemies help the battles feel distinct.

Destiny’s design is particularly well suited to team play. Solo play is an ideal choice for players looking for a challenge, but any given mode is more fun (and easier) with a friend or two at your side. The potential for seamless flow between missions is halted by the regular need to return home to a central social hub to receive mission awards and gear up. That wouldn’t be so bad, except that Destiny suffers from lengthy load times that stunt the momentum of a session. Bungie also needs to find more solutions to let players of differing levels play together; as it is, a mismatched team-up is doomed to either be too easy for one or too hard for another.

Intense, high-octane battles are Bungie’s forte, and Destiny maintains the reputation. Each of several gun types feels balanced and rewarding, and the special powers, grenades, and melee attacks that are unique to each class are exciting to acquire and a joy to perfect. Enemy combatants often rely on numbers and damage potential over complex A.I. routines; it’s fun to mow through dozens of foes, but enemies rarely provide a strategically engaging matching of wits. Characters are highly mobile thanks to the inclusion of class-specific movement modes, and the importance of understanding the aerial game is key to mastering the harder fights. In between battles, Bungie’s solution to the MMO “mount” is a floating speeder bike that’s more fun than it has any right to be, even if it is a blatant copy (sound effects and all) of the classic Star Wars vehicle.

The competitive offering includes fewer customization options than some contemporary shooters, but the fierce PvP battles that unfold in the few available modes are uniformly excellent. Double jumps and similar movement modes provide a verticality to the maps that adds tension and tactical depth. Weapon skill and sharp reflexes undoubtedly win the day, but the inclusion of supers assures that even beginning players get brief moments of victory on the battlefield. None of the initial batch of maps stand out, but all include opportunities for compelling exchanges, from interesting sniping spots to hidden alcoves from which to ambush unsuspecting foes. Matchmaking is slow, but my matches have offered mostly well-balanced teams even in the early days after launch. Unlike in the cooperative game, characters of different levels are able to play well together, but guardians who have not yet unlocked at least their core powers are at a notable disadvantage.

Character progression is shared across competitive and solo/cooperative play, lending a genuine sense of ownership over your guardian. The sense of investment is increased through the opportunity to level multiple subclasses and improve weapons with their use. Loot isn’t plentiful, but it’s often meaningful, so you’re making interesting choices about which gun to equip rather than constantly clearing out dozens of useless objects. The three classes are more similar than they are different, but each has a few exciting ways to stand out, from the hunter’s unbearably cool bladedancer attacks to the warlock’s devastating nova bomb. Your guardian’s options only become more flexible as levels rise, leading to ample opportunities to tweak a build to your specifications.

The philosophy of depth over time extends to the rest of the game; Destiny reveals its complexity only after many hours. Unlike in many games, hitting level cap and completing the story is more of a mid-game marker. Farming reputation, using gear to level beyond the cap, and completing progression for each of your subclasses can be a lot of fun, but it won’t appeal to gamers who hate grinding. For those that enjoy the process, it’s exciting to uncover higher level versions of old missions and track down little boosts and tricks, such as the ability to repower teammates’ super abilities through careful timing of your deployments.

Like the MMOs from which Destiny draws inspiration, it’s challenging to draw a line in the sand about what the game is or will be. Already, Bungie has plans in the works to expand the game with additional story content, raids, and regular new variations on competitive play. However, a game can’t be judged for what it might be in the future. Even with its stumbles, the initial release of Destiny is a colossal achievement in interactive design, integrating a number of differing genre elements into a smart and unified whole. Bungie’s latest futuristic opus is one of the first true event games of this new generation, and while it still has room to grow, it’s worth your attention right out of the gate.