

It Follows

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March 11, 2024



There is a relentless exhaustion that comes from being stalked. I remember in 2011 downloading Instagram for the first time and thinking, *why the fuck would I want “followers?”* Then, it happened. As if overnight, we went from “friends” in online communities to cult leaders or stalking victims. I knew from experience this signaled that the fun on social media would soon end, I just didn’t anticipate how long “soon” would take. One thing was certain to me, especially then: there is no rest for the followed.

That's what happens when *it* follows you. It can be anything: a person, a past, a topic, a cause, a dark car, a ravenous carnivorous animal, a societal experience so ingrained that it repeats again and again and again in different places and through different people, a mistake, a nightmare, a footprint.

When David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* premiered in 2014, I was in awe of how simultaneously timeless and timely the film was. There was a marked jump in collective screen time after 2013, the start of many more people having access to everything (the internet, each other) all the time (smartphones) — the start of time collapsing in on itself just as it does in the film. Ten years later, I certainly see how the film indirectly comments on social media stalking, rapid technological changes, and surveillance culture. However, the beauty of *It Follows* is how broad it paints with its brush, a story so excellently told that it could, in fact, be about anything and at any time, but not just anywhere. Detroit is not just anywhere.

Mitchell executes this by manipulating time through technology and set design. Classic cars, like the 1975 Plymouth Gran Fury and 1980 Chevrolet Impala Wagon, look brand new compared to the beat-up contemporary cars — making the new cars look old and the old cars look new. Highlighting how the glory days of Detroit are in a time gone by, but also still very much alive and informing the present. The televisions are not flat rectangles on the wall, masquerading as family photos or art, but cube-shaped objects playing pixelated black and white movies. One such box sits in the corner of main character Jay's bedroom, with silver antennae emerging from it like a giant ancient sleeping bug waiting to be awakened. Then there is the pink plastic hand-held shell, where Jay's friend Yara is reading Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* as if it were an e-reader — something that never existed and maybe never will.

The present lives in layers of decades. It reminds me of my teenage years in the early-mid 2000s; my favorite party store looked like it was from the 1980s, and my favorite diner hadn't been updated since the 1970s. Meanwhile, my mom's house looked very contemporary, and my school looked like a combination of the 1990s and 1940s. I largely knew how to locate these decades thanks to watching films. It is through place, architecture, design, materials, art, and layers of sediment that we are made up of time.



It Follows' dilation of time works in layers. It is like how trauma distorts time. It is how the city of Detroit, where the film takes place, has been forced to keep reliving its past. A city where time exists on a loop, or so it seems. When Jay goes on a date at the Redford Theatre, she has no idea what layer of the loop she'll soon find herself stuck in. Eventually, lying in the back of her date's car, she remarks on how this was exactly the kind of thing she fantasized about doing when she was younger: going on dates and driving around. He's heard digging something out of his trunk. Her date then comes up behind her and smothers her with a cloth.



When Jay wakes up in what looks like the old Packard Plant, she's still in her pink matching underwear and tied to a black and chrome wheelchair. Three horizontal blue-striped lights are seen like lighthouse beacons in the distance — the Renaissance Center. She yells for help, but her voice echoes in a way that signals no one will hear. Then, her date explains that Jay must now have sex with someone else to pass “it” on. Otherwise, it will follow her and kill her, and then kill him. That sometimes the entity — It — might look like someone she loves just to hurt her even more.

A naked woman comes into focus, walking toward her, and Jay screams. “I’m doing this to help you,” he says, moving his flashlight onto the woman, or “it.” As soon as it gets close, he hurriedly wheels Jay away and says he had to do this so she would believe him. When they get back to her house, Jay is dumped on her front lawn for her sister and friends to find.

Her sister Kelly and friends have been sitting outside playing cards to the sound of crickets and a metal flask being poured into an aluminum Coke can. While Yara reads from her shell:

“I think that if one is faced with inevitable destruction — if a house is falling upon you — for instance, one must feel a great longing to sit down, close one’s eyes, and wait, come what may.”

It Follows could be an allegory about STDs. I’ve certainly joked it is about a “sexually transmitted demon.” It could be about growing up in the shadow of the AIDs crisis. It could be about sexual violence and how the trauma of that can follow a person, muddling time while impacting every following person they are intimate with and passing on the hurt like a game of tag. It could be about Detroit and what it represents, a city that cannot hide its ruins in proximity to a failing empire, the death and destruction of its drawn-out fall — it follows.

Or, most simply, “it” could be about the ultimate end. Our human end. The very thing that follows us all since birth. No matter what things we acquire or what technological advancements we make, we will always be situated in our short place in this lifetime. Just as Yara expresses, the one final time she reads from *The Idiot* on her shell, near the conclusion of the film:

“When there is torture, there is pain and wounds. Physical agony and all this distracts the mind from mental suffering so that one is tormented by the wounds until the moment of death. And the most terrible agony may not be in the wounds themselves but in knowing for certain that within an hour, then within 10 minutes, then within half a minute, and now at this very instant, your soul will leave your body, and you will no longer be a person. And that this is certain, the worst thing is that it is certain.”

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