



## Original 'Fight Club' ending restored in China after online backlash

The original, iconic ending of cult US film *Fight Club* has been restored to screens in China after a censored version that brought all criminals to book sparked outrage online. Beijing has some of the world's most restrictive censorship rules with authorities only approving a handful of foreign films for release each year—sometimes with major cuts. But reversing endings is rare, and there was widespread anger after censors replaced

the original finale of *Fight Club* on a version streaming on platform Tencent Video.

In the original closing scenes, star Edward Norton's narrator kills his imaginary alter-ego Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, before watching multiple buildings explode, suggesting his character's plan to bring down modern civilization. But the version on Tencent instead closed with a line of text on a black screen to say the police "rapidly figured out the whole plan

and arrested all criminals".

In a rare censorship reversal, however, Tencent this week began to air the original conclusion of David Fincher's film, including the iconic explosive ending that was trimmed last month. The ending in which the state triumphs had sparked head scratching and outrage among some Chinese viewers—many of whom would likely have seen pirated versions of the unadulterated film. Human Rights Watch

described the cuts as "dystopian". Author Chuck Palahniuk, who wrote the 1996 novel that *Fight Club* was adapted from, tweeted that China had "done the right thing".

Tencent did not reply to questions on what led to the censorship, nor its abrupt reversal, which prompted more debate online. "Now, I'm speechless!" wrote one Chinese film fan, with the sentiment echoed across social media.—AFP

## End of the road in Colombia for Escobar's 'cocaine' hippos?

More than 100 African hippos descended from fewer than a handful imported as exotic pets by drug lord Pablo Escobar, face an uncertain future in Colombia. After the government added Escobar's so-called "cocaine" hippos Friday to a list of "introduced, invasive species," experts say killing them may be the only viable option. From the few individuals once housed at Escobar's Hacienda Napoles estate, the hippos' numbers have ballooned, with 130 now roaming free north of Bogota around the Magdalena River.

Officials say the grazing giants, endemic to sub-Saharan Africa, threaten local wildlife and humans living along the river, whom they have already come into conflict with. Attempts have been made to sterilize the animals, which can weigh as much as 1.8 tons, but doing so is expensive and difficult. "Sacrifice (culling) remains on the table," said David Echeverri, head of the Cornare state environmental agency in charge of the sterilization effort. "It is a necessary option... it could be the only way to stop the problem from getting worse," he told AFP.

Escobar, once head of the deadly Medellin Cartel, became one of the richest men on the planet, according to Forbes,

thanks to the drug trafficking empire he built. With his wealth he built a menagerie, acquiring hippos, flamingos, giraffes, zebras and kangaroos for his ranch. After he was shot dead by police in 1993, all but the hippopotamuses were sold to zoos. The semi-aquatic ungulates were left to roam Escobar's estate and continued breeding. They are now believed to be the largest so-called "bloat" of hippopotamuses outside of Africa.

### 'Complex, expensive and dangerous'

The creatures have long been a headache for authorities faced with a vocal anti-culling campaign. Last Friday, the government officially declared the hippos an invasive species and announced it had a plan to "manage" their population, which studies have suggested could quadruple in 10 years. Although the details of the plan have not been revealed, former environment minister Manuel Rodriguez has urged the government to use any means, including opening a hunt on the animals. "Obviously there are animal activists opposed to this, but what is the alternative?" he said.

To date, Cornare has managed to surgically sterilize 11 hippos and dart another 40 with contraceptives. The effort has cost more than \$100,000, but has failed to stop hippo numbers from swelling. "Everything with hippos is complex, expensive and dangerous," Echeverri told AFP.

For Rodriguez, the animals pose a major threat to fishermen and other riverside inhabitants. Last year, Cornare recorded two hippo attacks on people, neither fatal. In Africa, hippos kill hundreds of people every year.—AFP



## Hit Aussie show 'Neighbors' faces the axe

The Australian soap opera that helped launch the careers of Kylie Minogue, Margot Robbie and Russell Crowe faced an uncertain future yesterday, with 'Neighbors' finding few friends in the television industry. After almost 9,000 episodes, the Melbourne-based show is struggling to find a broadcaster in Britain — where it has enjoyed a cult following for the past 36 years. Current UK broadcaster Channel 5 will not carry the program after June 2022, forcing producers to pull the plug unless a replacement is found. "As you know the future of the show has been uncertain for some time," a top producer told cast and crew Sunday, in a memo obtained by AFP.

Australia's "Channel 10 would love the show to continue if we could find another broadcast partner to replace C5", the message said. "These discussions are ongoing however there is no new broadcaster at the moment and production must end, effectively resting the show."

"We are so proud of the show, you all and everything that you've achieved. But for now, this chapter is closing and we want to work together to give Neighbors

the amazing send off it deserves," it added. The note also included a helpline number for distraught cast and crew to contact for support. A whole generation of Brits grew up watching characters such as Charlene Robinson (Minogue) and her on-screen beau Scott Robinson, as well as an ensemble cast that over the years included actors Guy Pearce, Natalie Imbruglia and Liam Hemsworth.

Such was the show's one-time popularity that it was once blamed for Brits adopting an Australian-style upwards intonation at the end of sentences. Britain's Channel 5 said that while 'Neighbours' was "iconic", it wanted to focus on homegrown shows. "We recognise that there will be disappointment about this decision, however our current focus is on increasing our investment in original UK drama, which has strong appeal for our viewers," it said. Australia's Network 10 said in a statement that its intention was to "continue our association with Neighbors if another broadcast partner comes forward".—AFP



In this file photo taken on May 18, 1982 Italian film directors, brothers Paolo (second left), and Vittorio Taviani (second right) are accompanied by the actors, Sabina Vannucchi (left), Omero Antinutti (center), Margarita Lozano (right), and Claudio Bigagli for the presentation of their film 'La Notte di San Lorenzo' during the Cannes International Film Festival. — AFP

## Spanish actress Margarita Lozano dies at 90

Spanish actress Margarita Lozano, who worked with top European directors such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Sergio Leone, died yesterday aged 90, local officials said. The southeastern city of Lorca, where Lozano spent her childhood, declared three days of mourning, referring to her as an "adoptive daughter." "Margarita Lozano left a deep mark on both the cinema and theatre and acted under the orders of the best directors of the time," Lorca mayor Diego Jose Mateos said in a statement. Born in 1931 in Tetuan in northern Morocco which was then a Spanish protectorate to a father who was a

soldier stationed there, Lozano initially studied design and fashion.

But she abandoned her studies to pursue acting, her true passion, in Madrid, initially in the theatre. She starred in acclaimed Spanish director Luis Bunuel's 1961 drama "Viridiana" about a young nun about to take her final vows. The movie won the top Palme d'Or prize at the Cannes Film Festival that year. In the late 1960s she went to Italy, appearing in Pasolini's 1969 drama "Pigsty" as well as Sergio Leone's 1964 western "A Fistful of Dollars" alongside Clint Eastwood.

She retired for a decade to raise her

family but returned to Italian cinema in the 80s, appearing in several films by Paolo Taviani and his brother Vittorio Taviani. Her friend, Spanish architect Simon Angel Ros who designed her home in the coastal town of Puntas de Calnegre near Lorca where she was living, said Lozano passed away "peaceful". "Her heart has been weakening slowly, she did not suffer," he told local media. Lozano's only son Paco flew from Italy where he lives on Saturday to be by her side in her final hours, he added.—AFP

## NY's Queens borough offers a world of flavors, even amid pandemic

Across ethnically rich New York, you can easily dine on food from 100-plus countries. Or you can just go to the borough of Queens, where an incredibly diverse food scene is thriving even in these pandemic days. Located across the East River from Manhattan, Queens has benefited from steady immigration that has built up a fabulously varied culinary stage. "Of the five boroughs, Queens is the one with the most diverse population... with over 100 ethnicities, by my count," said Robert Sietsema, a food writer for Eater.com.

He said nobody knows the exact number of communities, as immigrants keep coming in. "Tibetans and Nepalese have recently arrived in Jackson Heights, for example," he said, referring to one of the most vibrant neighborhoods of this borough of nearly 2.5 million people. Indeed, a journey through Queens is an exotic feast of flavors, aromas and textures, its offerings expanding even as the pandemic has hit New York hard. This month alone four new restaurants opened in Queens, serving food from Turkey, Hong Kong, Singapore and Italy, according to Eater.com.

And the situation is fluid in this most dynamic of cities as neighborhoods and their culinary offerings constantly evolve. The visitor to Queens will find everything from Colombian arepas to Greek moussaka, hummus from Lebanon, and Brazilian feijoada, a hearty stew of black beans, beef and pork.

### Keeping track

In 2015, Instagram influencer Andy Doro set himself the goal of touring the world—culinarily speaking—by eating his way through as many ethnic restaurants in New York as he could. He got stuck at 145 countries. "It's very easy to get to 100," he told AFP, but "now, you know, I've been stuck in the 140s. I'm at 145." And a good number of them are in Queens. Doro showed off some favorite spots on a tour through the borough's snowy streets, start-



A cook prepares arepas in the kitchen of the Arepa Lady restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City.

ing in the heart of Jackson Heights.

The area once attracted many people of Colombian origin, and now has become "a big center for a lot of South Asian and Himalayan countries—so Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh," Doro said. At tiny Yun Cafe, 25-year-old Yun Naing, a recent arrival from Myanmar, said she keeps her cuisine authentic by importing ingredients—tea leaves, chili powder and more—from back home. "Burmese cuisine is special," she said, "because we

have a lot of strong flavors."

Other Queens neighborhoods have their own rich offerings, such as the Chinatown in the Flushing area farther east—known to the world as the home of the US Tennis Open. Locals say it rivals that of the better known one in Manhattan, boasting myriad eateries representing many regions of China as well as the increasingly popular cuisine of South Korea.—AFP



Cook Alfredo Lopez prepares arepas in the kitchen of the 'Arepa Lady' restaurant in the Queens borough of New York City. — AFP photos