

FLORIDA'S BEST

BENEDICT, alligator wrestling prodigy. From his perspective, alligator wrestling is just part of 'sowing his wild oats' in America. Has origins in rural France.

OTARII, Benedict's agent. Long-haired. A hippie in dress attire. Loves the sound of poetic words and his own voice; however, on occasion, one of his ever-flowing sentiments will hit a real insight.

SHILOH, ten years old. Gator-wrestler-in-training and Benedict's younger sister. His flippancy has rubbed off on her, badly.

FIELD MEDIC, a man who spends his nights patching up the bloodied contenders of Nutcracker Stadium. Does not like nor want his job, but stays for fear of being replaced by an incompetent.

SCENE: NUTCRACKER STADIUM

Orlando, Florida. Friday night. Nutcracker Stadium, the first official alligator-wrestling stadium in the US, is roaring with excitement from fans and commentators alike, driven almost frantic by the center of the action.

Tonight's wrestler, BENEDICT DUBOIS, has pinned his opponent, FIGHT HOUND, a deeply gnarled, 600lb American Alligator, to the sand in a complex knee-to-chin lock. One steel-booted foot pushes its open mouth away from him while his chain-mail gloved hand grips the end of its snout. To a spectator in the back stands, he appears rooted in place, but a close-camera shot to the front row's viewpoint shows the slight full-body tremble that betrays just how close he is to slipping. The audience's reactions are equal parts excitement and anxiety—should his perfect balance falter even a little, he'll be left defenseless to the jaws of the massive FIGHT HOUND.

This is BENEDICT DUBOIS, a French wrestler who has, until now, had recruiting issues thanks to his slight build. His contract with Nutcracker Stadium continues to be a hotly controversial topic. In the ring, his risky but smart style is perfect for whipping the crowd into frenzies.)

The buzzer marks the end of the second round; the timer declares ten-minute intermission till the final round, or "blackout

round". Fans, chatting, laughing, exchanging amazement, are going to get popcorn and snacks.

BENEDICT and the gator, however, are still locked eye-to-eye, silently struggling. Four people in green sedate and remove the gator. Benedict breaks away, stumbling slightly and fingers going to his right hip flexor. He briskly shakes out his legs, and, with a lopsided gait, exits the shot.

SCENE: MEDICAL TENT

BENEDICT pushes into the medical tent, which is empty except for a ratty little girl, who is standing next to a cooler as she attempts to open a bright red energy drink. This is SHILOH DUBOIS, Benedict's sister. She offers him a high five, but suddenly he seems only focused on the energy drink in her hand. BENEDICT yanks his helmet off to reveal the unassuming, blond 19-year-old beneath. His beard—his pride and joy—is a glorified layer of fuzz. His voice still cracks. Even as an adult, he's yet to enter a bar without an argument about his age.

[BENEDICT] (offscreen) For real?! Cherry? You know the cherry ones are *mine!*

[SHILOH] Chill and pick one of the six other flavors.

[BENEDICT] —which you could've chosen any one of! I only like the cherry ones!

SHILOH tosses a grape-purple can to Benny, who reflexively catches it. He holds it with a look of disbelief as SHILOH shamelessly toasts his can.

[SHILOH] To Benny, and him setting aside this bitchiness for this last round.

She starts chugging. Outraged, he opens his mouth to protest—

[SHILOH] You shush.

[BENEDICT] No, you shush! Don't talk to your older brother like that!

He tries to snatch it from her.

CUT to OTARII, who is talking with the FIELD MEDIC.

[OTARII] Don't stress, I'll ensure that he understands.

[FIELD MEDIC] Please do. I see his kind too much. They fight hard and fall harder. 'Specially these young ones.

OTARII starts to respond, but is distracted by a yell from inside the medical tent.

[BENEDICT] (distantly) I'll put you in the foster care system!

Cut to FOREGROUND SHOT of BENNY AND SHILOH engaged in an escalating game of tug-of-war over the cherry energy drink.

[SHILOH] LET GO OR I SWEAR I'LL CALL CPS—

She does a double take at Otarii, who blinks before turning to BENEDICT.

[OTARII] Dubois, I've been looking for you.

SHILOH and BENEDICT disengage. BENEDICT, muttering discontentedly, settles for grape flavor. Side by side, the identicality of the two's yellowy-pale complexions and hooded blue-gray eyes is striking. Even their teeth, large and white like piano keys, leave no doubt they're related.

[BENEDICT] Well, you found me! Shiloh, this is Mr. Richards, my agent. He's a nice guy—the kind we *don't* take credit cards from, okay? Mr. Richards, Shiloh. My sister.

He keeps a nervous hand on Shiloh's shoulder. BENEDICT, despite having legal guardianship of SHILOH, has little to no control over her antics. He dreads the chaos of the day when SHILOH begins to interact with the media and possible agents. Thankfully, SHILOH is too busy knocking back the energy drink to say anything damning to OTARII.

[BENEDICT] (to SHILOH, out of the corner of his mouth) Only drink half of that.

She shoots him a thumbs up and resumes chugging. The halfway-through-intermission marker buzzes, but OTARII is focused on this new tidbit of information.

[OTARII] You brought someone overseas with you?

[BENEDICT] Just her!

[OTARII] So you're already looking after a minor—can you even look after a minor? What are you, seventeen?

[BENEDICT] (slightly annoyed) I'm twenty-one.

[OTARII] Uh-huh. (quietly) As soon as blackout round's over, we are going to verify *all* of your documents.

BENEDICT nods, pretending he knows a damn thing about documents, and didn't have his mother handle all of the international records and guardianship files. As he tries to come up with something a knowledgeable twenty-one old would say, the beeping three-minute marker spares him.

[BENEDICT] ...Well, speaking of blackout rounds—

OTARII, who has spent the past seven minutes considering the FIELD MEDIC'S words, has riled himself up into a passionate 'Otarii Talk'.

[OTARII] Not so fast. The work didn't stop when Mr. Nutcracker agreed to sign your contract. Quit flexing for the crowd, Leeroy Jenkins. The secret of this sport is that it's a marathon, not a sprint. Be calculating, be quick, but above all, preserve yourself.

[BENEDICT] I hear ya.

Otarii's advice goes in one of Benedict's ears and right out the other; he moves to exit the tent, only to be intercepted by the harried FIELD MEDIC.

[FIELD MEDIC] Hold your horses! (Benedict groans good-naturedly.) Any pressing issues? Injuries?

[BENEDICT] Not a scratch.

Shot to a small puncture wound near his right knee. The other two men suspect nothing. The FIELD MEDIC sighs in relief.

[FIELD MEDIC] Go on. They're waiting for you.

BENEDICT turns to face the cheering crowd awaiting him outside the tent, his annoyance at SHILOH, OTARII, and the FIELD MEDIC beginning to fade as his mind assumes a state of strategy.

[OTARII] Break a leg!

[FIELD MEDIC] Stay safe.

[SHILOH] Put the spiny bastard in the ground!

Grinning, BENEDICT hooks Shiloh into a rough one-armed hug, then strides out for the blackout round.

[A buzzer declares the end of the intermission. The crowd is even more hyped for the third and final round, or 'blackout round'. "Uptown Funk" begins to blare throughout the stadium as the revived-and-ready Fight Hound is released from its cage. The spectators in their stands drop all conversations, bets, popcorn, and Iphone cameras, in favor of screaming and applause. Brief cut to BENEDICT as he's putting his shades and helmet on, strobe lights harshly reflecting off of the black metal. The effect is painfully cool until he gets a bit too into the groove of the music.]

[FIELD MEDIC] (unimpressed) He can't dance.

[OTARII] Maybe I should've signed Adams instead.

Cut to the NUTCRACKER and OTARII hovering inside of the open tent, and zoom out to BENEDICT and FIGHT HOUND facing each other in the ring.

Both are silhouetted against the giant timer, as it is rewound from 10 minutes to 5 minutes. The numbers glow red. Dead silence falls, except for the final chorus of 'Uptown Funk', which only contributes to the tension of the next ten seconds.

As the song's last few notes play, NUTCRACKER COMMENTATOR'S voice fills the stadium.

[NUTCRACKER COMMENTATOR] HOPE ALL YOU FOLKS HERE IN ORLANDO ARE FEELIN' GOOD TONIGHT!

An eruption of noise. The crowd rages. Bruno Mars' trumpets blast. The telltale gun fires, and the timer begins to count down from five.

SERIES: If ‘Gothic Superhero Show’ were considered its own genre by now(as it could be) I’d be lukewarm about it. The musings on justice and what is Right would get very repetitive(as it has). So that’s why I have more affection for The Umbrella Academy than most Gothic Superhero Shows(as other shows as well): its breaking of that superhero cookie-cutter mold was pleasantly surprising. At first glance, the premise of a crime-fighting, madly dysfunctional adoptive family didn’t particularly sparkle—in fact, it sounded identical to “what if we aged up the Robins of DC a bit and explored their collective Cain Instinct?”. Boy. Oh, boy, was I proven wrong.

The seven Hargreeves quickly shed their initial impressions as Robin Expys. Most significantly: they’re concerned with family above all else. Including justice, which simplifies things—if DC has taught me one thing, it’s that making the core of a character justice is likely to turn your script into an in-universe philosophy discourse. And they philosophize with swords and sick laser eyes. I’m all for swords and sick laser eyes, but any philosophy, allegorical or not, will straight-up *tranquilize* me. So I was pleased to learn that the core of the Hargreeves family is, well, family, which also makes it far more relatable than the vague “justice” that glues the Robins together.

In fact, “justice” is the buzzword for Gothic Superhero Shows. “Justice” is what the main character will agonize over, despite not being actually able to define the word. Though The Umbrella Academy treats its central theme of “family” similarly, it allows for a greater range of morality in its cast, and thus greater capacity for nuance. This is where the show begins to break the mold, as the writers decide that *everyone* deserves a ride on the Morally Gray Train. The token wildcard character is no longer elusive—if one wildcard can make a story interesting, an entire cast of them should make it *really* interesting! And they were right! As the moral compass

of each Hargreaves progressively weakens, their lack of judgment leads to serious mistakes, giving the writers more material for stakes-raising, character-developing consequences. They rarely angst over if their actions were Right, but they *will* get angry, pick up a set of knives, and charge proudly into a trap. They're forced to wise up to escape—and *then* they angst over if their actions were Right. But then, just as they've sworn an oath of kindness, an antagonist threatening a family member makes them completely forget it, because when the stakes start climbing, they shouldn't stop climbing. Rapid pacing aside, it makes the characters feel flawed—like real people, rather than performers in a good-guy-bad-guy-allegory. Take my favorite character, Hazel, who's characterized as an extremely unremarkable middle-aged man—the kind anyone can look at and say, “I know a guy like that”. A hitman, but only when work calls. One of the two antagonists, and one of the most relatable characters on the show. In between kidnapping, torturing, and trying to massacre the Hargreeves family(his latest assignment), Hazel discovers a love for Fixer Upper, donuts, and the pretty lady selling the donuts. Cue his character arc, in which he increasingly struggles to balance the mundane in his life with the madness of his job—at which a good chunk of the audience will comment, “I know a guy like that. He's *me*.” “Relatable villain” is somewhat of an oxymoron in the superhero genre, so the thought put into Hazel's character is a real treat to watch. The best kind of villain is a one that is everything *but* a cardboard cutout of relentless malice.

Overall, the script of *The Umbrella Academy* exhibits some admirably deft characterization. The writers have managed to breathe life into comic book characters with the silver screen. The show is allowed to deviate from your typical Gothic Superhero Show path by emphasizing a different theme—family—which lays a profound emotional foundation and gives characters far more agency than ‘who here can be the most morally correct’. The Hargreeves

aren't forcefully symbolic characters created to display a life lesson to the audience in neon flashing lights. That's the heart of my admiration—they're captured as real people.

EPISODE: My favorite episode of *The Umbrella Academy*, *Extra Ordinary*, is like an omelet, wrapping my favorite tropes—irony, dissonance, morbid comedy, and artistic cinematography—in a lightning-fast plot packed with layered drama. The most obvious ironies are played for humor—the oldest, wisest sibling trapped in a 13-year-old body, the leather-bound rebel of the family being an unapologetic mama's boy, etc. In contrast, more subtle ironies that connect to the overarching storyline—the 'anxiety meds' that one character, Vanya, relies on are actually power-suppressing sedatives—are used to foreshadow the rich drama to come. The secret is in the timing. Expanding on the previous example, Vanya's response to being reminded of her 'ordinariness' is to pop one of her meds; the cause-and-effect nature of both occurrences, coupled with the camera lingering just long enough to arouse the audience's suspicion.

Dissonance—especially musical dissonance—is hands down my favorite trope in fictional media. TV gunfights are fun. But TV gunfights set to Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now"? Pass the popcorn. The morbid comedy in this episode is masterfully built up until it hits its funniest at the climax, a chaotic sequence in which masked gunmen raid the family house. However, it's shown through the perspective of the comedy relief, Klaus, while he dances through the halls with the upbeat "Sinnerman" blasting through his headphones. This seems to simply be a crack at Klaus's obliviousness until "Sinnerman" becomes the background track for the shootout happening just outside his line of sight. The unfitting soundtrack is a stylistic choice, but also a really slick maneuver that shifts the audience's thinking from "*Silly Klaus, he can't hear the gunshots*" to "*Oh, God, Klaus can't hear the gunshots*". The rapid-fire switching from machine guns blazing to Klaus's dancing is also darkly hilarious—as are the assassins'

pastel kiddie masks, of course. But every joke in the Umbrella Academy has a decidedly unfunny punchline. This one is in the episode's final shot: Klaus, vulnerable in his jam session, gets kidnapped by the hitmen. The writers brought their A-game to the climax of the episode, which can be seen in the seamless condensation of humor, gravity, and plot into a 15 minute fight scene.

The visuals of the episode deserve honorable mention as well. The cinematographic style rather resembles gothic Wes Anderson—lots of symmetrical shots and grandiose architecture, set against a color palette of blacks, grays, and whites. The dark colors provide a 'canvas' for bright colors (like the assassins' masks) to pop out. Bizarre visual storytelling is also incredibly enjoyable to watch—particularly the beginning sequence, which shows Vanya's siblings' reactions to her novel of family secrets, which range from using it as a punching bag to proudly reading it out loud to group therapy.

From a creator's viewpoint, the episode's artistic writing and visuals are what catch my attention. The writers strike that balance between goofy and dark like it's effortless.