

NOW AVAILABLE ON AMAZON PRIME: FREE FIRE SEES FEAR & MASCULINE INSECURITY BEGET VIOLENCE

Posted by Christina Tucker | Oct 22, 2017 | Reviews, Streaming Suggestions | 0 | ★★★★★



SCORE 91%

Originally published on April 24, 2017. Free Fire is now available on Amazon Prime's streaming service.

Overview: In 1978, a weapons deal in a warehouse quickly goes wrong, and a shootout ensues when

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everyone present tries to defend themselves. A24; 2016; Rated R; 90 minutes.

**“It’s too late, I’ve been insulted”:** In 1978, a weapons deal goes wrong. There is no on screen information to give a date, time, or location. We can glean as much as it necessary from visual cues and exposition. *Free Fire*’s premise could be handled in many ways, and Ben Wheatley chooses an impressively subtle and character-focused exploration of violence and its causes.

It is not surprising that the weapons deal goes wrong, or even that someone has double crossed the group in *Free Fire*. What is most interesting about this film is why and how the main characters manage to so quickly devolve into desperate, insecure children in an attempt to get what they want. Each character’s emotional baggage is brought into the shootout, and is displayed gradually as things progress.

*Free Fire* takes a shootout that could be, in a more condensed form, the climax of a film, and decides to focus on this moment completely, putting its characters through hell for 90 minutes of insecurities and desperation laid bare.

**“Golden hour and a half”:** A trim runtime and single location keeps things focused, and the plot becomes largely secondary to interpersonal interactions and characterization in *Free Fire*. What begins as a film that seems to promise moments of masculine heroism, stunts, and impressive gunslinging, quickly becomes something else entirely.

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SCORE: 

**Te-Ata Isn’t a Good Film, But It Comes from a Good Place**

SCORE: 

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SCORE: 88% 

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We see characters that are, to varying levels of success, defending themselves physically and mentally, from the threats around them. A stellar cast brings the characters in *Free Fire* to life and strong performances allow for all the nuances of each character, as well as flesh out characters whose backstories that remain largely ambiguous.

The men of the cast and their defense mechanisms and weaknesses are what eventually lead to their inability to carry out the deal. Cillian Murphy's IRA member Chris with his posturing in front of the group, Sharlto Copley's Vernon, who was misdiagnosed as a genius as a child and has maintained these insecurities, Armie Hammer's Ord and his need to have the funniest thing to say at any given moment; these personalities challenge each other and are almost immediately pushed to violence.

Brie Larson's Justine, the only female character in *Free Fire*, begins as a mediator but gradually sinks to the level of the men around her. She is also one of the most active characters in the shootout, while her agency goes largely unseen by the men around her. She tries to save Martin (Babou Ceesay) when he is shot, limps down hallways while most of the cast is still on the ground, and is eventually, through her own planning and machinations, the closest to success in the end.

The humor of *Free Fire* is interesting in that it has an increasing sense of desperation. The jokes told by many characters, particularly Ord, Vernon, and Harry (Jack Raynor), are first sources of comic relief, but eventually, in the midst of violence and death, take on a different, more tragic tone.

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During the masculine power struggle between the main characters, in an attempt to dominate those around them and feel in control, men become boys, reckless and insecure.

**“You’re a fucking kid, a fucking baby”:** Much of *Free Fire*, sometimes repetitive but generally entertaining, is spent watching the main characters drag themselves through rubble and dirt, scrounging for ammunition and weapons, whining and afraid, while still attempting to gain the upper hand on one another through physical and verbal abuse. The cast, except Larson’s Justine, becomes largely unconcerned with the weapons deal at hand, or any concrete goal, and is more concerned with competing with one another, blinded by their own personal faults.

The well-crafted 70s setting heightens the sense of exploitation, drawing parallels to exploitation films of that era. This film is, in a sense, exploitation with a twist, an exploration of our strange desire for triumphant scenes of of gun violence. When *Free Fire* questions the senselessness and maturity of its protagonists, it also questions aspects of culture that make such senseless violence a widely marketable, appealing aspect of entertainment.

The few moments of triumph in this scene are not the moments of the most extreme violence, but in brief moments of humanity and kindness between characters. There is a particular moment near the end of the film when a scene of reconciliation is interrupted by more carnage, which is remarkably heartbreaking. When it is discovered that one of the characters present in the shootout has betrayed the others, there is a sense of tragic irony; things had

already devolved into violence before any outside contact was involved.

**Overall:** *Free Fire* shows how quickly masculine insecurity can lead to violence, focusing on complex characters with questionable senses of justice and morality. There is little triumph or even resolution at the end of *Free Fire*'s shootout, but rather a fascinating emphasis on the ineffective, immature, destructive nature of the violence that the characters enact on one another.

**Grade:** A-

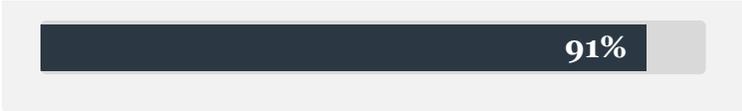
*Featured Image:* A24

## FREE FIRE

91%

### FINAL

**ASSESSMENT:** "There is little triumph or even resolution at the end of *Free Fire*'s shootout, but rather a fascinating emphasis on the ineffective, immature, destructive nature of the violence that the characters enact on one another."



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#### Christina Tucker

Christina is formerly an art history student, currently an aspiring film critic, screenwriter, and/or starving artist. Born and raised in Michigan, she is currently based in New York City.

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