

EDITORIAL

Being a reader comes with its own sense of guilt. In my head there's a certain number of books you have to read per month to retain the status of a "reader", sort of like renewing your membership to some kind of cool club.

Sometimes, my telling people I'm a "bookworm" is followed by a quick explanation/apology. "I have so much going on right now so I'm not reading actively, but there's like a big pile on my desk." But simply having a big pile of books on one's desk doesn't make someone a bookworm.

But trying to give in and be swept away by a Regency romance isn't as easy when you can't focus on anything for more than five minutes, owing to constant anxiety over your workload.

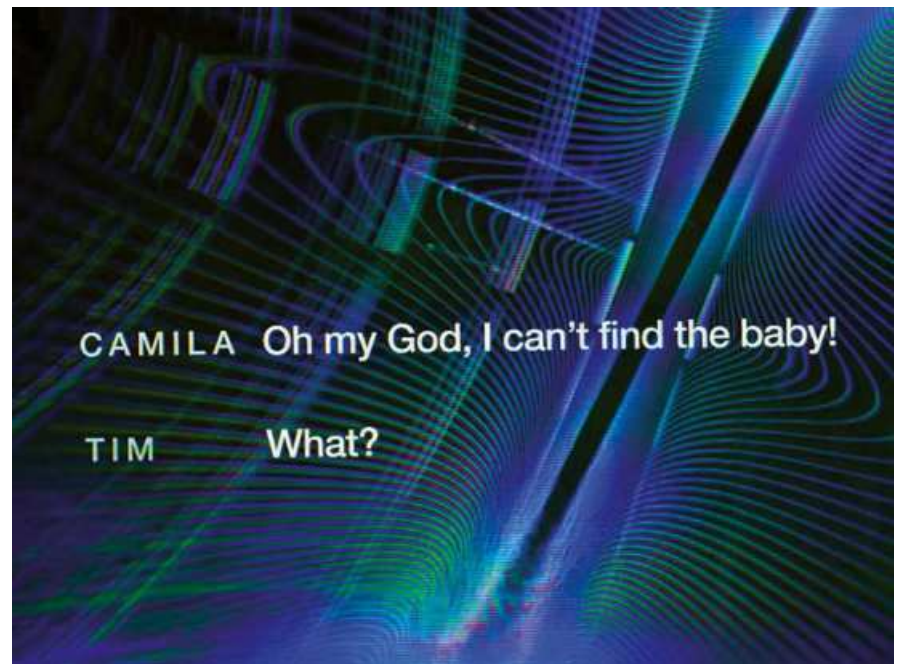
Why is there so much guilt involved in a hobby that was such a major part of me growing up? An elitist attitude about books having to be read and not listened to through audiobooks, certainly doesn't help. But I'm coming around to accepting that if you want to have a lifelong passion, you must evolve in your approach and be accepting of the many forms it takes throughout your life. Perhaps two quick pages after each long day before bed it will have to be.

-- Mrittika Anan Rahman, Sub-editor, SHOUT



PLAYWATCH

TV SHOW REVIEW



CALLS: A worthy successor to *The Twilight Zone*?

RASHA JAMEEL

As an absolute sci-fi nerd, I've had a significantly hard time bidding adieu to the late 50s classic, *The Twilight Zone* (1959). I had to accept that it was over and done with, and I, alongside fellow fans of the classic American show, had to move on.

The early 2000s remake came, but it was an absolute disaster. I eventually found solace in Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011) and Jordan Peele's reboot of *The Twilight Zone* (2019). I thought sci-fi dramas couldn't get any better on television.

Then came Apple TV+'s new sci-fi offering: *Calls* (2021).

Apple TV's latest drama is by no means an original. *Calls* (2021) is the American adaptation of a popular French series of the same name, co-produced with Canal+. Even though the first season boasts a star-studded ensemble cast of Pedro Pascal, Joey King, Nick Jonas, Rosario Dawson, Aaron Taylor-Johnson and many more, I still had my reservations given the show's genre and episode length. I didn't find the show promising enough based on the premise of a "podcast-style sci-fi drama."

I was pleasantly surprised after giving it a try as a midnight binge-watch upon my friend's insistence. Not only had *Calls* (2021) managed to elevate the experience of sci-fi television for me, but it had also provided an insightful look into flawed interpersonal relationships shared by people. Both of the aforementioned concepts are quite difficult to pull off in a tv show where each episode is limited to a duration of about 12 to 20 minutes and there is no actual drama playing out in the conventional video format. The

waters here are tricky to navigate and the Apple TV+ drama succeeds in its efforts for the most part.

The graphics in each episode play a significant role in conveying the tension exhibited by the fictional characters in question. Audio waveforms, circled points, and intersecting lines act as visual stimuli, making up for the sensory information the audience is missing out on. You won't see the actors' sense of distress popping up on their faces, but it will be registered by a peak or two on the buzzing waveform. The lines will give you a sense of a distance between characters, both geographical and emotional, while the circles symbolise a sense of connectivity. Noteworthy mentions include the episodes "Mom", "Is There a Scientist on the Plane", and "The Beginning", each of which feature the most complexly-designed waveforms as distorted loops, cobwebs, and the digital imagery of an airplane in flight.

The writers of *Calls* (2021) may have taken inspiration from a French podcast of the same name, but they really put in the effort to break new ground with their own stories. Some episodes proved to be true game-changers in the genre, while some fell flat in comparison. The show's strength lay in its depiction of human emotions, from a strained father-daughter relationship to the suspicions of a conflicted husband to the trauma of an orphaned young girl, all of which are set against the backdrop of a central narrative building up to global catastrophe involving disturbances in time and space.

Now, to answer the question posed in the title of this review: considering the potential this show has, it might just be the next best thing after *The Twilight Zone*.

