

# 'Her' is one of the most memorable, inventive tales about intimacy in years

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We live in an era where our interactions and repeated behaviors with our electronic devices suggest a strong sense of devotion to them. More often than not, we hold our smart phones more than we do other people or we hold our gaze upon computer screens with far more determination and presence than we do if we were sitting across from another person. Two human beings meeting for, say, coffee, might become distracted and eventually find themselves being more committed to making a connection to their electronic device than remaining present in the conversation taking place in front of them. It is no stretch by any means to suggest that most individuals in the 21st century are already having some type of relationship with their electronic pals.



Warner Bros.

That may be a sobering reality to fully grasp and process, but bless screenwriter/director Spike Jonze for using it as a premise and running with it. In [Her](#), he creates a tale in the near-future that explores several things with haunting depth: To what degree do we connect with others; how deep are we

willing to go—and why—and what is it that makes us connect with somebody (or in this case, some “thing”) in the first place? Is it derived from within us? The other entity?

What *is* connection?

Set in smoggy, high-rise ridden Los Angeles, we follow Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), a surrogate letter writer—seems the original way of doing it got tossed aside years ago—who purchases a new OS (Operating System). Through Bluetooth-like technology, it allows him to, at any time, connect to the female voice managing his electronic world and then some—think Siri with more panache and personality. The OS voice is given a name—Samantha (Scarlett Johansson)—and is über efficient.

After scouring Theodore’s personal files—e.i. life—Samantha quickly assesses as much as she can about him, only to later crack jokes, make him laugh or ponder the philosophical. She comes across as playful and lighthearted, which, at first feels like the ideal upbeat "program" designed for Theodore. All of this surprises him of course—he's still licking the wounds from a failed marriage—but in a relatively short time, the two interact more regularly. Eventually, Samantha expands her, say, field of consciousness, and she and Theodore reach a new level of intimacy. Naturally, this poses an immediate dilemma. Samantha is, after all, a computer program, which processes data—loads of it—but we soon learn that she has the ability to process much more than that. Let’s just say she reconstructs the meaning of Artificial Intelligence and the curious emotional vulnerability she develops somehow begins effecting ... *us*. We, too, care about what happens to Samantha.

Theodore gets sanity checks for his curious odyssey via his coworkers and friends, most notably his neighbor, played by [Amy Adams](#), but in this not-too-distant future, falling for your OS seems as natural as crushing on a coworker.

It's a fascinating modern world Jonze gives us here. The film also does a remarkable job showcasing the future its set in—everything from the styles of the day to the modern ways in which people are living.

That Jonze manages to pull all of it off to the superb ends he does, without having the film devolve into a screwball comedy, further illuminates the brilliance of the man already revered for making *Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation* and *Where The Wild Things Are*. This is by far another career-defining turn for Phoenix as well. And Johansson creates a, for lack of a better term, full-bodied, Samantha—a true presence capable of capturing our attention and keeping us invested in her evolution.

Only a handful of love stories over the last decade stand out for their courage to explore love and connection with such unwavering honesty (*Once*, *Far From Heaven*, *Brokeback Mountain*). *Her* is one of those stories, and it unspools in a kind of mesmerizing and ethereal subtlety that just keeps you thinking about it long after you have left the theater.

## HER

\*\*\* ½ (out of four)

*With Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson, Amy Adams, Olivia Wilde and Rooney Mara. Written and directed by Spike Jonze. Rated R. 120 minutes.*



### **Greg Archer**

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