Arts & Life

‘Stranger Things’ turned my world Upside Down

By LILLIAN CURTIN
Opinion Editor

Over nine years. That’s how long it took to get five seasons of “Stranger Things.” I’ve been here every step of the way.

If you were to tell 11-year-old me that she’d be 20 years old, spending her New Year’s Eve watching the finale to her favorite show for nearly a decade, she would’ve said you’re crazy.

That’s exactly what I did; and I’m feeling a mix of things. Now that I’m out of the five stages of grief, I can talk about it.

Maybe it’s because I’m a “Game of Thrones” fan, but I was expecting a lot more death. In the most gruesome of ways, to be extremely honest.

In episode six of the latest season, Holly (Nell Fisher) is falling from the sky. The scene cuts off to Holly falling, and her sister Nancy (Natalia Dyer) seeing her.

Then, we get to episode seven, Nancy and her brother Mike (Finn Wolfhard) reunite. Nancy looks emotionally distraught, but Holly's not with them.

It was at this moment that I thought the Duffer Brothers were deranged enough to kill a little girl, “Amazing Spider-Man 2” style.

I’m not complaining about the fact that beloved characters didn’t die. I love a happy ending more than shock value. I was just surprised. I knew it wasn’t going to be a massacre when the Duffer Brothers said there was “no Red Wedding.”

To those of you unfamiliar, the Red Wedding was single-handedly one of the most traumatizing scenes in all of fiction. Think about all of your favorite characters who’ve been there since the first episode, massacred in one fell swoop with no warning.

It taught me a valuable lesson that even the most beloved characters can be killed just for the hell of it. Since this was the last episode, nothing was stopping the Duffer Brothers from pulling something like that. So, I was on edge.

My first concern: single mother of six, Steve Harrington (Joe Keery). I’m going to be quite frank: if Steve had died, I would’ve needed to be sedated. Not just because he’s hot (but c’mon), but because he has had one of the best character developments ever. From a cocky playboy jock to a hero.

Let’s also give a round of applause for Karen Wheeler (Cara Buono). M.I.L.F. of the year. She saved her daughter, got sliced and diced by a Demogorgon and proceeded to save all of them again by putting the oxygen tank in the hospital dryer.

We look back at older seasons, and the little things like them all eating dinner at her house or her scolding them like her own children, are all heartwarming. She’s everyone's mom. So when she heard over the hospital intercom that Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin) was in trouble, she got out of her bed and saved them.

I have no clue where Ted Wheeler (Joe Chrest) went for the majority of this season, and I honestly don’t care. Neither did the characters, apparently, because basically everyone forgot about him. I’m reluctant to give him “Walk-em down Wheeler” status because, yes, he did fight a Demogorgon with his golf club, but he’s also annoying, and people are giving him way too much credit.

I heard that we get a glimpse of Karen and Ted’s past before they were married in the Broadway show “Stranger Things: The First Shadow.” The same goes for information on Vecna/Henry’s (Jamie Campbell Bower) past. This really, really grinds my gears. Why are you putting key background information in a niche Broadway prequel that no one sees? It’s not even that I don’t want to see it. I can’t. It’s just inaccessible.

Speaking of Bower, I knew him as Caius in the “Twilight” franchise and Jace in “The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones.” This man is such a bubbly person, but, for some reason, keeps playing insane and dark characters.



ILLUSTRATION BY KATERINA PARIZKOVA

It’d be amiss not to talk about the actual ending of the show. What the hell was that?

The battle scene was perfect. No notes. Clear increase in battle IQ.

With the amount of montages in the last episode, you would’ve thought we were in the “Twilight: Breaking Dawn Pt. 2” ending credits. The specific montage where we see glimpses of what everyone had lost had me in shambles. Then you have Robin (Maya Hawke) and Steve, who were really just there for the love of the game.

Listen, I’m not even that upset about the ending. But why could they not just give my girl El (Millie Bobby Brown) a break? Her happy ending was right there.

As I said earlier, I love a happy ending. This was not it for me. I wanted her and Mike together, happy and thriving. But no, because the Duffer Brothers just hate joy, I cried because Hopper (David Harbour) lost another daughter. I watched everyone’s reactions to her killing herself and I had to hear the “goodbye Mike” all over again.

I knew something was up when they defeated Vecna and there was still an hour left. For my own sanity, El’s not dead. I saw someone say she uses her powers to visit Mike, and that’s what I’m going with. Leave me alone.

She “died” to escape Dr. Kay (Linda Hamilton), but what happened to them afterwards? Dr. Kay and her team just… left Hawkins? That’s a bit anticlimactic for a woman who was hunting a child.

Iffy (potentially A.I.) writing aside, it was overall pretty good closure. After 10 years, the actors have grown and are ready to move on, and so is the audience. Though I wished for a happier ending for the girl who carried it all, I’m going to take what I can get. Because I believe.

Is 2016 back, or is this just another passing trend?

By GINA LORUSSO
Managing Editor

A decade later, one of the most iconic and impactful years in terms of pop culture, internet humor and fashion, is making a comeback.

In 2016, I was leaving fifth grade and entering middle school with nothing but a choker and my high-top Converse. Life seemed so simple for many — the colors were bright, the air was fresh and we were, most definitely, cringe. We were cringe, but free.

Nearing the end of 2025, there was sudden talk about 2016 making a comeback in 2026, marking exactly 10 years since the era took over social media and wardrobes, consuming every aspect of people’s lives. What started as jokes on TikTok turned into something much more intentional, as if people were actually trying to summon the energy of a time that felt less curated and less exhausting than now.

Starbucks’ Unicorn Frappuccino, Adidas Superstars, skinny jeans, chokers, chunky jewelry, Pokémon Go, the Mannequin Challenge — it’s all in rotation again, appearing on social media feeds and in stores, leaning into 2016s aesthetics like they never left.

One of the first major instances of a 2016 movement was the unexpected rise of singer-songwriter Zara Larsson. Larsson opened for singer-songwriter Tate McRae’s recent “Miss Possessive Tour” and was widely recognized as an underrated artist.

For many social media users, her resurgence felt like the opening of a time capsule since many of her hits dominated 2016 radio. She developed a renewed appreciation, especially after channeling 2016 aesthetics in her wardrobe of bright colors and experimental makeup.

From one chronically online college student to another, I haven’t seen this much effort to revive an era with full commitment. Usually, it’s just a few trends that find their way back to us, like low-rise jeans or Juicy Couture tracksuits, but this feels weirdly different. It’s almost like people are so sick of the way we live now that they’re searching for the comfort and liberation many of us felt 10 years ago.

Beyond just music, social media has seen old trends surface like videos focused on nostalgic 2016 fashion, old Snapchat filters and bold makeup trends using vibrant colors instead of the boring soft glam that’s usually featured on algorithms.

This revival feels incredibly tied to the apparent collective burnout many Gen Z’ers face in online spaces today. Everything we scroll through is heavily monetized and judged, but looking back, the internet was a place where self-expression didn’t require perfection — people didn’t hesitate to post something playful or expressive because the internet wasn’t so toxic yet. Now, everyone has an opinion, and it feels like everything is so performative to meet the standards of random people online.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

Still, the question remains: is this 2016 revival here to stay, or will it fade as quickly as every other trend?

Waves of internet nostalgia come often, so 2016 may very well be just one of these waves. But the emotional attachment people seem to have to this comeback shows that it could be deeper than a trend.

At this point, people are actively seeking the joy and simplicity that the world has lost.

I would do anything to go back to 2016 — as a version of myself that’s a little less embarrassing — but maybe that’s the point. The awkwardness and lack of self-awareness are what made that era feel so free.

In revisiting 2016, many people might not be chasing the aesthetics — they may be chasing a version of themselves that didn’t feel so restricted by societal expectations.

Whether these trends last or not, I feel it’s safe to say people are ready to feel some type of unfiltered joy again.