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“Battle is the great redeemer” : Narrative Structure
and William Cage’s Journey towards Masculinity in
Edge of Tomorrow.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Puzzle films.....	5
3. <i>Edge of Tomorrow</i>	10
3.1 From zero to hero.....	10
3.2 The romantic catalyst.....	15
3.3 The U-turn.....	18
4. Conclusion.....	22
5. Works cited.....	24
6. Films cited.....	26

1. INTRODUCTION

Edge of Tomorrow is a 2014 science fiction action film directed by Doug Liman and starring Emily Blunt and Tom Cruise. It tells the story of an alien invasion (the Mimics) in Europe. Major William Cage (Tom Cruise), who does not have any experience at war, is sent to the battlefield, where he kills a rare and bigger mimic. The alien's blood covers Cage's body and dissolves him. Suddenly, Cage finds himself at Heathrow Airport, right where his journey started. He tries to warn his squad fellows about his situation (he is reliving the same events), but he is not taken seriously. After that, they go to the same battlefield and he dies again (but in a different manner). His death resets the temporal loop once more and he finds himself at Heathrow airport again, ready to be sent to the battlefield. Unable to understand what is happening to him, Cage gains war expertise with each repetition of the loop. He meets Rita Vrataski (Emily Blunt), the only person willing to listen to his story since, as she tells him, she went through the same experience but lost her powers after a blood transfusion. Rita knows that Cage is key to stopping the alien invasion and is willing to teach him to win the battle.

Overall, the film got a lot of positive reviews, For instance, Jonathan Romney from *The Guardian* states that in this film “Doug Liman shows how to recycle the old sci-fi formula – and wipes the grin off Tom Cruise's face by casting him as a dork (...) James Herbert's editing throws us in and out of the action, forever bringing us back to zero with a jerk – but with rhythmic variations, so that we don't hit the same points of the loop every time” (2014).

Peter Travers writing for the *Rolling Stone* claims: “It shouldn't work. A human-versus-aliens epic that keeps repeating the same scene over and over again as if the comic tilt of *Groundhog Day* had turned suddenly dangerous. But *Edge of*

Tomorrow will keep you on edge. Guaranteed. (...) Working from an exuberantly clever script (...) Liman keeps the action and surprises coming nonstop.” (2014)

For Ann Hornaday from “*The Washington Post*”, Liman’s film is “a crafty, clever, stylish science-fiction action adventure, this time-travel loop-de-loop didn’t have to be this good. But thanks to the efforts of a superb creative team and Tom Cruise (...) what might have been a throwaway genre exercise instead turns out to be a surprisingly satisfying day-after-day-after-day at the movies.” (2014)

As can be seen, one of the most praised elements of the film is its narrative structure. Critics remark the difficulty that this type of plot entails so that the final product does not bore the viewer. This essay will explore the links between the narrative structure and the ideological remit of the film. It starts with a section on Warren Buckland’s concept of puzzle films. The analysis of the film looks at the ways in which the narrative structure allows Cage to gain his masculinity and become the hero of the film. As will be argued, the J-squad, Cage’s own deaths and Rita Vrataski influence him in different ways to defeat the aliens. The last section of the analysis focuses on the ideological baggage of the film, which is key to fully understand Cage’s evolution.

2. PUZZLE FILMS

Warren Buckland's *Puzzle Films* will be used to better understand the narrative structure of the film. Buckland defines this type of films as "a popular cycle of films from the 1990s that rejects classical storytelling techniques and replaces them with complex storytelling" (2008:1). Out of this vast group, I am going to focus on what Buckland calls "forking path plot" films. The main difference between these and "standard" storytelling is that "a puzzle plot is intricate in the sense that the arrangement of events is (...) complicated and perplexing; the events are not simply interwoven, but *entangled*" (3). They are different since nearly all the puzzle/forking path films "break the boundaries of the classical, unified mimetic plot" (5). The characters and actions that are shown in this kind of films diverge from the ones of the classical plot, constituting a "post-classical filmic mode of representation". This rupture of the boundaries results in features such as "non-linearity, time loops and fragmented spatio-temporality" (6).

The narrative pattern of *Edge of Tomorrow* may be regarded as a product of a breach, a crisis between the film and the viewer. The position of the viewer just as a "witness, observer, voyeur" is not enough, because the audience expects something else, not just that neutral, classical position that has ruled from the beginning of the history of cinema (Elsaesser, 2009:16). Kiss and Willemsen (2018:79) in their chapter from the book *Stories* also believe that "the success of impossible puzzle films can be seen as the result of a narrative audacity that takes its viewers' 'empowered' positions into consideration". Directors challenge the audience's intellect and transport them into impossible journeys. Liman's *Edge of Tomorrow* faithfully portrays this; it contains constant loops, a tricky narrative structure in which a character is trapped and a forking-path plot that may seem quite challenging for the spectator.

The complexity of these films triggers several analysis that can be tackled from many perspectives, but the focus is going to be the narrative structure since this is what this essay is going to revolve around. For Bordwell, the various paths in complex narratives need to be well-indicated (so that they do not become something impossible to decipher) and are meant to converge at the end of the film. Each one of these occupies a place in a hierarchy, which is topped by the last fork that “presupposes all the others” (Elsaesser, 2009:21). The first paths are a way of learning for the characters, but as the film advances, the paths become more and more relevant since the protagonist(s) acquire more knowledge .

David Bordwell also explains that there are some narrative structures that consist on reaching one goal or objective and even though there are films that vastly play with temporality, the fact of having a final mission concede them consistency and the events unfold in the order they occurred. He explains this device in his blog as “the tickling clock” (2011). This is something that we see in many films and it is usually reserved for their climaxes. But in several films this device becomes a very important convention that “governs both the macro-level” and every time travel that happens to exist in the story so that “this recurring deadline becomes a structural cell of the movie” (2011).

Something that many of these forking-path films share is that an isolated action can trigger a whole new chain of events and at the same time, many new forks or paths open in the film. This is called the “butterfly effect”, a tenet of the chaos theory that states that small changes in the initial condition can lead to big changes in a later situation. This can be easily explained by saying that a simple butterfly wingbeat in one point of the world can unleash a hurricane in the opposite part of the world. Even though many films are built around this premise, *The Butterfly Effect* (Bress and Gruber, 2004) is the one that best portrays this phenomenon: Evan Treborn (Ashton

Kutcher) travels back in time in order to ameliorate his relationships with friends and feel better off, but ends up changing drastically his present.

As this essay will talk about the narrative structure of a film, it is also important to know the two elements that conform the narrative structure of a film: the plot (syuzhet) and the story (fabula). The former consists in all those explicitly presented events arranged in a specific order which is not necessarily chronological. The latter is formed by all the events of the narrative in chronological order from beginning to end, including those explicitly shown, the ones we see, and also those we infer. There are films that play with temporality- at the level of the plot (syuzhet), but others do this at the level of the story (fabula), as is the case of *Edge of Tomorrow*. Now, in order to better understand this kind of films, I will set some examples of different temporality treatments and how they affect the film overall.

(500) Days of Summer (Marc Webb, 2009) is a puzzle romantic comedy that plays with temporality at the level of the syuzhet. The fabula follows a chronological trajectory, from the day Tom (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) and Summer (Zooey Deschanel) meet to the day he gets over her and meets a new girl (Autumn). Yet, the film's syuzhet scrambles chronology, leaping from an early day in Tom and Summer's relationship to a later one and then back to an earlier one. Each scene is introduced by a card that shows the day it corresponds to. The puzzle structure is the most distinctive feature of the film, as it edits together happy and heartbreaking moments in Tom's life.

Irreversible (Gaspar Noé, 2002) tells the story of Marcus (Vincent Cassel) and Pierre (Albert Dupontel) who are looking for revenge because of the rape of Marcus' girlfriend. Even though the story is not very original, the way the plot is arranged is very innovative since it is represented in reverse chronological order. The first events (that is, the last events chronologically speaking) show the two men being arrested as a

consequence of the murder of a person. From then on, the film moves back in time scene by scene, ending in the couple's bed, where the story started.

An earlier example of a puzzle film at the level of syuzhet is *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) a story about a man, Leonard (Guy Pearce), who after a hit in his head suffers a brain trauma that makes him unable to collect new memories. He is looking for his wife's murderer so in order to "remember" the things he discovers, he takes pictures and gets tattoos all over his body. The temporal structure of this film is built upon continuous flashbacks and flashforwards which instead of telling the consequences of the actions shown, tell their causes. At times during the film there are some black and white scenes that eventually are gathered at the end and tell the other side of Leonard's story.

Other films, such as *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011) or *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993) play with temporality at the level of the fabula, since, for different reasons, their characters have the power to embark on temporal loops. In the first one, Captain Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) only has eight minutes to save a train on which someone has planted a bomb. The bomb explodes and he dies, but he wakes up in a cell and he is asked to tell everything he saw there. After that he is sent back to that train. This structure is repeated until Stevens manages to discover who put the bomb and avoids its explosion. *Groundhog Day* tells the story of selfish, arrogant Phil Connors (Bill Murray), a weatherman that attends the Groundhog Day in a village in Pennsylvania. The next day, he wakes up and realises he is living the very same day. This one-day-loop structure lasts until he becomes a better person.

Edge of Tomorrow belongs to this group of puzzle films that play with temporality at the level of the fabula. This relatively new way of telling stories has attracted many spectators and instead of calling them a genre, Thomas Elsaesser

(2009:14) “prefer(s) to think of them as a phenomenon, or maybe a ‘certain tendency’ in contemporary cinema”.

3. EDGE OF TOMORROW

3.1 FROM ZERO TO HERO.

As mentioned in the introduction, *Edge of Tomorrow* is highly defined by its narrative structure. Throughout the film we see William Cage's drastic evolution: from a major that works at the media relationships department of the USA to avoid being sent to battle to a clever and skilled soldier that defeats the most dangerous threat human kind ever faced. As will be argued in this section, Cage develops his combat skills at the same time he develops many features: at the beginning of the film, he is defined by his cowardice, at the end, he is the real hero, even though nobody else knows it. The main originator of this evolution is Cage himself but there are two factors that, directly or indirectly, influence his evolution: the J-squad and his own deaths.

Usually, "military films present masculinity as something to be struggled for" (Ruth O'Donnell, 2012:85). *Edge of Tomorrow* is not an exception, since Cage's evolution also entails an acquisition of masculinity. This is also a recurrent issue in Tom Cruise's films, as Ruth O'Donnell explains, "Tom Cruise's films are preoccupied with masculine competition and challenge, evaluation by other men (...) The typical Cruise character doubts his ability to meet the challenge he is faced with; the films depict a crisis of confidence, which must be overcome" (85). *Edge of Tomorrow* partakes of this trend, as Cruise's Cage does not think he is able to perform in the battlefield at the beginning, yet he manages to by the end of the film. The film is a continuous search for masculinity, which in the end reaches its peak with Cage as a hero. In order to explore Cage's evolution, I will be using some of the stereotypes of the American War Film as described by Ralph Donald and Karen MacDonald in *Reel Men at War* (2011).

From the very beginning, Cage shows he has the gift of the gab. He is shown on the TV addressing millions of people about the war, and giving them hope. One could say that he is directly involved in battle, as he says: “We will be victorious, we fight. That’s what we do”. From his words and his performance in the scene, one could infer that he is a courageous major on the front line of the battlefield. Yet, the conversation with General Brigham (Brendan Gleeson) shows that fighting is precisely what he tries to avoid: when trying to convince the general of the misunderstanding that has brought him to his office, he says that he is working at the media relationship department of the UDF (United Defense Force) precisely to avoid being sent to the battlefield. Just after this, he tells Brigham “I do what I do, and you do what you do,” showing that he has no intention of going to battle. The actor’s performance makes it clear the distance between the battlefield-related actions of soldiers and Cage’s duties. When he is telling the General that he is no soldier, he moves his hands back and forward, so as to show that he wants to keep the distance between the war and himself. He is a media relationship expert who sees the battle from behind a safe desk. He is unwilling to do anything that might put his life in danger and Cruise’s performance conveys this belief. Cage’s aptitudes are radically opposed to the ones a soldier requires, beginning with the lack of grit.

After the conversation with the general and his failed attempt to escape, he is introduced to the J-squad, since he will have to join them to fight the upcoming battle. From the very first moment, Sergeant Farrell (Bill Paxton) anticipates the thoughts of Cage’s fellow soldiers about him: “you’re a coward and a liar putting your life above theirs”. When he introduces Cage to the J-squad, he says he is a deserter. In order to highlight the repulsion the members of the squad feel for Cage, the camera shows individual close-ups of many of the squad soldiers’ faces. Their looks suggest those of a

predator looking at its prey, which is weak and defenceless. They all laugh at him. Griff (Kick Gurry) activates the safety device on his suit and does not tell him how to remove it. Then, Farrell says that Cage is not going to last too long in the battlefield. Another soldier tells him that there is a dead guy in his suit and that nobody is going to help him in the battlefield, while the rest of the soldiers laugh. As Donald and Macdonald explain “initially, the new guy is often shunned, because a newcomer to the war is much more likely to get himself killed, and in doing so, endangers others around him” (109) . Even though they are directly leading a man to death, they find it funny since they believe this man is not going to play any significant role in the battle. As will be explained next, the features that Cage shows when they meet him lead the soldiers to think of him as a burden at war and, therefore, someone whose death is irrelevant.

William Cage embodies some features from the stereotypes described in *Reel Men at War* (2011) such as the FNG (Fuckin New Guy) and the Coward. In war, “inexperience in almost any sense is seen as unmanly” (65) and, as manhood is an important feature in war, he is the target of all the squad’s jokes. The FNG also works as “a character and story exposition tool, introducing the squad, its characters, its culture, and its mission to the audience” (74). Cage’s refusal to go to the battlefield makes his fellow soldiers and Sergeant Farrell deem him as a coward. Cage’s complete ineptitude linked to all the squad’s members jokes works as a very important means of motivation for him to develop manly features. Even the film’s syuzhet does not show all the repetitions of that very same day, we know that Cage goes through the same events every time he dies and, therefore, every day the same insults are inflicted on him by his fellow soldiers. This is something that shapes Cage’s character to the point that these repetitive jokes give him a boost of motivation that contributes to improving his combat skills. Therefore, the role the J-squad plays in Cage’s evolution is quite important since

indirectly, they affect Cage positively, both in the battlefield and regarding his manliness.

There is also another important factor that helps Cage reach its final goal: his own deaths. Facing death is something everyone is afraid of, and Cage does not want to go to war because of this, he is afraid to die. Nevertheless, his first death shows the audience that he might not be such a coward. He dies on the battlefield killing an Alpha, which spills its blood over his face, killing him instantly. But he does not show any sort of weakness when he is about to kill the Alpha, so the viewer can infer that despicable Cage might positively evolve throughout the film.

As he gets the power of resetting the day and goes through some loops, he confirms he is not the coward we expected him to be at the beginning of the film. Even if he tries to escape to avoid the battlefield several times, he soon realises that he does not need to do that because he is invulnerable. Still, aware of the fact that he is not a skilled soldier, he suggests that he should transfer his power to Rita, showing here some despair. But as he knows it is not possible, his only focus is learning how to be a skilled soldier and stop the alien invasion.

Even though from the beginning of the film it is clearly shown that Cage's fear for death is substantial, he overcomes it to the point of training (and repeatedly dying) with Rita many times. The conversation in which Vrataski tells him that a blood transfusion can take his power out of him could have worked as a catalyst for him to lose his power. He is stuck in a twenty-hour loop, dying every day and fighting on the beach against an alien species, something radically opposed to his actual duties. He knows he is going to go through many of those loops from scratch every day but he does not quit. Cage takes every loop as a chance to get better. His biggest fear is now

gone. Death is just a device for him to reset the day. He starts risking his life and starts acquiring manly features.

As Donald and MacDonald quote from Molly Merryman “the process of proving oneself a man is a culturally prescribed construction in which men are willing to risk danger, dismemberment, and death to prove their masculinity” (15). With each loop, Cage learns some lessons that help him start distancing from the stereotypes aforementioned. He loses his cowardice when training with Rita, since he repeatedly dies. By experiencing death and dismemberment, Cage stops being “the coward”, as his invulnerability makes it easier for him to progress as a soldier. Moreover, after he has a drink in the pub he shows in the training room that he is not the inexperienced soldier he was in the first loops. His bravery, together with his enhanced combat skills act as an evidence that he is not the FNG anymore. Rita, as well as the J-squad, are impressed about Cage’s skills, which reinforces the idea that he is not unmanly any more. From now on, he is turning into The Hero (101). This is the “stereotype (that) cuts across all the others” (101) as usually, the hero is the one that is given the most importance in a film. The way Cage becomes the hero is quite unusual, since it can be said that it is quite accidentally. The butterfly effect, which was discussed in the introduction of this paper, might work as an explanation and as such, there is a series of random events that lead Cage to killing the Alpha and getting the power. Usually, characters do not make such a transformation in order to become the hero. But in *Edge of Tomorrow*, Cage shows that even though the most coward man can become a hero.

3.2 THE ROMANTIC CATALYST.

Cage’s deaths and the J-squad are two essential factors that allow him to reach his ultimate goal, winning the battle (and saving the world). Nevertheless, there is a third

and crucial component in his evolution that acts as a catalyst for him to defeat the aliens and attain his masculinity: Rita Vrataski. As will be argued in this section, Cage's two aims, winning the war and saving Rita, are intertwined in the course of the film. Even if Rita only lives several hours with Cage in each loop (and then forgets about him when the loop is reset), he lives through the same day countless times and keeps his memories. Repeated conversations with Rita and, especially, seeing her die again and again, change Cage.

Cage's first contact with Vrataski is disastrous one--she steals Cage's suit battery--, but he needs to talk to her in order to discover what is happening to him. At the beginning of the film, both characters are very different and they have opposite goals: while Cage is willing to flee from the aliens, Rita's only objective is to win the war. But loop after loop their different aims become one: Cage knows that winning the battle is his only way out of this "eternal" day. When Cage puts all his efforts into winning the battle, Rita finds in Cage her soulmate: a brave soldier that risks his life to kill the Omega and save the world. This common goal also contributes to Cage's falling in love with Rita. Throughout the film, he is progressively infected with Rita's obsession with war and his focus on war grows at the same time as his love for Vrataski. Therefore, their *idée fixe* is the spark that started and made their relationship grow.

There are some key scenes that show the evolution of Cage's feelings towards Rita, as is the case of the scene in which they leave the beach and go to a house in the countryside. This scene shows Cage's feelings for Rita. At this point, Cage is already a skilled soldier that has managed to get him and Rita out of the beach, but Rita is slightly injured and Cage has to take care of her. Cage is enjoying Rita's company, he suggests going back to the farm house and spending the night there. He prepares a coffee for

Rita; he smiles at her; he likes seeing Rita happy. We soon find out that it is not the first time they have gone through that moment (even if it is the first time we see it): Cage tells Rita they cannot leave that house because only one of them escapes. The other dies. Cage takes advantage of his lived experience (the previous loops) to make the most of his time with Rita because he is already in love with her.

An important element this scene makes use of in order to highlight this feeling of closeness is *mise-en-scène*. Cage and Rita are in a house, having coffee next to a fire. All these elements give the sensation of being at home, where usually the most intimate moments take place. Cage's desire of spending some time with Rita goes hand in hand with the location, which remarks Cage's romantic feeling in this scene. In that house, they are safe and it is the only moment in the film in which the war seems to be a secondary issue.

Once Cage tells Rita that it is not the first time they have reached the house, Rita becomes enraged and leaves the house. Cage is not focused on the battle and they are wasting time. There is an opposition between the atmosphere indoors and outdoors. In the house, they have a nice conversation, tender looks, they even laugh and joke. Both of them are safe under that roof. Outside, the tone of the conversation changes, and they have an argument. Rita does not care about dying as long as the mimics are defeated but Cage wants to see her alive. He makes clear that he is already in love with her, saying "I wish I didn't know you. But I do". With this statement, Cage lays the ground for the upcoming events and lets the viewer know that there is another issue haunting his mind.

The next loop is also important to understand the importance Rita has for Cage. He has already seen the visions of the Omega's location. But this time, instead of going to find Rita and talking to her, he decides to go alone. He reaches the house where the last scene took place and flies, on his own, to the Omega's hiding place. The Omega

unsuccessfully attempts to take Cage's power out, resetting the loop once again. Cage's decision to go without Rita highlights his desperation after seeing Rita die every day. Rita's deaths have eventually taken a toll on him to the extent of trying a new way of winning the battle without her, even if he knows that that means never meeting her.

During the film, we see both characters planning the attack on the beach, talking about Cage's power, training and so on, but intimate moments between the two of them are very rare. This is why these two scenes are very meaningful, as they shape the film from then on. Now, the viewer knows that not only war is important for Cage, but also Rita's life.

3.3 THE U-TURN.

At the beginning of the film, Cage's lack of experience makes him dependent on Rita. She is the most experienced soldier in this war and also went through a similar ordeal. But throughout the film, Cage's evolution allows him to, little by little, displace Rita from this dominant position and become the leader of the final attack to the mimics. As will be argued, in the film there is a progressive change of roles which culminates in the last loop with Cage taking control. This change of roles will be analysed taking into account not only what the characters do but also how they are presented in the film in the light of Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze".

As Laura Mulvey argues in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975:58) classical cinema has traditionally constructed the look of the film as a male one. By means of focalization and other visual mechanisms, spectators are asked to identify with a male character who is active and makes the action move forward, and enjoy the looks of the female character. Mulvey explains the latter by means of the

concept of scopophilia: “the wish for pleasurable looking” (60). This is a pleasure provided by the female character, usually a passive one. Rita is by no means a passive character in the film. Yet, some of the patterns identified by Mulvey are still at work.

When Cage first goes to see Rita at the training room, the way she is depicted is certainly peculiar. She is just wearing a bulletproof vest and plain trousers. Rita’s outfit does not make much sense because she is training with some mechanic system that replicates the mimics quick movements. Although she is a superlative soldier, something could go wrong in her training and she may be badly hurt. Apart from this, Blunt’s performance invites even more to Rita’s objectification. She is shown with close-ups, sweating while exercising, which highlights her upper body even more. After Cage interrupts her training, she stands up with a very unnatural movement, slowly bending her back while staring at Cage. Even he looks surprised and amazed after that and remains open-mouthed for a few seconds after Rita talks to him. Rita is the hero of Verdun. Yet, she is not shown as a hero but as a beautiful, spectacular woman. Mulvey’s theory matches accurately Rita’s representation in this scene: “she is (...) a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look” (14).

There is another scene in which Cage is focalised, but the effect it provokes on the viewer is different from the one explained above. This is the scene in which Cage is training with Rita and dies repeatedly. With this scene, the audience gets pleasure because of the fact of seeing Cage constantly training and getting beaten up by the machines. But, unlike in Rita’s scene, Cage is not sexualized for the spectator. Cage’s attempts are pure spectacle but, as Cohan and Rae Hark (1993:18) indicate, “we are offered the spectacle of male bodies, but bodies unmarked as objects of erotic display”. Besides, this spectacle makes the action of the film move forward since, after all, Cage

is learning to fight, which is one of his aims in the film. The way they are represented benefits Cage, since the film seems to be helping him to attain his masculinity by objectifying Rita to a certain extent. Besides, as will be argued below, Cage progressively “steals” Rita’s initiative at war and even becomes the real hero.

All these ideas converge in the very last loop, in which the film lays bare its ideological stance regarding gender roles. The scene in which they are on the plane shows how Cage has taken over the leader position. This one can be equated to the repetitive scenes in which Sergeant Farrell and more soldiers are on the plane flying to the beach to fight the mimics. Every soldier is listening to the leader, Farrell at the beginning of the film and Cage at the end, even Rita obeys his orders. The situation is very alike too, their aeroplane is destroyed by the aliens and Cage tells his fellow soldiers to jump off the plane. This particular scene is very relevant since the audience sees that Cage’s transformation is already completed. Now he is the leader of the squad and not even Rita claims that position.

After that, there are some other actions that reinforce the idea of role reversal between Rita and Cage. It is Cage that comes up with the idea of propelling the aeroplane across the river to reach the Louvre. Without that plan, they would not have defeated the Omega. Moreover, while they are going to the Louvre with this risky manoeuvre, there is a moment in which he commands Rita to take over the plane while he is shooting the mimics. He is protecting Rita, as he is exposing himself to an enormous threat, he is surrounded by mimics and it is a miracle that he reaches the Louvre alive. He also saves Rita’s life when she is about to be hit by a big rock. Eventually, Rita decides she will distract the Alpha and it is Cage who kills the Omega.

It is important to bear in mind that in the last loop, everything is new for Cage. He is improvising, he has not been through any of those situations, which make his duty

even harder. Besides, the fact that so many acts of heroism and displays of bravery carried out by Cage are squeezed in such a short time is not a coincidence. They work as a perfect conclusion to his evolution. They reinforce his masculinity, the idea that he is the hero, that he has nothing to do with the Cage prior to the war. Besides, Cage has lost his power and cannot reset the day any longer. Without his safety net, he might have collapsed or delegated the leadership to Rita. But at this point he is no longer the emasculated man he was. The two forces that drive him (Rita and winning the war) are more important than his life. The ending of the film confirms the ideology of the film: even though woman can perform at a high level, it is the man that usually becomes the leader and eventually, the hero of the story.

4. CONCLUSION

This essay has explored Cage's gradual transformation from a reluctant soldier to a hero in the film *Edge of Tomorrow*. This process runs parallel to the character's acquisition of masculinity and the narrative structure of the film plays a key role in it. As has also been argued, Cage's evolution also implies a reversal of roles between the male and the female character: even if Rita is the most experienced of the two and the one that teaches Cage how to fight, he ends up taking the main role in the final battle.

The essay starts with a section on puzzle films, in particular, forking-path plots, as described by Warren Buckland. The analysis of the film looks at the three main catalysts that trigger and promote Cage's evolution. The J-squad and Cage's deaths are the focus of the first part of the analysis. Cage's relationship with Rita is explored in the second part. The third part of the analysis looks into what I have called "the U-turn", that is, the role reversal between Rita and Cage, which has been explored in relation to Laura Mulvey's theory on the male gaze in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In spite of Rita's combat experience in the film and her active role in teaching Cage, she is still portrayed as the object of the gaze and is relegated to a secondary position in the definitive battle.

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