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## On-Screen: The Silver, Small and Smartphone Screens of Heroism

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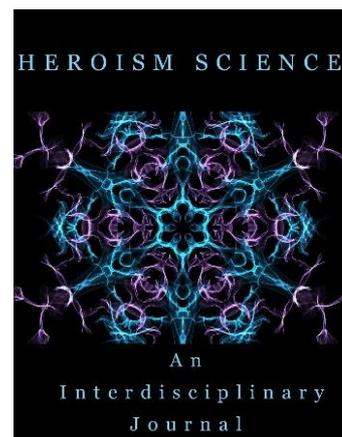
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# On-Screen: The Silver, Small and Smartphone Screens of Heroism



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## 1 EDITORIAL

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Returned to his role as a Starfleet Admiral after years of retirement, Jean-Luc Picard beams (with his smile, not the teleporting kind) at an audience of eager Starfleet Academy graduates who listen raptly to his inspiring commencement speech. Following the disastrous flooding of Gotham City amid a terror attack by the Riddler, newly-minted superhero Batman vows to shift his mission of vengeance into one of hope, inspiring Gotham's citizenry as he helps lead rescue and relief efforts. As Russian forces advance further onto Ukrainian soil, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy makes multiple defiant addresses – through social media and traditional broadcast – vowing not to give up the defence of his country against Russia's aggression. In the final moments of the 2022 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, streamed online and broadcast on television, former Savage Garden frontman Darren Hayes – himself a gay man – begins singing one of the band's most-well known songs, "Affirmation", by declaring in the style of the song's lyrics that "I believe that God does not endorse religious discrimination bills" (Admin 2022). Hayes' declaration references a then-recent controversial Australian parliamentary vote that failed to pass law that would have legalized the exclusion of queer and transgender schoolchildren on the grounds of religious belief (see Hitch 2021 and Parkinson 2022).

These moments, between the fictional events of *Star Trek: Picard* (2020-2022) and *The Batman* (2022) and the real events of the invasion of Ukraine and the Sydney Mardis Gras, respectively, share a common, simple theme: displaying acts of heroism on the screen. All these moments were displayed or captured near each other in early 2022, and all are reflective of the evergreen quality of the screen, in all its sizes and capacities, to display, represent, convey, conjure and critique heroic moments. The fragmentation of media environments permits a bombardment of imagery, static and moving, across screens to all manner of audiences. The traditional outlets of the cinema and the television have been accompanied by

the smartphone, the computer and the game console for many years, and each are instrumental in conveying heroic imagery to audiences.

That conveyance is always important and is assuredly necessary in 2022. In the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Russian invasion into Ukraine has (at time of writing) only just begun, and as the divisions within and between nations continue to widen with the existing, compounding crises of climate change, resource scarcity and discrimination of every kind, we can look to our screens to see a cornucopia of heroism in all its permutations. This has been a tactic Ukraine's President Zelenskyy has weaponized against Russia, frequently stating his unwillingness to surrender to Russia and his ardent stance that Ukraine will survive the invasion, and he will stay in Ukraine – despite many threats to his life and those around him – until it is finished. As a PR campaign, a show of solidarity with and inspiration for his countrymen, and a display of what, to many, is a heroic move taken “straight out of an action movie” (Susaria 2022), Zelenskyy's use of social media is an effective, succinct representation of the heroic power of the screen (see Wright 2022 and Todd 2022).

In many ways, our concern with fictional heroism as a guiding principle has much in common with the guidance of the fictional utopia. We use both concepts as aspects to strive for socially, culturally, technologically, diplomatically. Our understanding and our seeking the best possible course for humanity is aided and, in some cases, informed by the way we use fiction to metaphorically assess how that course can be undertaken. In discussing the political utility of utopia, Fredric Jameson offers that “Utopia... serves a vital political function today which goes well beyond mere ideological expression or replication... [It is] a rattling of the bars and an intense spiritual connection and preparation for another stage which has not yet arrived.” (2005, pp. 232-233) The same is true of fictional heroism, offering preparations for multiple stages of kindness and strength that can then be emulated

by audiences: Picard, Batman and a plethora of fictional heroes continue to give us symbols to embody. We can look to examples that are proliferated across social media, such as the use of Carrie Fisher's portrayal of *Star Wars*' Princess Leia in protest signs during the 2017 US Women's Marches (Watercutter 2017) or the many visits that superheroes make to children's hospitals thanks to cosplayers (see Moody 2019 and Domingo 2021) and film actors (see Lou 2015, Cirruzzo & Ramirez 2018 and Gardner 2019).

The representation of heroism on screens, and the ways we make sense of heroic imagery across them, is the theme of this special issue of *Heroism Science*. Each paper makes the case that our comprehension of heroism can only be augmented and enhanced by the film, the television series, the video game, the news broadcast, the phone camera and the social media stream, all of them on screens that are silver, small and smart. Moreover, the evergreen nature of the screen as a conduit for heroism – and this issue's nature as a rolling submission that invites papers as time goes on – means we can continue articulating this rich, vivid area of heroism studies for a long time to come.

## 2 AUTHOR BIO

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Chris Comerford is a Lecturer of Communication and Media at the University of Wollongong, specialising in screen studies, fan studies and digital media. His current research maps cinematic television in relation to production, reception and aesthetic aspects of screen studies, the influence of the digital turn in film and television storytelling, and the benefits of emergent media – including social media, video games and streaming television – in leisure and pedagogy.

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#### **4 CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

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*The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.*