

Tom Cruise flies high in the exhilarating 'Top Gun: Maverick'

By Justin Chang

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Jets still scream and muscles still gleam in the ridiculous and often ridiculously entertaining "Top Gun: Maverick," though in several respects, the movie evinces — and rewards — an unusual investment of brain-power. I'd go further and say that

it offers its own decisive reversal of Maverick's dubious logic: It has plenty on its mind, and it's gloriously alive.

A lot of consideration and calculation have clearly gone into this long-aborning blockbuster sequel, insofar as Cruise (one of the producers) and his collaborators have taken such clear pains to maintain continuity with

the events, if not the style, of the first film. That's no small thing, more than 30 years after the fiery young Maverick lost Goose, made peace with Iceman and rode off into the annals of fictional U.S. Navy history. And rather than let bygones be bygones, the director, Joseph Kosinski, and a trio of screenwriters (Ehren Kruger, Eric Warren Singer and



Paramount Pictures

Tom Cruise is revisiting his 1986 hit in "Top Gun: Maverick," a sequel that sees his Maverick character over 30 years later.

Christopher McQuarrie) have resurrected those threads of rivalry, tragedy and triumph.

Some of this continuity is a matter of basic story sense, rooted in a shrewd understanding of franchise mechanics and an equally savvy appeal to '80s nostalgia. But it also has something to do with the 59-year-old Cruise's close stewardship of his own superhuman image, a commitment that speaks to his talent as well as his monomania. And with the arguable exception of "Mission: Impossible's" Ethan Hunt, few Cruise characters have felt as aligned with that monomania as Maverick. From the moment he entered the frame in '86, sporting flippant aviator shades and riding a Kawasaki motorcycle, Pete "Maverick" Mitchell announced himself as a signature Cruise creation — a

precision-tooled amalgam of underwear-dancing sex symbol (just three years after "Risky Business") and the envelope-pushing, heights-scaling action star he would become.

Called back to the elite Navy training school where he flew planes, defied orders and irritated his peers with distinction, Maverick is charged with preparing the program's best and brightest for a stealth attack on a far-flung uranium enrichment plant owned by some conveniently unidentified NATO-threatening entity. As impossible missions go, it makes the Death Star trench attack look like a grocery run — a tough assignment for Maverick's 12 brilliant but still-untested pilots, played by actors including Lewis Pullman, Jay Ellis, Danny Ramirez and a terrific Glen Powell as a smug, know-it-all Iceman type.

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