

Buzz Lightyear is a classic Pixar character. But he's going from being a toy to a human and some may see this as cashing in on the nostalgia, which, you know, yeah it is, but also looking again at the Toy Story franchise this actually makes a lot of sense because this is a chance to give Buzz something he's not really had before. A story.

[INTRO]

In 1995 Toy Story wowed the world. It was the first computer generated movie and made Pixar a household name. It also made us incredibly guilty about throwing away our old toys.  
[pulls toy out of bin]  
I'm sorry.

It spawned multiple sequels, short films and now a kinda prequel? Coming next year, Lightyear is set to be something of an origin story for Buzz Lightyear, but as his voice actor Chris Evans wants to make clear this isn't Buzz Lightyear the toy. This is the origin story of the human Buzz Lightyear that the toy is based on.

So is this a movie within a movie, like this is the Buzz that Andy would've seen before Toy Story 1 and wanted as a toy, meaning this movie is technically set in the 90s except it's also the future? And where does Buzz Lightyear of Star Command fit into all this?! Yeah thanks Chris that's totally clear.

<https://twitter.com/chrisevans/status/1337204197641629696?lang=en>

In many ways, Lightyear could be seen as a step back for Buzz, like we've had Buzz for 26 years and you're now going to drop all of that just because, what, you probably don't want to work with Tim Allen anymore? I mean that's probably not the case since this Buzz is meant to be treated as separate to toy Buzz and Tim Allen is probably gonna still voice toy Buzz for like the theme parks and whatever. You know, he'll be fine.

But this trailer looks really good and to me, this movie is pretty much the only thing that could do with the character. But what do I mean by that? Let's look at Buzz the toy and what this means for Buzz the human.

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In Toy Story 1, Woody is the favourite toy and his life of privilege is threatened with the arrival of a Buzz Lightyear toy. Woody assumes something of a command position among the toys, like a leader or a parental figure. So when the new toy arrives, Woody tries to resume his leadership role but because Buzz is so wrapped up in the delusion that he is the real Buzz Lightyear, Woody cannot command him. You can't control someone who doesn't even recognise your authority. This turns Woody envious and manipulative which drives everyone away but Buzz isn't acting deluded on purpose, he can't help having all the super cool features that impresses everyone, he's not the bad guy.

Woody has had a privileged life for so long, that once it's taken away it reveals his sense of inferiority. The Toy Story movies are about change, and in this case, that's represented by Buzz himself. And it's only when Woody finally accepts change, does he regain a place in Andy's room.

As for Buzz, his entire worldview is shattered when he's finally confronted by the fact he is a toy. His denial before is rooted in having an immovable perception of the world. He is a Space Ranger on a secret mission in uncharted space. His mind will make leaps in logic than see the obvious truth. Like if Buzz recognises Sid as a happy child, why doesn't he question why he's fucking enormous. Because when you're in a delusional mindset, you'll rather be completely irrational than wrong. Buzz would definitely believe in Q Anon. And when that reality is finally shattered Buzz has nothing left. Because what is Buzz Lightyear if he is not a Space Ranger. Buzz becomes a broken man and it's only through Woody's words, he finds a new mission, a renewed sense of self-worth and his character arc is complete.

Then they made a sequel.

Animated sequels, especially ones with an ensemble cast can struggle. *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs* is a wonderfully quirky movie with a fun cast of characters, who were placed in roles that fit the story, the dad, the cop, the... cameraman, and so on. But for a sequel, they kinda have to bring those characters back again, right, especially if they're fan favourites... and also the cameraman. But they've lost their role in the story, because this is a different story now and they're different, like Baby Brent goes from being the rival to not a rival, so why is he here? Oh they can deliver jokes, of course, but they basically just plod along or become someone for Flint Lockwood to save later.

*Toy Story 2* does a much better job of this. While Woody is stolen by a toy collector, only a select few of Andy's toys venture forth to save Woody, and they all have a useful function. Slinky can stretch, Mr Potato Head can separate, Rex has his video game knowledge, Hamm has John Ratzenberger. But what about Buzz. Stemming from his heroic space adventurer origins, Buzz is brave and assertive, he's the one leading the charge. Buzz is the driving force that keeps the other toys together. Until he gets replaced with a Buzz who thinks he's a Space Ranger.

In a move that seems like they didn't have a lot of time and had to reuse a lot of past elements, because that's what happened, Buzz became a Space Ranger again, but this time it's more of a B-plot comedic device. This is explained by an aisle full of Buzzes.

This line is a weird in-joke reference to when *Toy Story* came out the toy company, for some reason, didn't think people would be interested in their own Buzz Lightyear toy and failed to stock enough that Christmas.

<https://www.marketingweek.com/the-toy-fiasco-that-cost-disney-50m/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Hf0NFwBwEE>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100102202712/http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/herocomplex/2009/12/thinkways.html>

Regular Buzz eventually returns and, in a role reversal [1] is now in the position of convincing Woody who he is. This might seem like this conflicts with the overall theme of change, hey Woody, don't leave, let's go back to the way things were. But Woody is sensing his time with Andy is coming to an end and is only holding his place by a thread. Woody is again trying to avoid change with the alluring offer of immortality, but it's Buzz who is able to snap him out of it. And other than some rescuing and heroics, that's pretty much all he does,

his role is basically just supplementing Woody. Buzz doesn't have any character arc anymore. Because he's already had it. It's strange how these films that are all about change, for the most part Buzz does not.

[1 SWAP PLACES <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOhiAyTtNfl>]

In Toy Story 3, Andy is all grown up and the toys are living rather sad lives, wallowing in the toy box desperate to be played with. So they naturally assume they're getting thrown out and accidentally wind up in a daycare run by the toy mafia. Again, Woody lives in the delusion that he needs to return to Andy and it's down to Buzz to encourage him to let go. Since the second film Buzz has slipped into being Woody's voice of reason, which Woody chooses to ignore. And again, without Woody around, there's only one thing Buzz will do. Become a Space Ranger again. Unlike the second film, this time it's not for comedic purposes, but a genuine threat thanks to Lotso's evil influence. It takes a factory reset to turn him into Spanish Buzz, now a comic relief version of the Space Ranger.

This seemingly in-built tendency to slide into the delusion could be seen as Buzz's quirk in the same way as Rex being nervous. But it seems to me, that despite being something of secondary protagonist, when Woody isn't around, Pixar just don't know what to do with him. Because what is Buzz Lightyear if he is not a Space Ranger.

Eventually Woody returns and so does regular Buzz, and in an absolute gutsy play, Buzz encourages Woody to let go and accept their fate knowing they're going to die. God damn that's dark. Wow. They naturally get out but again, Woody accepts change and it's guided by the helping hand of Buzz Lightyear.

In the 4th Toy Story, Woody starts to get left out by their new owner Bonnie, and while Buzz tries to comfort him, Buzz generally plays a smaller part than in the previous films. They finally drop the Space Ranger act and Buzz is weirdly dumber now. He's given this inner voice subplot which to me just feels like a weak way to give him something to do, acting more like a running joke than a character arc. It kinda takes away Buzz's autonomy, so his impulsive actions are driven by, basically, a magic 8-ball.

The Toy Story sequels seem to be very good about being selective what characters stick around based on whether they serve a purpose or not. Bo Peep gets sidelined in Toy Story 2, is just sent away unceremoniously off-screen in Toy Story 3 and returns in a big way in Toy Story 4. So likewise, Toy Story 4 could have reduced Buzz's role even more, he didn't have to be around for the antique store parts but I guess he's the popular character. But Buzz has one vital role to play that no-one else can. In this film, Woody is struggling to find his place in a post-Andy world and this isolation has made him incredibly self-centered, refusing to listen to others. Everything he has done has been in service to others, but never what's good for himself. And in the end, the one to give him the push he needs is of course Buzz, Woody's voice of reason.

So for each movie, Buzz has been the second-protagonist after Woody, but his lack of any real development could make him seem more of a glorified secondary character, like Rex or Mr Potato Head. There might be small changes like a love interest, but nothing happens to them that changes in any significant way. He has no character arc anymore because Buzz has become what is known as a steadfast character. With character arcs, we're used to seeing them be positive change or negative change. So a flawed character who overcomes

some internal conflict for the better or for the worse. But sometimes we have characters who have no character arc, known as the flat arc, like Paddington. Paddington doesn't have some internal conflict to overcome, instead he holds onto a belief, the belief of seeing good in people. And as a character he does not change, but the characters around him do, because of his influence.

Many characters don't have character arcs like James Bond, Marty McFly, Aang, Moana, Ratatouille.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnmNvgkT1vE>

There might be little signs of growth like not reacting to being called a coward and they may begin to doubt they can hold on to their beliefs (Aang) but ultimately they're supposed to remain the same.

This is useful for superheroes, characters who may go through dramatic events and have their faith tested across comics, tv and movies, but remain true to themselves. But their heroic acts change and inspire others.

The Toy Story movies are Woody's story. From the fear of change to accepting it. And from the 2nd movie onwards, Buzz's steadfast position anchors Woody and is pivotal in his development. The pep talk in Toy Story 2, the acceptance of fate in Toy Story 3 and the push for a happier life in Toy Story 4. Buzz is able to adjust to his life as a toy in one movie thanks to Woody, and Woody is able to grow and change across all four movies thanks to Buzz.

So if Buzz's role in the Toy Story movies is to facilitate change in Woody, how could you do a Toy Story movie without Woody? Well what is Buzz Lightyear if he is not a Space Ranger.

Lightyear as a stand alone movie, representing the thing Buzz is based on is pretty much the only direction they could take with the Toy Story universe. Aside from outside elements like the aging actors, and us just wanting the toys to have a happily ever after, Woody's departure in Toy Story 4 removes Buzz's role in the dynamic of the toys. So the best position Buzz can be in is to be a Space Ranger once again.

Will human Buzz be as steadfast as toy Buzz, or will he have a life-changing epiphany like Toy Story 1? We will have to wait and see. But if this is to be true to the spirit of Buzz, then he will hopefully also create positive change to those closest to him. Whatever direction they take Buzz next year and beyond, at least we'll always have our toys.