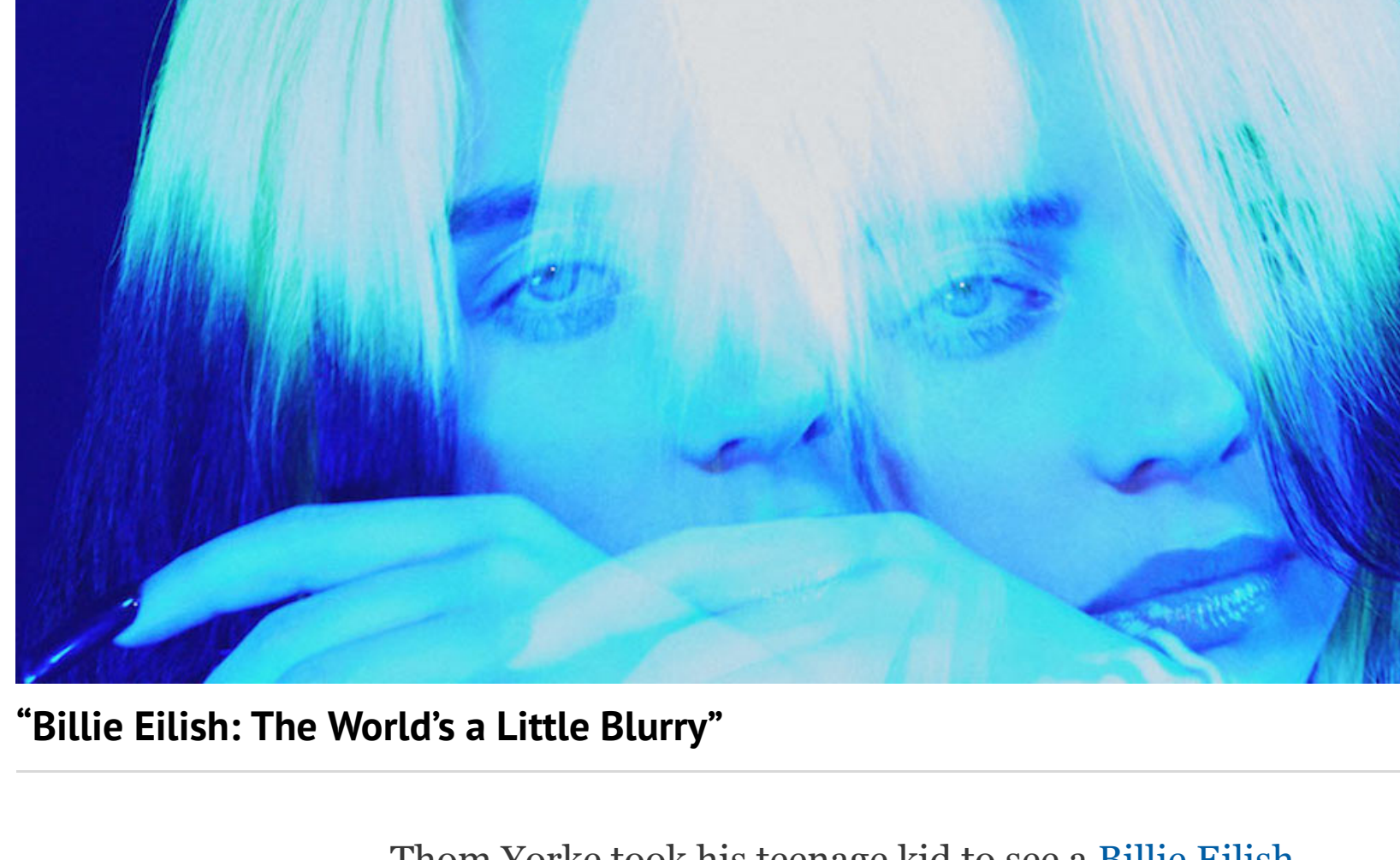




'Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry' Review: A Radically Honest Doc About a Teen Becoming an Icon

R.J. Cutler's film offers a generational portrait of the timeless relationship between teenagers and the people they listen to.

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"Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry"

Thom Yorke took his teenage kid to see a Billie Eilish concert in 2019, and the story goes that the Radiohead frontman was so impressed by the bedroom pop supernova that he went backstage after the show and told her that she was "the only one doing anything fucking interesting nowadays." (There's some very special video of Yorke seat-dancing to "You Should See Me in a Crown" with the same twitchy abandon he moves to his own songs.) It's hard to know exactly what he meant by that earth-shaking endorsement — even Yorke's compliments are as serrated and Sphinx-like as his lyrics — and harder still to imagine that the legion of young fans who live and breathe Eilish's music would care. They have their own sacred idea of what makes her special, and the rest of us are just vibing along from the sidelines.

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A year-in-the-life documentary that observes Eilish's meteoric stardom in such extreme close-up that everything around her eventually fuzzes out of view, R.J. Cutler's epic yet bracingly intimate "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry" knows that whatever makes its subject so fucking interesting is already self-evident to the people who hear themselves in her music. And it's only because his film accepts that truth from the start — only because it doesn't bend over backwards to bring their parents into the fold, or try to explain Eilish's appeal to an audience who has never seen the world through those ocean eyes — that it's able to smudge it into something big enough for anyone to appreciate.

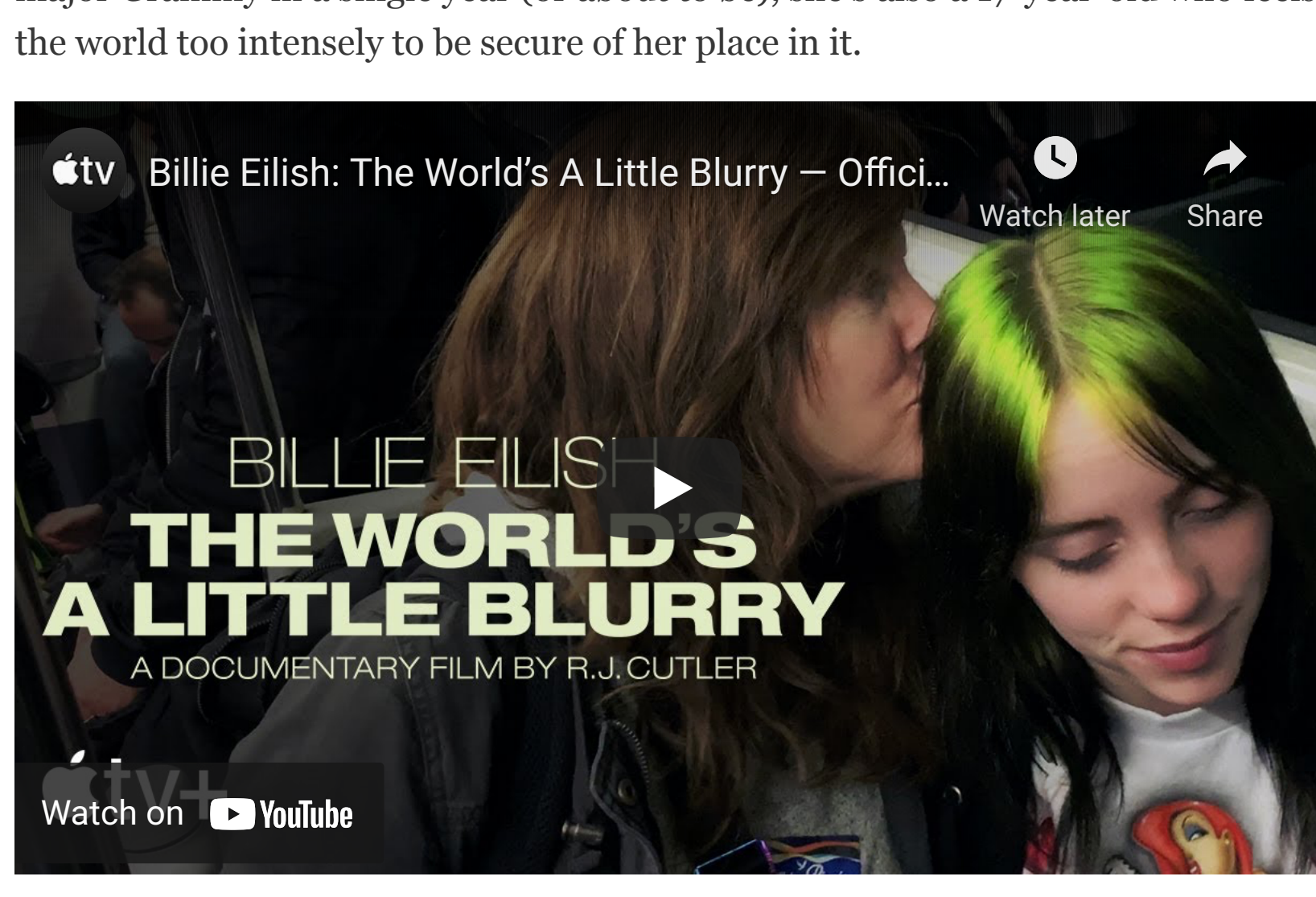
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It may not be possible to pinpoint the moment when the full scope of "The World's a Little Blurry" shifts into focus, but the most pivotal scene might also be the only one that people over a certain age will struggle to understand. Eilish, who somehow idolizes Justin Bieber to an even more severe degree than this critic and so many sad boy millennials like him who grew up worshipping Yorke (her obsession got so intense that her mom once considered sending her to therapy for it), finally gets a chance to meet the Canadian heartthrob at Coachella.

Eilish basically short-circuits the moment they cross paths; she freezes and weeps at the sight of him. The sight of Justin Bieber. She goes weak and collapses into his arms. The arms of Justin Bieber. In that moment we remember something that Eilish never gets a chance to forget, which is that she isn't just the youngest person to ever win every major Grammy in a single year (or about to be), she's also a 17-year-old who feels the world too intensely to be secure of her place in it.



The doc's vérité approach helps to articulate that turbulence, as the already voyeuristic thrill of watching someone on the ride of their life is compounded by the volatility of teenage emotions. Minutes before, Eilish was so blasé about meeting Katy Perry's boyfriend that she didn't even recognize who he was. (Bieber comes off like a champ, but Orlando Bloom joins "Blindspotting" director Carlos López Estrada and several other high-flying men in the mass grave that Eilish digs throughout this movie.) Now, her entire universe is being dissolved into molecules because of a musician who, um, is not exactly the lead singer of Radiohead. He isn't even the bassist in Muse.

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But it doesn't matter. Not to Eilish, and not to the documentary that Cutler has made about the most transformative years of her life. Because "The World's a Little Blurry" isn't just the definitive look inside Eilish's world domination, it's also a generational portrait of the timeless relationship between teenagers and the people they listen to — the people who understand them, and help them understand themselves in return.

The emotional rawness of that super-real encounter is typical of what viewers will find scattered across Cutler's film, an 135-minute opus — complete with intermission! — that indulges Eilish fans without alienating casual passersby. "The World's a Little Blurry" cuts between recording sessions in her brother Finneas' childhood bedroom and sold-out concert performances from around the globe with such frequency that it gradually collapses the two into different sides of a single life. For one, obsessives will have their minds blown by front-row footage of the moment Billie and Finneas cracked "Bad Guy," while everyone else can rest assured that the film will eventually convince them to care.

Cutler's doc thrives on that contrast, as the ways that Eilish's life is so obviously exceptional make it easier to appreciate the ways it isn't. Like any teenager, she argues with her parents, ricochets from grandiosity to self-doubt, gets dicked around by her spectacularly useless boyfriend "Q" (not so anonymous anymore!), and pulls her hair out in search of a way to express herself. Similar to last year's fantastic Taylor Swift documentary "Miss Americana" in function if not form, "The World's a Little Blurry" recognizes that public success can amplify personal shortcomings in a way that reveals ultra-rich artists to be as relatable as their music. "We have millions of dollars," Eilish says at the end of the film. "But we're not millionaires." Fame changes some people more than others, but everyone is easier to see when they're standing on a stage.

If "Miss Americana" was the fine-crafted story of a veteran pop star coming into her strength and making space for her ego, this is the messy sketch of a young newcomer learning how to live with her id. "This is so weird, you guys," she tells the rabid audience at one of her shows. "I don't know why you like me." Cutler's film makes it impossible not to believe her, not to be happy when she inches closer towards some kind of understanding, and not to appreciate that she'll never fully solve the mystery of her own success.

"The World's a Little Blurry" doesn't try to do it for her, even when Eilish's radical honesty creates a strange kind of distance that Cutler isn't able to close; a film like this can only be so transparent until you find yourself less compelled by what it's showing you than by what it can't or won't. Eilish has a sneaky way of piercing right through that. A child of the "Office" generation, she occasionally throws a look into the camera as if she were cosplaying as a character on her favorite show. That "I see you, and I know how absurd life can seem" energy feels intrinsic to the powerful mind-meld she has with her fans and anyone else who's coming of age at a time when the world's on fire and all the lonely people in it are ensnared by the same web that was supposed to connect them.

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That's how Eilish's mom rationalizes the lightning-bolt relevance of her daughter's put-on-the-floor songwriting, and it's as logical an explanation as any that can be given to words. Her take harks back to an early scene where an injured fan at one of Eilish's shows gets carried out by security, and the singer stops the concert to address the crowd between songs. "You guys need to be fucking okay 'cause you're the reason I'm fucking okay, okay?" Whatever you think of Eilish by the time "The World's a Little Blurry" stops spinning, you're just glad that she and her audience can hear each other clearly.

Grade: B+

"Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry" will be available to stream on AppleTV+ starting Friday, February 26.

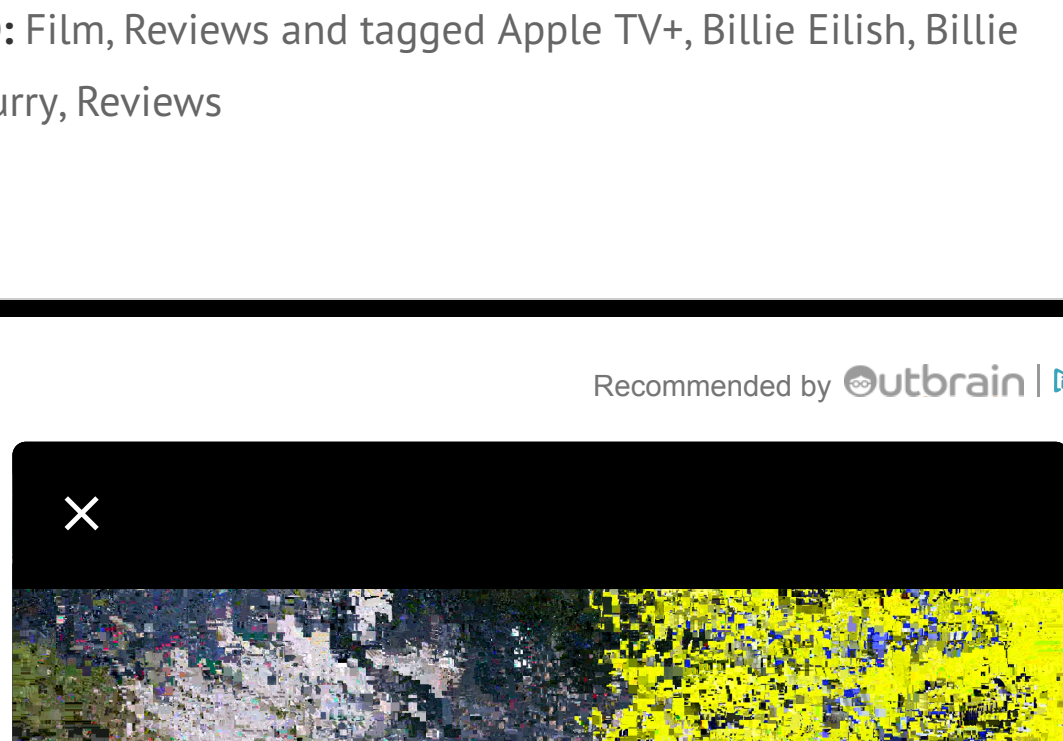
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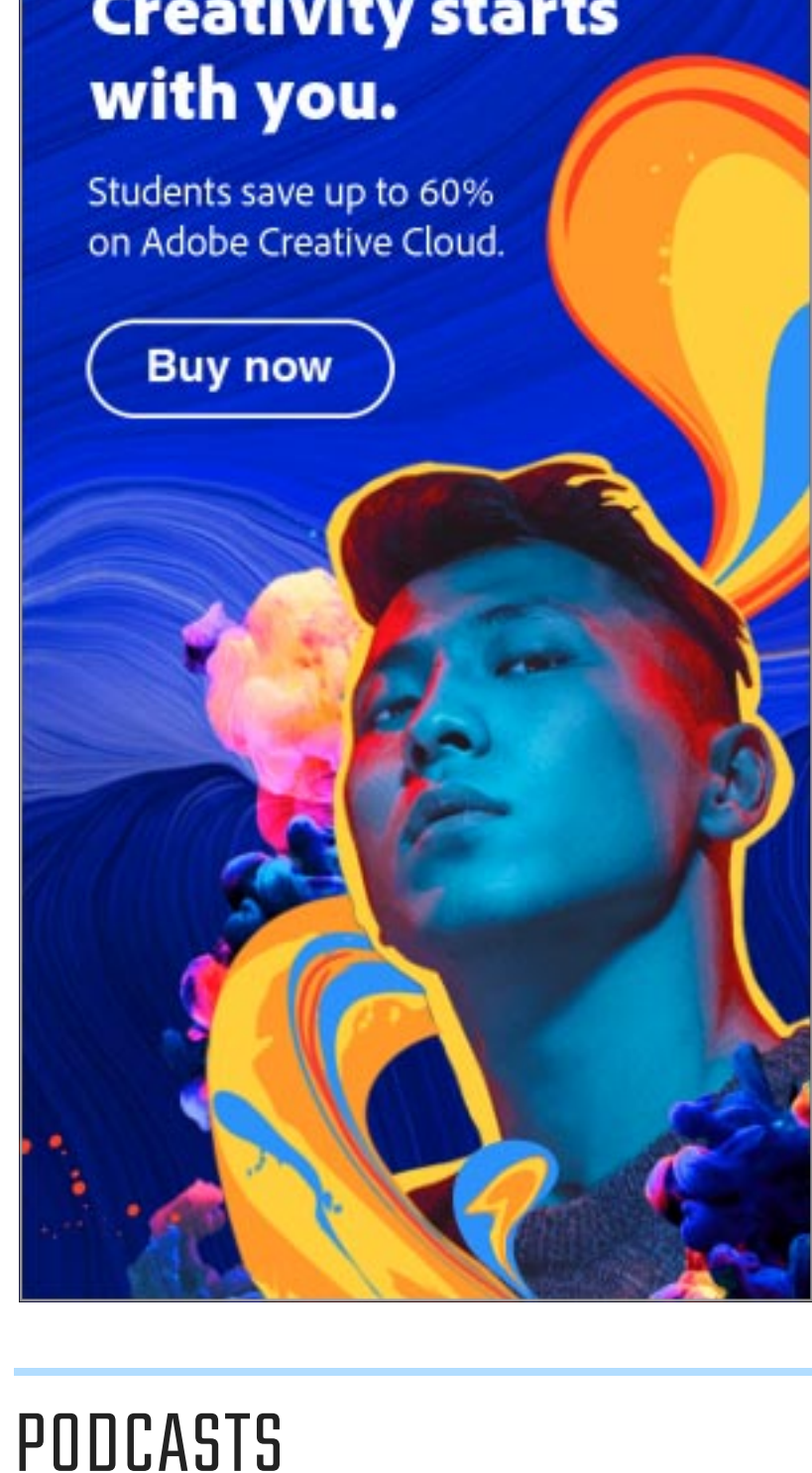
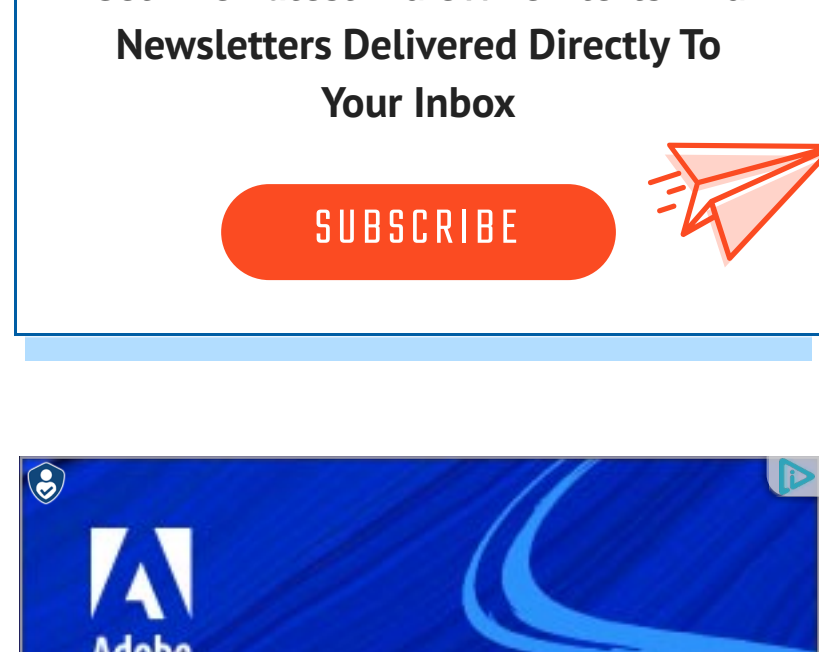
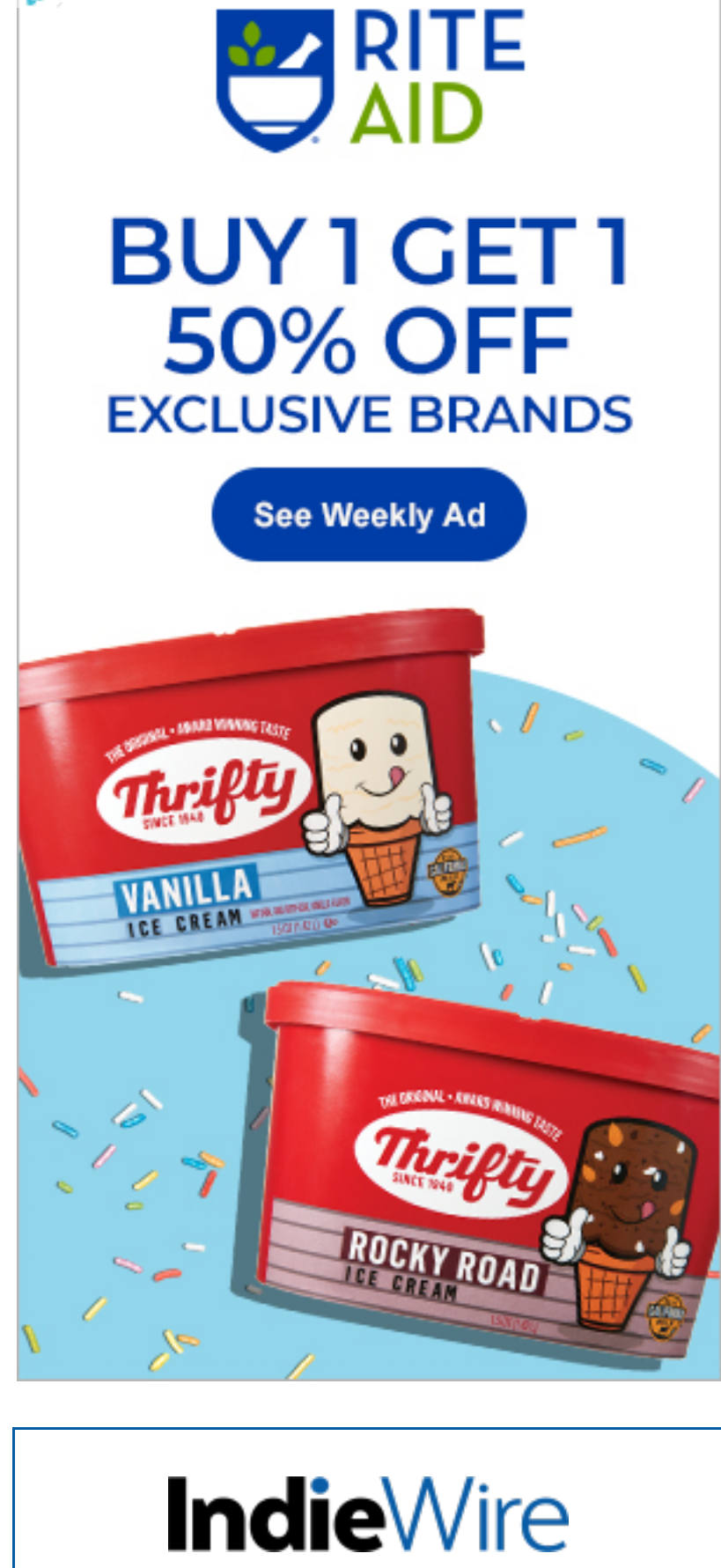
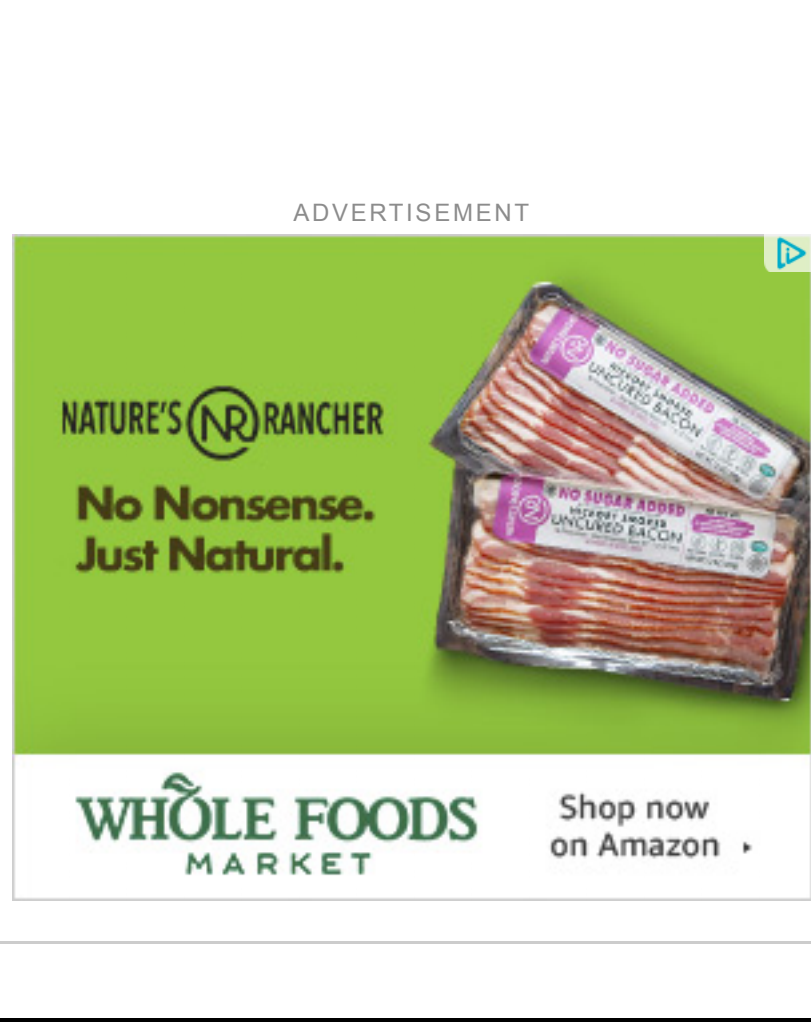
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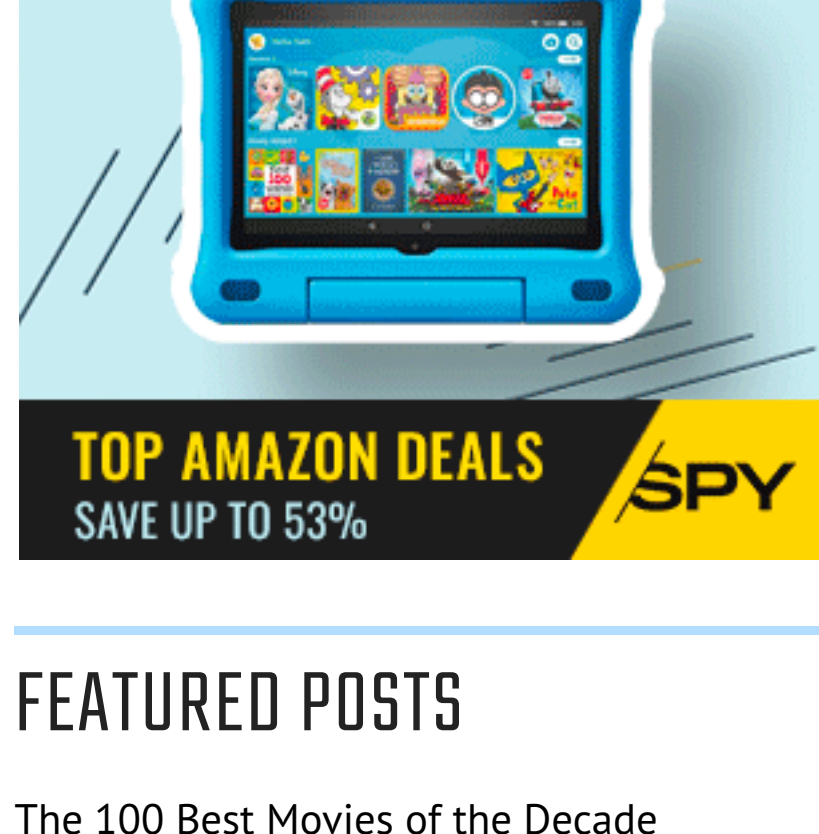
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