



## **Battle of Fandor**

By Christina Couch  
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*A new site joins a handful of others in streaming art-house titles on demand*

Move over Alfred, Fandor.com wants to be your movie butler. Described as “If Sundance Ran Netflix,” the new boutique on-demand site launched in beta in late October and offers subscribers a limited selection of new films every month, each hand-picked by cinephiles. Unlike Netflix and Amazon VOD, Fandor and a growing number of competitors, such as FilmBuff on Demand and Mubi.com, focus on streaming art-house films. But can they survive?

Jane Riccobono, Fandor’s marketing and syndication coordinator, says yes. “We’re not trying to be Netflix,” Riccobono explains. “We’re a supplement. It’s like a multiplex versus a film festival. You go to a multiplex to see the latest blockbuster, but you go to a film festival to have professionals present you with a smaller number of things you’ve never heard of before that you’re likely to find interesting.”

For Fandor, that includes obscure titles ranging from *The Hitch-Hiker*, a 1953 thriller often described as the first noir directed by a woman (Ida Lupino) to the 2007 documentary *This Is Nollywood*, which profiles Nigeria’s burgeoning film industry. Fandor’s selections are interesting, but relative to other companies, there aren’t many of them. Whereas Amazon currently streams 75,000 movies and television shows (Netflix won’t reveal exactly how many films it’s streaming; it’s “above 10,000 and below 30,000,” according to spokesman Steve Swasey), Fandor only licenses about 1,000 films, many of which are shorts.

“Our mission is less about trying to replace Netflix and more about maintaining an ongoing conversation with fans about what kinds of films they’re responding to,” explains Damian Benders, head of marketing for FilmBuff, a similar curatorial site launched in 2007 that hosts approximately 1,100 short and feature-length movies.

What art-house streaming sites lack in sheer numbers, they make up for by reaching an audience other sites ignore. For those interested in streaming films such as Kim Ki-young’s 1960 Korean classic *The Housemaid* or Louis Feuillade’s 1913 silent *Fantômas* series, sites designed by and for hardcore cinephiles are indispensable not only as vehicles for accessing obscure titles, but also as a means of connecting

with the likeminded. Fandor, FilmBuff and Mubi provide multiple social-networking outlets for users, personalized critical commentary from staff writers (Fandor's blog editor, Kevin B. Lee, is an occasional Time Out contributor) and better promotional opportunities for filmmakers.

"When we offer filmmakers placement on our site, they're not going to have to compete against other films that might take their audience," says Riccobono, adding that a significant portion of Fandor revenue goes back to the filmmakers themselves. "That makes a big difference."

Whether Fandor will be able to permanently steal a fiscally viable slice of the film-fan pie remains to be seen. For now, it's nice to know that indie voices can slip outside of the big red envelope.