

**Movie:** *Mad Max: Fury Road*

**Deggans:** Failed, though it *almost* passes. The film is not about race, and one of the major characters is played by Zoe Kravitz (the daughter of Lenny Kravitz), who is half Jewish and half African-American.

**Bechdel:** Passed with flying colors. Most of the main cast consists of strong female protagonists who are escaping from a power-mad warlord in a post-nuclear wasteland, and they are led by one of said warlord's best soldiers who went rogue; a one-armed woman named Imperator Furiosa. While the movie is light on dialogue (much like its predecessors), and while there are a few bits of dialogue that often discuss the man that they're escaping from, the babies that two of them are pregnant with, or the titular character, Max Rockatansky, the "five wives of Immortan Joe" make the movie pass the Bechdel Test on principle alone. Each of the five wives are named, though they have odd names such as "Cheedo", "The Dag", and "Toast The Knowing". Each member of this sisterhood has unique personalities, are strong, and often discuss things such as battle strategies, weapons, vehicles, and the promised land that they're searching for, The Green Place. At one point, one of the wives starts making odd hand gestures, and is asked what she's doing. "Praying", she responds. "To who?", asks her peer. "Anybody who is listening", she answers coldly. This conversation is a perfect representation of these women. Another example of this is the tribe of female warriors that the group meets up with later in the movie. This tribe, where Furiosa originated, consists entirely of women who are generally untrusting of men. The only two men that most female characters in this movie trust are Max and the former warboy, Nux, though this is after much (deserved) distrust and scrutiny towards them. Furiosa is arguably the

main protagonist, despite the film's title. At worst, she is a solid deuteragonist. She is the one who kills the main antagonist in the end.

**Genre:** True to the series it is a part of, this film is an action-adventure film with a post-apocalyptic setting. The setting technically makes it a science fiction film, though it breaks a lot of tropes commonly seen in science fiction.

### **Three Narrative Elements**

- 1. Plot:** "Mad" Max Rockatansky, an ex-cop, is suffering from severe PTSD flashbacks, and is surviving in a post-nuclear wasteland. He's hunted down by cancer-stricken Warboys, and his belongings are taken from him. He is transported to The Citadel where he is made into a human bloodbag. Meanwhile, the leader of The Citadel, Immortan Joe, sends his most trusted lieutenant, Imperator Furiosa, to the nearby Gastown and Bullet Farm for shipments of gasoline and ammunition. She leads her convoy with a war rig (an armored tanker rig), and takes them on a detour where they are attacked by a Russian raider group known as The Buzzards. Immortan Joe is confused as to why Furiosa went off-course, and checks a large vault where he has been keeping his breeding fodder, his "Five Wives" locked up. The vault is empty, and he realizes that Furiosa took the Wives with her. He leads a war party to chase the rig and get his wives back. Nux, a particularly unhealthy Warboy, takes Max with him to act as spare blood, and joins the war party. The party chases Furiosa into a sandstorm where Nux's car is torn to shreds, and both Nux and Max are knocked unconscious. When Max wakes up, he finds the Wives and Furiosa fixing up the war rig, and after a brief fight, he takes the rig and leaves everybody

behind. It stops about a quarter of a mile later, and Furiosa explains that due to a killswitch, only she can drive the rig, and she'll drive it for Max, but only if the Wives are allowed on-board, too. Max is forced to oblige. Max slowly starts to trust his newfound companions, and they start to trust him. Nux makes one more attempt at capturing Furiosa, but fails right in front of Immortan Joe. Shortly after, Angharad, one of the two pregnant wives, falls off of the rig, and is killed when she gets caught under the wheels. Immortan Joe is stricken with grief. Nux is found by Capable, another wife, in the back of the rig, unable to face Joe given his latest blunder. Capable is kind and gentle towards him, and he forms a romantic bond with her. The rig later gets stuck in a marsh, and the group is attacked by one of Joe's henchmen, Bullet Farmer. Nux helps them get the rig unstuck, and together, Max and Furiosa kill their assailant. They finally reach what used to be Furiosa's home and encounter a tribe of warrior women who inform them that the marsh that they had passed was their destination; The Green Place. The water had been poisoned, and the place was deemed uninhabitable. Furiosa emotionally breaks down. The group decides to head west, and Max parts ways with them, but promptly turns around and suggests they take over the now-defenseless Citadel, offering to help them once again. They're met by Immortan Joe's war party, and the two groups battle as they race to the Citadel. Furiosa is stabbed in the side, and the group suffers many casualties, but Furiosa is able to kill Immortan Joe by using a harpoon to rip his face off. The wives and Max all move to Joe's now-empty vehicle, and Nux stays behind to jam up the remnants of the war party. Just then, Joe's son, Rictus Erectus, attacks. Nux sacrifices himself by flipping the war rig, thus taking out Rictus. Max transfers some of his blood to Furiosa in order to save her, finally telling her that his name is Max. Back at

The Citadel, the group presents the corpse of Immortan Joe, and they are given the clearance that The Citadel is now free of Joe's grasp. Max slips away with a smile on his face.

2. **Characters:** "Mad" Max Rockatansky, Imperator Furiosa, Angharad, Toast The Knowing, The Dag, Capable, Cheedo The Fragile, Nux, Immortan Joe, Rictus Erectus, The People Eater, Bullet Farmer, Ms. Giddy
3. **Setting:** The setting is best described as a post-nuclear wasteland, taking place in Australia at a designated time sometime shortly after the end of the world. Ironically, fossil fuels were the reason that the world ended, and yet people still continue to fight over them. Some have described the aesthetic as a grittier and more cynical dieselpunk, which is a fairly accurate description. The costumes and character archetypes are also reminiscent of steampunk and cyperpunk, respectively.

**Explicit Meaning:** One could be forgiven for losing the meaning of *Mad Max: Fury Road* amongst the high-octane action and cool-looking cars. On first-watch, it might seem like there's a strong feminist theme to this film—and there is—but that's not the main point. Sure, survival seems like an obvious one, but that's not exactly much of an Aesop, now is it? Of course, in a world plagued by dwindling resources, a nuclear hellscape, and an "us vs. them" dog-eat-dog mentality, survival is going to be prominent. Perhaps to elaborate, it could show the importance of cooperation in order to survive a cruel world. Max, a loner, is forced to work as a team player, and he learns to enjoy and grow from his camaraderie.

**Subtext/Implicit Meaning or “Hidden Meaning”:** While the previous section proposed that one of the main takeaways from this film was a strong, feminist message, a deeper look at this film paints something far more expansive, best explained through a phrase uttered by a few of the main characters: “We are not things!”. While this could support the obvious interpretation that it refers to the wives being used as breeding material for Immortan Joe, let’s take this a step further: Immortan Joe considers everything his property, something I had noticed when he said, “That’s my child! *My property!*”. His loyal Warboys are his war fodder to sacrifice in battle, Max is made into a human bloodbag for his cancer-stricken Warboys. Women in The Citadel are made nothing more than sources of milk. Immortan Joe makes whatever he gets his hands on into “Things”, which is preposterous! It serves as a good analogy for a utilitarian society, where people are only as valuable as what they can contribute, or they are defined by this characteristic.

**“Message”:** It seems to me, between the explicit themes of teamwork and the implicit themes that shine a negative light on a utilitarian society, the message is spelled out for us, plain as day: “We are not things!” This applies to all genders, all ethnicities, and all walks of life. Men are not born solely to die fighting for someone who won’t even remember them, and women are not born solely to give birth and raise children. We have to set aside our differences like Max and Furiosa if we want to create a world that values us as people rather than as things.

### **Four Steps In The Hero’s Journey**

- 1. Refusal Of The Call:** Interestingly, both Max and Nux are showing facing this stage of The Hero’s Journey. All Max cares about at first is getting his car back after waking up from the sandstorm. He takes the war rig with the intention of leaving Furiosa, Nux, and

the Wives in the desert to fend for themselves. He also faces this later when they reach their destination, and he opts to leave with his payment. Nux is stuck in his ways, and initially continues his attempts at capturing Furiosa and the Wives, despite their efforts to convince him that Immortan Joe is not nearly as great a man as Nux believes him to be.

2. **Crossing The Threshold:** Max is forced to allow Furiosa and the Wives onto the war rig when the vehicle stalls thanks to a killswitch Furiosa had installed. Later, Max almost immediately decides to turn around and offer to help the group once again. Nux, having been disgraced in front of Immortan Joe, hides in the back of the rig where he is found by Capable. The two have a heart-to-heart conversation, and he forms a romantic bond with her, deciding to help her and her allies.
3. **Ordeal:** Max witnesses one of the Wives, Angharad, slip and go under the wheels of the war rig. The rest of the wives demand he turn around, but he refuses, stating matter-of-factly that “she went under the wheels”. This reminds him of the other people in his life that he had failed to save. Later, Max and company race back to the unoccupied Citadel with Immortan Joe’s war party hot on their trail. In this battle, Immortan Joe, Rictus Erectus, and The People Eater are killed, but at the cost of numerous warrior women and Nux, who flips the war rig in order to stop Rictus from killing all of his newfound friends.
4. **Return With Elixir:** Nux died, having redeemed himself. He used to long for the opportunity to die on the road in the name of Immortan Joe, as he believed that by being “witnessed” while doing this, Immortan Joe would carry him to Valhalla. There, he could “ride eternal, shiny, and chrome”. By the end of the movie, he told Capable to “witness him” right before he flipped the war rig, killing Rictus, and jamming up the war party.

This would remove the last obstacle standing between his friends and the safety of the Citadel. In a way, Nux achieved what he had set out to do: sacrifice himself for a cause he believed in, thus making his journey go full circle. As for Max, Max stuck around long enough to see Furiosa and the Wives succeed, but he quietly slipped away and left with a smile on his face. He returned to his life as a loner, but he seemed less broken and much happier.