

Prologue | California

Thud! I land on the ridged roof of the home of a billionaire, whose mansion houses a priceless diamond, which is about to be stolen. Well, that's what our agency thought. But of course, my team and I would get there before that happens, take out the criminals, bring them to the agency, and collect praises from everybody at headquarters. That's what happens when you're the best in the game.

I run along the roof and jump down to the balcony to meet Olivia, our tech specialist. I've known her since she first joined when she was 14.

She has her computer and is sitting, typing away. "Lasers disabled, lock unlocked, and the family is safe. Where's Leanne?"

"She's on the other side. Thanks, Liv."

"Of course."

I slip through the open sliding door and tiptoe carefully through the long corridor, followed by Olivia. We meet Leanne. "All clear. No one for feet. Or miles, actually, this place is huge."

The bulky, silver door opens for us. The diamond is in plain sight. And so is the black-clad criminal holding it. The agency told us that she was a girl. She's startled, but she's trying to hide it. Leanne and I bolt forward and I snatch the diamond from her hands, while she pins the criminal to the floor. Olivia peacefully comes forward and scans the lady's face using her computer.

"Claire Hartz. Out of jail.... Wow, 3 weeks ago? Just couldn't wait to get back on scene, huh? I know Mrs. Z will be thrilled to see her, you guys. She's robbed banks, stolen jewelry, and, worst of all, sped! Can you believe it?"

"Yeah, yeah.... Livvy, can we hurry up here?" Leanne says.

"Right. I sent Mrs. Z a word. She'll have a helicopter this time to pick us up," says Liv.

"Can she hurry up? My arm is dying here," whines Leanne.

"Annie, you've fought in wars and battles and everything else! Holding someone down is nothing,"

While they bicker in the background, I look at the heavy diamond in my hand. A pair of striking blue eyes stare back at me. That's me, Charleigh Hyde-age 17, orphaned at 4 months, alias Agent Jekyll. I've been a spy since I could walk. It's my life. For my friends, it's different. Anne and Liv have only been spying for a couple of years now, but you could never tell.

I met Leanne and Livvy at a mission in Barcelona - Liv was visiting her aunt. She was about to go back to Italy, where she lives, but I realized she was perfect for the hacker position that had opened up in one of our teams. I brought her back to the U.S. with me. Our head, Mrs. Z saw how friendly we were and decided to put Liv with me. I had never worked with someone, but I knew it was destiny. Leanne and I were still keeping in touch, when I discovered that her mom worked at our agency. Leanne joined us about half a year later, and our team was complete.

Suddenly, Leanne and Liv stop arguing and start to have a decent conversation.

"So, a helicopter. Fancy. Last time it was a... lasagna or something? Some fancy car," says Leanne.

"Lamborghini, Leanne," I say.

"Whatever. She has been spoiling us."

We all nod in agreement while Claire stares at us in amazement.

"H-how did you know? They told me it was all so protected, so secretive. Who are you guys?" she asks, struggling to breathe against the floor.

"The AIA's top three best agents of the century."



Why Taylor Swift is the most influential singer

By: Zachary W



Are you ready for it?

Taylor Swift has been one of the most popular singers for over 17 years. Whether you're a fan or not, it is hard to deny her impact on the world. She is way more than just a singer. She is an actor, a businesswoman, a director, and much more. It is almost impossible to remain at Taylor Swift's current level of fame. Ever since the debut of her first album, she has shown a talent for engaging with her fans, she leaves them wanting each new song and album. During Taylor Swift's reign, she has used her influence to change not just the music industry, but the world. From people wanting to build a collection of all her merchandise, to changing the way concert tickets are bought and sold, Taylor Swift will be one of the most popular singers of all time. She is definitely one of the most influential artists of all time.

The Eras Tour

The first reason that I think that Taylor Swift is the most influential singer of the 21st century is because of how many people wanted to go to the Eras tour. An example of this is in the article by Music Business Worldwide. It states that, "Ticketmaster explained that over 3.5 million people had pre-registered for Taylor's Verified Fan sale," which was, it added, the "largest registration in history." Analyzing internet traffic to the ticket site, 14 million users tried to access the site, and if everyone had been able to buy tickets, Taylor would have been booked every night for 2.5 years. On November 15, 2022, as an example, the site sold over two million tickets - "the most tickets ever sold for an artist in a single day according to Ticketmaster." The whole process of getting tickets to her show is insane. First, you have to sign up for a verified fan, which gives you a chance of getting a code. Only about 5% of people who signed up got it. Then, the code lets you get into a queue to try to buy tickets. I know this because my family tried to get Era's tour tickets. We signed up for verified fan on two accounts, neither of which even got the presale code.

Friendship Bracelets

The second reason that Taylor Swift is the most influential artist of the 21st century is because of the increase in sales of friendship bracelets or friendship bracelet kits. An example of this is in the article by CNN. It states that, "Jamie Tompkins stays up well past midnight to work on her budding side hustle: making friendship bracelets for Taylor Swift concert goers. She said she sold over 5,000 Taylor Swift-themed friendship bracelets on her Etsy shop this summer, bringing in about \$16,000 in sales. There were weeks that making bracelets paid more than my full time job." The tradition of trading friendship bracelets at Swift concerts is inspired by the lyrics on her song "You're on Your Own, Kid" from her most recent album "Midnights." There, Taylor sings about making friendship bracelets as a way to connect with others over a shared moment. My mom and I spent hours making friendship bracelets to trade for the Era's tour movie. In total, we made about 50 bracelets. The bracelets can be made of anything, from beads to letters to charms and can be complex or simple. The bracelets include letters that form her albums, her song names, and inside jokes between the swifties.

Different Genres

The last reason that I think Taylor Swift is the most influential singer of the 21st century is because she showed that artists can change genres. Everytime she changes genres, she gains a bigger audience. An example of this is from an article by Billboard. It says, "It's worth noting that Taylor was never just a country artist." Even though Taylor's 2006 album was officially a country album, it had a lot of pop on it. Her next three albums were the same, until in 2014 with her 1989 album she fully changed over to pop. Each album grew her fan base. After that, with Folklore and Evermore, "Swift experimented with an indie folk/rock sound that served to broaden her fanbase to more alternative audiences. The result is a discography that seems to hold space for nearly every kind of listener." Her first couple albums, Taylor Swift, Fearless, Speak Now, Red, were mostly country but each album was steering more into the pop genre. Preparing fans for her first full on pop album, 1989. then Reputation, her most diverse album, which pulled into electro pop and even hip-hop. As she evolved in different styles of music, she drew in new fans. This resulted in a discography for everybody to enjoy. I'm not that big of a country fan, but as Taylor branched out into different genres, she pulled me in and made me a swiftie.

The Final Proof

As you can see, Taylor Swift is the most influential singer of the 21st century. She's made over 500 million dollars from the Eras tour, she's donated an extra \$100,000 to all of her truck drivers, and she's donated to food banks along her route of tour. But more than that, she was a way for me and my mom to bond. When we were driving back from Chicago last spring, my mom and I weren't really Taylor Swift fans. So, my mom was finding a new playlist on Spotify to listen to in the car, and she found a playlist with all the "essential Taylor Swift songs" and we loved it. Ever since then, Taylor Swift is always playing in the car, we spent hours making friendship bracelets for her movie, we know most of the lyrics to all of her songs, and she is our top streamed artist on our Spotify for 2023. Even years later when Taylor Swift isn't the most popular singer anymore, she will always definitely be the most influential singer for my mom and I.

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