



## 11/6 1 ARTHUR CHRISTMAS

ANIMATED/FAMILY \$48 MILL BO 3376 SCREENS PG 97 MINUTES

VOICED BY **Jim Broadbent, Hugh Laurie, Bill Nighy**

How does Santa deliver all those presents in a single night? This enormously entertaining computer-animated comedy answers this question – and many more besides – with wit, charm and ingenuity.

It turns out that the annual festive mission has been carried out by a long line of Santas and has evolved considerably over the years. The latest Santa (voiced by **Jim Broadbent**) is little more than a figurehead and it's his alpha male eldest son Steve (**Hugh Laurie**) who is really running the show. Steve has turned the present-delivery business into a slick hi-tech operation involving a mile-wide, sleigh-shaped stealth craft and a million elves, who have 18.14 seconds to nip in and out of each household on Earth.



But when a glitch occurs and a child in a Cornish village misses out on her present, it's Steve's meek and clumsy younger brother Arthur (**James McAvoy**) who resolves to put things right. Accompanied by his grandfather, **Bill Nighy's** doddering Grandsanta, and by feisty elf Bryony (**Ashley Jensen**), a lowly member of Santa's Giftwrap Battalion, Arthur sets forth on Grandsanta's old-fashioned, reindeer-drawn sleigh to get the missing gift to its destination in time.



Arthur Christmas is a real treat – as warm-hearted as its hero and as inventive as his brother. It's also quirky and quintessentially British, traits it shares with producers Aardman Animations' best-known hit, Wallace and Gromit. Director **Sarah Smith** and her co-writer **Peter Baynham** deserve similar success. Like Santa's sack, their film is stuffed with so many surprises and delights it will keep on giving over many Christmas viewings to come.

This movie will hit on all cylinders for those that loved **MADAGASCAR 3, UP, KUNG FU PANDA 2, CARS, TANGLED, SUPER 8, THE SMURFS** and **THE MUPPETS**.

## 11/6 2 YOUR SISTER'S SISTER

DRAMA \$2 MILL BO 106 SCREENS R 90 MINUTES



**Emily Blunt (THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU, YOUNG VICTORIA, THE FIVE YEAR ENGAGEMENT, SUNSHINE CLEANING)**

**Mark Duplass (GREENBERG, HUMPDAY, MARS)**

Set in the Northwest, the film begins with friends sharing drinks and fondly remembering Tom, a recently deceased buddy. Tom's brother, Jack (Duplass), ruins the memorial by angrily describing him in an unflattering light. Tom's ex-girlfriend, Iris (Blunt), pulls Jack aside and proposes he recoup in isolation at her family's island house. Jack arrives at the secluded destination but discovers an attractive, barely dressed woman. Hannah (Rosemarie DeWitt) is the lesbian sister of Iris, mourning the breakup of a seven-year relationship. Both grieving losses, Jack and Hannah connect on the first night and drink too much, leading to an awkward sexual encounter. Matters get further complicated when Iris unexpectedly visits the house and confides in her sister that she's in love with Jack.

Based on this film and her last, Shelton seems interested in exploring jealousy and rivalry, both topics that are ripe with possibility. Anyone who has a sibling or best friend has felt some level of competitiveness, no matter how badly one wants to provide unselfish love. Yes, the sisters' relationship is at stake, but Jack doesn't seem worth the fuss. The cast certainly seems to have fun with the material but while their improvisation gives the dialogue life, it sometimes lacks a certain refinement that could've come from more time or a single hand. Similarly, the cinematography covers the action of the actors guiding our eye and providing something new—likely a by-product of the improvisation and allowing the actors ample room to move where they choose.

That said, it's an intimate drama on a scale that few actors the stature of Emily Blunt venture to participate in. And outside of the occasional Nicole Holofcener (HUMPDAY) film, it's rare to see a female-centric film in American cinema today.

The cast does a good job in this film and will offer strong appeal to those that liked **HUMPDAY**, **BEING FLYNN**, **THIN ICE**, **LIKE CRAZY**, **FROZEN RIVER**, **SUNSHINE CLEANING**, **MARGARET** and **THE MONITOR**.



**11/6 3 REC 3 HORROR**  
**\$1 MILL BO 248 SCREENS R 80 MINUTES**

**Leticia Dolrea (CIRCUIT, IMAGE MORTIS)**  
**Diego Martin (THE BORGIA, MATAHARIS)**

Following the throat-munching bloodbath that overwhelms the wedding of two happy love birds, Clara (Leticia Dolrea) and Koldo (Diego Martin), when an uncle arrives on the scene feeling a under the weather, having presumably been bitten by the diseased pooch mentioned in passing by a little girl in REC this "parallel sequel" plays like a cheeky fanboy's perversion of all that made the first two films so singularly unnerving and tautly constructed. And that this is the first entry directed by Paco Plaza without Jaime Balagueró perhaps proves who the brains of this

operation was from the start.

REC and part of *[Rec] 2* assume the faux-verité gaze of professional cameramen, placed conveniently inside an apartment building as a zombieistic virus grips the building's tenants. Neither film broke any sort of mold in their use of first-person point of view, but the horror documented by the absurdly ever-recording cameras was chilling in its sustained immediacy. *[Rec] 3*, shot from the POV of a wedding videographer who, in a shrill but convincing enough testament to his deeply ingrained sense of failure as a filmmaker, name drops Dziga Vertov and repeatedly advocates the use of "cinéma vérité," has more reason than its predecessors to keep the camera on. That it doesn't, after Koldo questions Atún's (Sr. B) need to film the zombie attack as they hole themselves up inside the reception hall's kitchen, is ultimately less surprising than the comic inanity that subsumes all horror as the film's dominant mood.

As guests run wildly through the wedding hall's corridors and woody exteriors, but never inexplicably beyond the grounds and toward the presumably safe civilization beyond, the film jumps from scene to scene with the sort of reckless and confusing abandon that only the expected blackouts of a camera constantly being banged about and turned on and off might have justified. The film forgets to include the scene where Koldo, after leaving a church where the zombies are unable to enter, puts on protective armor before returning to the wedding hall.

This installment of the REC franchise will entertain all that liked **CHERNOBYL DIARIES**, **BATTLESHIP**, **UNDERWORLD 4**, **THE DEVIL INSIDE**, **REAL STEEL**, and **APOLLO 18**.





**11/6 3 360 THRILLER**

**\$1 MILL BO 129 SCREENS R 110 MINUTES**

**Rachel Weisz (FRED CLAUS, DEFINITELY MAYBE, THE MUMMY, THE WHISTLE BLOWER, THE BROTEHRS BLOOM**

**Jude Law (AVIATOR, ALFIE (remake), BREAKING AND ENTERING, GATTACA)**

**Anthony Hopkins (SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, PROOF, BEOWULF, RED DRAGON, BOBBY, HANNIBAL)**

Focusing on a handful of characters (including those played by Jude Law, Anthony Hopkins and Rachel Weisz) in a handful of cities (Paris and London, among them), Meirelles begins and ends with some prominent words about decisions and consequences. Unfortunately, these words are not mirrored by the actions and events in the film—Meirelles actually neglects them to make sure all ends meet and all characters and plots connect. This failure leaves the film bereft of any sort of moral heft and, instead, sows moral confusion. Is Meirelles condemning or celebrating the wide range of behaviors—marriage, infidelity, pornography, religion, etc.—he presents?

In trying to weave together multiple threads, Meirelles and Morgan bring characters together in the most unconvincing of ways. At one point, the story randomly sends a Frenchwoman (Dinara Drukarova) to an AA meeting in Phoenix (though her addiction is conveniently never mentioned before or after this short and arbitrary scene), where she drops in while visiting her sister who “married an American,” just to join two plotlines. In order to link the actions of a former sex offender (Ben Foster) and a young, heartbroken Londoner (Gabriela Marcinkova), the beautiful brunette goes out of character and invites the wormy criminal into her hotel room for wine because, well, they both got stuck in the airport due to weather (of course, right?). These manufactured moments—a whole slew of breakups and hookups between characters—stand front and center in *360*. Still, this will appeal to those that did like **CHERNOBYL DIARIES, RED LIGHTS, ABRAHAM LINCOLN: VAMPIRE HUNTER, THE HUNTER, LOCKOUT** and **HAYWIRE**.



**11/9 1 THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN ACTION/FANTASY**

**\$260 MILL BO 4318 SCREENS PG-13 136 MINUTES**

**Andrew Garfield (THE SOCIAL NETWORK, NEVER LET ME GO)**

**Emma Stone (FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, CRAZY STUPID LOVE, THE ROCKER, SUPER BAD)**

**Denis Leary ( THE REF, voice ICE AGE 1-3, COMPANY MAN, BAD BOY, WAG THE DOG, TWO IF BY SEA)**

A nerdy schoolboy from Queens gets bitten by an altered arachnid -- again -- in "The Amazing Spider-Man," a mostly slick, entertaining and emotionally involving recombination of fresh and familiar elements. With the propitiously named Marc Webb at the helm and a solid screenplay, Sony's reboot of its successful franchise, arriving five years after the last Sam Raimi-directed installment, is gratifyingly more of a drama-with-action than a nonstop assault on the senses. Benefiting enormously from the perfect chemistry of leads Andrew Garfield and Emma Stone, this superhero date movie should do boffo biz, though only strong word of mouth can confer must-see status.

After Peter's bitten by the requisite spider at New York-based Oscorp's genetic research facility, where he's been shown around by cute intern and classmate Gwen Stacy (Stone), he discovers his new powers in a subway car, and then the next morning in the bathroom. The two short scenes showcase Peter's maladroitness as well as the pic's underlying vein of character-driven humor.

Though the film is clearly set in the present day or not-too-distant future (with Internet and holographic computer projections galore), there are some nice retro touches, such as Peter's old-fashioned camera and skateboard, which comes in particularly handy when he tries to test the limits of his strengths in a scenic harbor-side hangar.

After his uncle Ben (a benign Martin Sheen) is killed in a robbery, Peter starts to think of ways he can harness his powers to find the killer. Though the action-heavy second half is well executed, with long-held shots and clears editing allowing for a coherent, almost old-fashioned sense of spatial relations and never-intrusive use of 3D, it's clear that Webb is more interested in the story's human dimensions. A spectacular set piece involving Spider-Man's rescue of a small boy in a burning car, hanging off the Williamsburg Bridge, has much greater resonance than any confrontation with Connors' generally destruction-oriented Lizard, an ugly creature that's less human-gone-wrong than two-dimensional comic book villain, with CGI and prosthetic makeup to match. Similarly, the palpable rapport of Garfield and the ever-affable Stone in the pic's home stretch wows far more than the climactic web slinging antics. This film will be huge for all fans of **THE HUNGER GAMES**, **THE AVENGERS**, **ROCK OF AGES**, **MAGIC MIKE**, **THAT'S MY BOY**, **LORAX**, **21 JUMP STREET** and **FOOTLOOSE**.



11/13 **1** BRAVE ANIMATED

\$235 MILL BO 4164 SCREENS PG 100 MINUTES

**VOICES OF: Billy Connolly, Emma Thompson, Kelley MacDonald**

It was only a matter of time before Pixar released a feature centered around a woman. First they just had to make movies about a crotchety old man, a clownfish, a one-eyed monster, a rat with a penchant for cuisine, a decidedly male robot obsessed with **HELLO DOLLY!** a cowboy with a pull-string (three of those), and someone trying so hard to overcompensate that they actually *are* a Porsche. But now all of *that* is out of the way, Pixar's 13th film gives us Princess Merida, vivacious lass with deadly accuracy; she's a wicked archer beneath an explosion of wild red curls. Told on a small scale but fatally lacking the focus that such a confined story requires, the movie recounts Merida's legend, following the tumultuous

maturation of the Scottish royal who was born to be a hunter but fated to be a queen.

The opening sequence is remarkable. Things begin with a spontaneously violent flashback that recalls the pre-credits horrors of **FINDING NEMO**, soaring above the verdant hills of old-timey Scotland before landing on giddy young Merida (Kelly Macdonald). The rambunctious little girl roughhouses with her enormously strapping father (Billy Connolly), a fair and decent king whose wife, Queen Elinor (Emma Thompson) understands the royal responsibilities that await their daughter as she matures. Merida wanders off into the thick green forest to retrieve a wayward arrow when she gets distracted by a little bit of wispy magic and then, the next thing she knows, her father's leg is getting chewed off by a massive black bear. It's a lucid slice of storytelling, as elegant and evocative an introduction as one would expect from the folks who brought us **UP** and **WALL-E**. Those first few moments convey so much about Merida, her parents, and the world in which they live, that it's stupefying to see the 90 minutes that follow so thoroughly squander that foundation.





## 11/13 1 SAVAGES ACTION

\$48 MILL BO 2635 SCREENS R 131 MINUTES

**Taylor Keitsch (JOHN CARTER, BATTLESHIP, X MEN-FIRST CLASS TV's FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS)**

**Blake Lively (THE TOWN, GREEN LANTERN, HICK, THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS)**

**John Travolta (PHENOMENON, FACE-OFF, GET SHORTY, MICHAEL)**

**Benicio Del Toro (THE WOLFMAN, 21 GRAMS, SNATCH, THE USUAL SUSPECTS, THE FAN)**

**Salma Hayek (GROWN UPS, TRAFFIC, TV'S 30 ROCK, FROM DUSK TILL DAWN)**

The disreputable Oliver Stone of old makes a largely welcome reappearance with this one. Pungent, nasty and teeming with colorful crooked types, the writer-director's most vibrant (and violent) work in some time is a bracingly sordid saga of two young pot growers, the Orange County princess they love and the vicious Mexican cartel they get entangled with; imagine "Jules and Jim" with bombs and beheadings and you're halfway there. Even when it softens the impact of Don Winslow's scorching novel, this R-rated Universal release bristles with tension, and will likely enjoy a brief B.O. high that should last longer in ancillary.

Populated by wasted beauties and ruthless thugs, and shot through with moments of black humor and hair-trigger intensity, this bloody, scuzzy cocktail of a movie assuredly won't be to every taste. Something similar could be said of the Afghanistan-derived super-cannabis harvested and distributed by peace-loving, environment-friendly Ben (Aaron Johnson) and his more volatile partner, Chon (Kitsch), an ex-Navy SEAL who's not afraid to get nasty when their clients do the same.

These Laguna Beach layabouts share not only a successful business but also a lover, Ophelia, aka O (Lively), a blonde babe whose interests include shopping, smoking pot and keeping her boys happy. "For me, they are one big man," O murmurs in hazy voiceover, one of several lines that may leave the viewer unsure whether to laugh or take up.

Dan Mindel's gorgeous beachfront cinematography lends the early scenes an idyllic, dreamlike beauty that quickly fades when Ben and Chon turn down representatives of the Baja California cartel, who want to mass-market the duo's extremely potent product. Soon O is kidnapped (from the mall, natch), taken to Mexico and locked up in a grungy Mexican compound run by ball-breaking cartel queen Elena (Hayek) and her vile deputy, Lado (Del Toro). Rounding out this human circus are Lado's dapper colleague (Demian Bichir) and a dirty-dealing DEA agent (John Travolta, proudly displaying a receding hairline), both of whom, in keeping with the story's topsy-turvy moral logic, turn out to be more sympathetic than expected.

Preposterous as much of it is, the tale nonetheless generates a certain cross-cultural fascination as these narcissistic, nihilistic but highly resourceful kids find themselves down Mexico way. Indeed, the rest of the plot, propelled by shootings, stabbings and a few well-placed explosives, plays out like a contest to see which of these two warring factions can best live up to the description of the title.

Holding the screen to far more galvanizing effect is Del Toro's loathsome Lado, looking murderously unstable even when he's not shooting guys in the kneecaps. And Hayek, wearing a long Cleopatra wig, sinks her teeth into her meatiest role in some time as a formidable yet not invulnerable crime boss who has made enormous sacrifices to build authority in her domain. Keitsch and Travolta add their chops as well and help keep things very interesting so that the appeal will be very strong for all that liked **ACT OF VALOR, IMMORTALS, BATTLESHIP, HEAD HUNTERS, THE GREY, MAN ON A LEDGE, THE TOWN, and CONTRABAND.**





**11/13 2 THE WATCH COMEDY**  
\$35 MILL BO 3168 SCREENS R 102 MINUTES

**Ben Stiller (ZOOLANDER, MEET THE FOCKERS, TROPIC THUNDER, GREENBERG)**

**Jonah Hill (THE SITER, 21 JUMP STREET, SUPER BAD, MONEY BALL)**

**Vince Vaughn (THE WEDDING CRASHERS, COUPLES RETREAT, ANCHORMAN, OLD SCHOOL)**

When uptight Costco manager Evan (Stiller) finds the night watchman at his store brutally murdered, he takes matters into his own hands, forming a neighborhood watch group and soliciting membership from the townspeople. Only three people show up, boisterous Bob (Vaughn), less interested in solving crimes than in having a boys' night out, semi-psychotic Franklin (Hill), hoping to get back at the local police force for rejecting his application, and good-natured Jamarcus (Ayoade). They bond over beers (after finally convincing uptight Evan to partake) and begin staking out the Costco for any leads they can find.

Much of the laughs in the early going derive from the ridiculousness of the idea of a neighborhood watch. Both the characters (in their inferior role as law-enforcement civilians) and the actors (as comic performers) are continually upstaged by a pitch-perfect Will Forte as a local policeman who finds them to be both a perpetual annoyance and an object of fun. But there are only so many yuks to be derived as the four men's enterprise and the film, which increasingly moves into science-fiction territory with the discovery of the aliens, lacks the comic invention to keep things fresh, and so the quartet's antics soon become a bit tiresome.

Anxieties about masculinity have become a common theme lately in screen comedies and this film is no exception. Evan conceives the watch, at least partly, as an escape from his home life, where he's so humiliated by the fact that he's biologically unable to impregnate his wife that he's kept his infertility a secret from her for over a year. If shooting blanks is Evan's hang-up, then his daughter's sexuality holds a similar place in Bob's life, to the point that the man follows his teenage girl's activity on Facebook to make sure she's not screwing anyone.

But, in the end, both men are validated in their attempts to overcome their sense of emasculation. Evan may have to confess his deception to his wife, but she's not only totally understanding, she even joins the watch, whose antics move from the ridiculous to the necessary as they single-handedly stop an alien invasion, even forcing Forte's representative of legitimate law and order to praise the group's vigilante action. In light of the Trayvon Martin shooting, this seems a somewhat dubious proposition, especially given scenes in which Evan definitively asserts his manhood by firing extra rounds into the body of an already dead alien.



The laughs are there and fans of the cast and movies like **THAT'S MY BOY, THE SITER, JACK AND JILL, DAMSELS IN DISTRESS, NEW YEAR'S EVE, TOWER HEIST** and **BAD TEACHER**.



**11/13 3 THE QUEEN OF VERSAILLES**

**DRAMA/DOCUMENTARY**

**\$4 MILL BO 89 SCREENS PG 100 MINUTES**

**David Siegel, Jaqueline Siegel, Virginia Nebab (all playing themselves in this film)**

David A. Siegel is the billionaire president and CEO of Westgate Resorts, one of the biggest timeshare companies on the planet. Siegel is in the process of constructing the largest single-family home in the country: a 90,000-square-foot mansion humbly patterned after the palace of Versailles. Jacqueline Siegel is his trophy wife, a former Mrs. Florida and mother

to six of his children. From its opening scene, a lavish beauty-pageant photo-op along the Siegel home's grand staircase, this film clearly registers its subjects' greed and exhibitionism. The question that hovers over the film's rags-to-riches-to-belt-tightening narrative arc is whether their subsequent chastened honesty is ever anything but a subset of the latter. David gives interviews seated on a gilded throne, a bust of Napoleon visible in the

background, in which he claims to have been singlehandedly responsible for George W. Bush's 2000 presidential election through "extralegal means" (and that's putting it rather politely). Jackie has a penchant for enhanced cleavage-revealing ensembles and shopping sprees that require a caravan of SUVs to carry home the swag.

Despite our apparent national fascination with "lifestyle porn," evidenced by endless iterations of allegedly *Real Housewives* (or, for that matter, pretty much the entire lineup at networks like E! and Bravo), these aren't people we're immediately inclined to empathize with. Then the 2008 financial crisis hits hard, precipitated by precisely the sort of subprime mortgage bonanza peddled by Westgate's timeshare hucksters, and Lauren Greenfield's film evolves from an ode to entitled obliviousness to a more evenhanded character study, tracing the fault lines that develop within the Siegel family. The increasingly querulous paterfamilias goes into recluse mode, while Jackie and the kids get a taste of real housework (cleaning up after a menagerie of yapping, un-housebroken toy dogs) when they're forced to downsize their domestic staff. (Jackie's confession that she would never have had so many kids if she wasn't certain there'd be nannies around to look after them uncomfortably straddles the line between clueless self-pity and pitiless honesty.)



Greenfield deserves credit for allowing audiences sufficient room to empathize with the Siegels' plight while never stooping to pity them, an extremely fine line on which to balance a film. The movie is at its best when Greenfield delineates the push-pull between revelation and effacement: detailing the pep talks Siegel's son and second-in-command gives the Westgate sales staff (all about dangling the illusion of affluence in front of blue-collar noses), catching the Siegel family in candid moments that contrast vividly with earlier interview segments where they're more obviously in control, and, in a scene that literalizes the metaphor of effacement quite nicely, following Jackie into a makeover session complete with facial peel and Botox injections.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the intimate and often unkind nature of these revelations, the film's veracity hasn't gone unimpugned. Subsequent lawsuits filed on David Siegel's behalf, as well as an illuminating piece published in *The New York Times*, have questioned the legitimacy of Greenfield's editing techniques—in particular, rearrangements made to the narrative timeline in order to achieve maximum thematic weight and punch. Of course, allegations of misrepresentation are far from uncommon in the realm of documentary filmmaking; only a cinematic simpleton would take, for instance, one of Michael Moore's avowedly agitation-propagandistic films at face value with the expectation of unbiased verisimilitude. The potent cocktail of ego, power, and prospective failure, as detailed in here, presents a far thornier bed of roses. Whatever the film's ultimate truth value, it remains a compelling glimpse into the pitfalls of bankruptcy both economic and moral. Fans of **MOONRISE KINGDOM**, **THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL**, **BERNIE**, **SALMON FISHING IN THE YEMEN**, **THE DEBT**, **THE HELP**, and **BEGINNERS** will appreciate this one the most.



**11/20 1 THE EXPENDABLES 2 ACTION**  
**\$77 MILL BO 3355 SCREENS R 103 MINUTES**

**Sylvester Stallone (FIRST BLOOD, RAMBO, ROCKY, FLATBUSH AVENUE)**

**Jason Statham (SAFE, TRANSFORMERS, THE MECHANIC)**

**Dolph Lundgren ( THE KILLING MACHINE, THE EXPENDABLES, AGENT RED, DIAMOND DOGS, ROCKY IV)**

**Chuck Norris (MIA, GOOD GUYS WEAR BLACK, AN EYE FOR AN EYE, CODE OF SILENCE)**

**Jean-Claude Van Damme ( DESERT HEAT, REPLICANT, CYBORG, KICK BOXER, BLOOD SPORT)**

**Bruce Willis ( THE 6<sup>TH</sup> SENSE, NOBODY'S FOOL, LAST MAN STANDING, DIE HARD, PULP FICTION, 16 BLOCKS)**

**Arnold Schwarzenegger ( THE TERMINATOR, TWINS, TOTAL RECALL, RAW DEAL, PREDATOR)**

Redundant, bombastic and cheekily self-aware, "The Expendables 2" is also savvy enough to supply its own auto-critique. "Male-pattern badness," in the words of Bruce Willis, whose own smooth-shaven pate lends the joke an extra curl of irony. With Willis, Sylvester Stallone and roughly a dozen B-through-Z-movie icons returning for sequel duty, plus Jean-Claude Van Damme and Chuck Norris for good measure, this muscle-bound meathead extravaganza is a sometimes blissfully cretinous endeavor, delivering the maximum firepower and zero brainpower its target audience expects.

Having directed himself and his brawny ensemble with more energy than coherence in 2010's "The Expendables," Stallone turns over the helming reins to Simon West, well prepared for this gig based on his past experience shepherding burning planes ("Con Air") and Jason Statham ("The Mechanic"). On a visual level, West seems to have taken the idea of "down-and-dirty" rather too literally; from its initial blowout to its climactic slugfest, this is one ugly tank of a movie, shot in murky shades of brown, gray and yellow that suggests the actors were afflicted by an outbreak of jaundice.

As scripted by Stallone and Richard Wenk, the pic isn't much better to listen to. What it does offer, in spades, is the sort of self-referential humour that labors at every turn to make clear that the actors -- chiefly Arnold Schwarzenegger, who doesn't give a performance here so much as a recitation of "Terminator" references -- are in on the joke, the idea being that all the good-natured winking and ribbing will somehow translate into viewer enjoyment. And from time to time, with all the reliability of the gang's creaky old seaplane, it does.

After a fairly exciting 15-minute opening salvo in Nepal, ringleader Barney Ross (Stallone) and his hardened crew bid a hasty farewell to their token Chinese member, Yin Yang (Jet Li, in and out), only to inherit another, Maggie (Yu Nan), a skilled code breaker who joins them in their next mission. Alas, said mission costs them one of their best and brightest, a sensitive young sniper (Liam Hemsworth) mercilessly slain by a crime kingpin so villainous, he's actually named Vilain (Van Damme).

Clearly, it's payback time. Or at least, it will be once the pic dispenses with a few draggy character-building scenes and painful one-liners, as when Swedish meathead Gunner (Dolph Lundgren) fixes Maggie with a meaningful stare and murmurs, "I'd really die for some Chinese." This is followed by an ostensibly more chivalrous bit of male-female interaction in which Barney warns Maggie to keep her emotional distance, lest she, too, become a victim. Maggie, we're told, is good with a knife, but her weapon of choice here is the contemptuous smirk, the assumption being that the bold gesture of adding a woman to the cast precludes the need to give her anything interesting to do.



Far deadlier are newcomer Booker (Norris), a lone-ranger assassin whose dynamic entrance occasions a cheesy blast of Ennio Morricone, and Barney's trusty No. 2, Lee Christmas (Statham), who can be counted on to turn an airplane propeller into a handy decapitation device. As for the other men on the team, they all emerge from the experience with little more than scrapes and bruises, spraying their nemeses with almost as many catchphrases as bullets. "I got this!" grunts Hale Caesar (Terry Crews) right before firing off a few thousand rounds, allowing the actor to distinguish himself a bit from his virtually interchangeable co-stars Scott Adkins and Randy Couture.

In their closing bout, Stallone and Van Damme come to resemble two swinging sides of beef -- both tough, leathery and flayed almost beyond recognition, but not quite. Recognition, indeed, is the chief and perhaps sole pleasure this picture is selling: It's the ostensible thrill of seeing all these action-movie avatars trying to outmuscle each other onscreen, never mind how many lapses in logic and pointless plot contortions were necessary to bring them together in the first place.

This is highly entertaining, not to be taken seriously, but just for fun. For those that loved **SAFE, PROMETHEUS, THE HUNGER GAMES, ACT OF VALOR, HAYWIRE, UNDERWORLD 4, IMMORTALS, KILLER ELITE, and THE MECHANIC.**



## 11/27 **1** LAWLESS ACTION

\$35 MILL BO 3138 SCREENS R 116 MINUTES

**Guy Pearce (THE HURT LOCKER, MEMENTO, RULES OF ENGAGEMENT, THE KING'S SPEECH)**

**Shia LaBeouf (NEW YORK I LOVE YOU, EAGLE EYE, TRANSFORMERS, WALL STREET: THE MONEY NEVER SLEEPS)**

**Gary Oldman (THE BOOK OF ELI, RED RIDING HOOD, AIR FORCE ONE, JFK, STATE OF GRACE)**

Moonshine, machismo and rivers of gore make for a heady brew in this one. assembled Prohibition-era gangster pic, and his second American-set film after 2009's post-apocalyptic ramble *THE ROAD*.

Its 1931, two years shy of the repeal of Prohibition, and the prolific liquor production in Franklin County, Va., has earned it the sobriquet "the wettest county in the world." That's also the title of the semi-fictional 2009 source book by Matt Bondurant, chronicling the legendary exploits of his grandfather Jack and two great-uncles, Forrest and Howard.

A close-knit family after the Spanish flu epidemic killed off their parents and nearly took Forrest two years back, the three "difficult to kill" brothers run a deep-woods restaurant/feed store/gas station that serves as a front for their real business, distributing cases of hooch around the area. Bull-necked, basso-voiced middle son Forrest (Tom Hardy) is the brains of the operation, while shell-shocked, dipsomaniac war vet Howard (Jason Clarke) rides shotgun as backup muscle. As the youngest and least given to stabbing and beating people, Jack (Shia LaBeouf) is usually stuck in the role of driver or lookout, but longs to win his brothers' respect.

After years of keeping the local law safely in their pockets, the Bondurant boys find their apple-brandy cart upset when special deputy Charley Rakes (Guy Pearce) arrives in town from Chicago to crack down on the local trade. Of all the colorful characters the protean and ever-welcome Pearce has played, Rakes may be his most baroque creation yet: A fastidious dandy with a taste for dove-gray gloves, invisible eyebrows and hair ruthlessly parted and slicked back to make him look like Dagwood on steroids, Rakes is a total psychopath, particularly prone to violence when anyone needles his sore spot and dares to call him a nancy.

Early on in the proceedings, Rakes gives Jack a major ass-whupping, and the brothers vow revenge. The tit-for-tat tactical strikes between the two sides gradually escalate, doled out in regular screenwriting beats. One of the worst sees two of Rakes men slitting Forrest's throat (miraculously, he survives) and raping Maggie Beauford (Jessica Chastain), a former Chicago fan dancer who's now working as a waitress at the brothers' station in order to escape some never-specified problems up north.

This all adds up to an exciting, well-acted action film that will appeal to all that liked **SAFE, CLEANSKIN, BATTLESHIP, THE HUNTER, FREELANCERS, ACT OF VALOR** and **MAN ON A LEDGE**.

Australian helmer John Hillcoat's stylishly



**11/27 1 PARANORMAN** FAMILY ANIMATED  
\$47 MILL BO 3455 SCREENS PG 92 MINUTES

**VOICES OF: Jeff Garlin, John Goodman, Elaine Stritch**

The beautifully crafted new stop-motion film the movie opens with two important pieces of information. First, we observe our young hero as he watches a B-zombie flick, complete with choppy edits and a boom mic that creeps its way into the frame. This lets us know that the filmmakers approach the upcoming story with tongues firmly planted in cheeks. Second, Norman carries on a conversation with his grandmother. This part of the scene is only significant once we learn that grandma is quite dead.

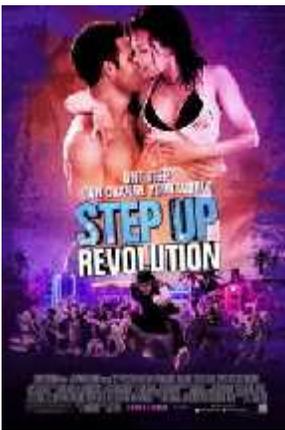
The town of Blithe Hollow, once a colonial village, now a struggling tourist trap, has lived under the threat of a witch's curse for 300 years—long enough for fear to transmogrify into camp. Norman (voiced by Kodi Smit-McPhee) can see and talk with ghosts, an ability that might make him quite popular with the dead set, but one that does little to improve his social standing with his living schoolmates... or his immediate family. Older sister Courtney (Anna Kendrick) and his parents (Leslie Mann and Jeff Garlin) have little patience for Norman's conversations with grandma (Elaine Stritch), or any of the other ghosts he interacts with, from roadkill to treed aviators. Only his uncle Mr. Prenderghast (John Goodman) believes him, and it is no coincidence that he is also the family pariah.

At school, Norman is subject to bullying from students and teachers alike, and we quickly come to care for this small, tough, sweet boy as he patiently cleans the word "freak" from his locker. Another social outcast, the rotund Neil (Tucker Albrizzi) latches on to Norman, becoming his new best friend (whether Norman wants one or not). The arrival of Neil also indicates the arrival of the true heart of this endearing film, which is its humor. The small team at the core of the story—Norman, Neil, his dense older brother Mitch (Casey Affleck), Courtney and even the local bully Alvin (Christopher Mintz-Plasse) are put together by circumstance to battle evils greater than lunchroom insults, and they prove to be a winning and very funny group of protagonists.

Zombies burst forth from the ground, ghosts shoot out of toilets like geysers, mobs cut a swath through town like Sherman through Atlanta. Norman and his team fight off sentient arms and disapproving authority figures to save everyone, living and undead alike.

PARANORMAN took two years to animate, and it shows in the exquisite craftsmanship of its design and execution. The artistic direction illustrates such a love for detail and texture that every bit of scenic design, from the town hall to a plastic bag caught in a fence, creates a perfect world for this story. Heidi Smith's character design is spot-on, and each character, whether it's the hulking Prenderghast and the stuffing bulging from his vest or Tim with his protruding ears backlit by the setting sun, is both archetypal and subtly individual. Even the zombies have distinct personalities – a detail of importance as the story unfolds.

This movie could be scary for kids under 10 because of the subject matter. Still, fans of **RIO**, **RANGO**, **MADAGASCAR 3**, **HAPPY FEET 2**, **SUPER 8**, **THE MUPPETS**, and **BIG MIRACLE** will like this one.



## 11/27 1 STEP UP REVOLUTION MUSICAL/DRAMA

\$36 MILL BO 2606 SCREENS PG-13 99 MINUTES

**Ryan Guzman (this is his first film. Has done some TV)**

**Katheryn McCormack (TV's FAME)**

A hot, street-dancing poor boy, played again by an Abercrombie & Fitch model, brings a sweet young thang into his posse, but will her classical dance training taint their street cred, and will they survive the obligatory *Three's Company*-style misunderstandings that ensue once everyone learns of her association to the Whitey Corp. that threatens their stomping ground?

After introducing us to the world wonder of Channing Tatum's pelvic thrust, the series took it to the streets, and then wondrously blew itself up in three dimensions. Something of a greatest-hits

combo, *Step Up Revolution* mixes class-consciousness with streetwiseness, giddily busting a move in 3D, but the revolution it televises between a group of Miami flash mobbers and a gentrifying hotel conglomerate pays only lip service to the culture that would be lost if a development project were allowed to replace an ostensibly impoverished strip of waterfront property where "people actually live."

The narrative follows the attempts of the chummy Mob to ingratiate themselves into the public's consciousness with a YouTube video they hope will snag an excess of 10 million viewers. They cause scenes with surprise flash mobs on city streets and inside art galleries and restaurants, subverting the pretense of Miami's luxe spaces, but it's not until they decide to get their Kony 2012 on, elevating performance art to protest art by crashing a project-determining meeting at a downtown Castle Greyskull, that their manifesto catches fire.

The film, through its spectacular dance sequences, advocates an ethos of polite remonstrance. Though the flash mobbers thumb their nose at refinement, their true enemy is the mundane, the stuffiness of the art-gallery space and the grayness of the high-end dining experience. Building off of the objects that exist within these spaces, they put a "spin on fine art," repurposing it so as to shock the complacent connoisseur. And this spirited purpose finds almost poignant expression in the crew's efforts to open the eyes of Bill Anderson (Gallagher), not only to the culture that his hotel project will destroy, but to his daughter's passion for dance. This is a fun film with spirited acting and dancing. Fans of **FOOTLOOSE**, **MAGIC MIKE**, **ROCK OF AGES**, **BIG MIRACLE**, **PROJECT X**, **JOYFUL NOISE**, **HANGOVER 2**, and **JACK AND JILL** will enjoy this as well.





**11/30 1 MEN IN BLACK 3 COMEDY/FANTASY**  
**\$181 MILL BO 4218 SCREENS PG-13 106 MINUTES**

**Will Smith (HANCOCK, THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS, I AM LEGEND, ALI, INDEPENDENCE DAY)**

**Tommy Lee Jones (THE FUGITIVE, COMPANY MAN, COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER, COBB, JFK, NATURAL BORN KILLERS)**

**Josh Brolin (AMERICAN GANGSTER, MILK, NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN, TRUE GRIT (REMAKE), W.)**

**Emma Thompson (NANCY MCPHEE RETURNS, PIRATE RADIO, AN EDUCATION, LAST CHANCE HARVEY, STRANGER THAN FICTION)**

After a prologue in which shot glass-eyed baddie Boris the Animal ("Flight of the Conchords" Jermaine Clement) is broken out of a lunar prison, Men in Black partners Agent J (Smith) and Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones) are seen back on Earth, going through the motions of brokering peace among New York City's undercover alien population and "neutralizing" eyewitnesses with sub-Bondian one-liners.

Jones is as laconic as always, though even Smith seems notably dialed down this time, with his bellows maintaining an inside-voice volume and his eyebrows rarely extending past half-arch. The conversational rhythms between the two partners have slowed, and J begins to interrogate K about his continued reticence to open up to him, even after 15 years of working together. The funereal mood then culminates in an actual funeral.

Then, just as one has begun to wonder where all this ennui and Oedipal anxiety is heading, escaped alien Boris travels back in time to 1969 -- when the young Agent K initially foiled his evil scheme, leading to Boris' imprisonment -- and kills the intergalactic lawman, with Agent J the only one who notices something is wrong in the present day. With Boris' evil brethren now angling for planet-wide invasion, J must travel back to the summer of '69 himself to protect his young partner (now played by Brolin), and put Boris down for good.

Most time-travel plots reveal holes upon later reflection, but this one is so openly nonsensical, with its own rules so arbitrarily applied, that scrutiny is a killjoy. This may rub some auds the wrong way, though "Men in Black 3" is at its best when it simply owns its own absurdity. (At one point, we learn that ruptures in the space-time continuum cause headaches, which in turn produce a powerful craving for chocolate milk.)

Now back in New York of the '60s, Smith's J serves as the straight man for some expectedly groanable time-period gags, though there are thankfully fewer of these than one might initially fear. (A trip to Andy Warhol's Factory in search of aliens is too obvious by half, though Bill Hader's turn as Warhol goes a long way toward justifying it.) Fortunately, J isn't stranded too long before running into Brolin's young Agent K, at which point the pic perks up noticeably. Brolin puts in a performance of almost eerie verisimilitude (indeed, there are brief shots where one almost suspects Jones has served as Brolin's stand-in), nailing Jones' Texas drawl and granite facial tics while subtly suggesting a childlike spirit hidden beneath. The pic never overdoes the character's youthfulness, of course; casting a 44-year-old thesp to play K at age 29 is one of its better in-jokes.

Aside from Brolin's K, the pic introduces a delightfully Vonnegutian new character in Michael Stuhlbarg's Griffin, a weirdly adorable humanlike creature who can see all possible outcomes of any given scenario. (His description of the wild combination of variables that had to line up to allow the Miracle Mets' victorious '69 season is the closest this series has ever veered toward poetry.) That this creature is forced to serve as conduit for the film's undeservedly sappy ending may cut down his overall grade, but he reps a nice addition nonetheless.

This movie is just good clean fun and very entertaining. Fans of **THAT'S MY BOY, DARK SHADOWS, BATTLE SHIP, THE HUNGER GAMES, THE FIVE YEAR ENGAGEMENT, CHRONICLE, SAFE HOUSE, WE BOUGHT A ZOO** and **MONEY BALL** will love this one too.





**11/30 2 SPARKLE MUSICAL/DRAMA**  
 \$26 MILL BO 2244 SCREENS PG-13 116 MINUTES

**Whitney Houston (THE BODY GUARD, WAITING TO EXHALE, THE PREACHER'S WIFE)**

**Jordin Sparks (AFRICAN CATS, AVALON HIGH)**

**Michael Epps (JUMPING THE BROOM, LOTTERY TICKET, THE HANGOVER, NEXT DAY AIR)**

In the last role of her abbreviated life and career, Whitney Houston plays the family matriarch in SPARKLE, portraying a woman quite contrary to the one that her tattered legacy left for fans. As

the strict, churchgoing mother of three grown girls in 1968 Detroit, Houston is assured, confident and clear-headed, showing off the natural charisma that marked the majority of her illustrious musical career. No sputtering diction, no sweaty, shaky vocals. Just a crisp shadow of the older woman she could have been.

That's the unexpected emotional draw of the film, with Houston a strong supporting player as the rigid Mama Emma. The leads are Emma's daughters (Jordin Sparks, Tika Sumpter, Carmen Ejogo), a singing trio of varying education and ambition, trying to make it as a headline act in a pop music world that, at the time, was equally embracing both Aretha Franklin and Cream. SPARKLE—named after Sparks' character—may look like a Motown music drama from a distance, but that's a melodic mirage. Director Salim Akil's (JUMPING THE BROOM) film is really a standard tale of family discord, with music as a springboard.

That works well for Sparks, who occasionally oversells her part but nails it when belting one out, and it fits Houston like a glove. In the film's first meaty conflict, oldest sibling Sister brings home a brash, rich comedian (Mike Epps) for Sunday dinner. Rudeness surfaces; insults fly. As Emma, Houston reprimands her daughter for calling out mom's past indiscretions, her drinking, her "lying in her own vomit."

And when Houston sings ... well, it's pretty fantastic, even for someone who doesn't particularly fawn over her style of music. Perhaps it's because she's in a church, where humility and gospel hit the right notes. Maybe it's because we're seeing the last of Houston's passion for song, and her talent for singing. Regardless, it's a warm, wholly unexpected highlight of *Sparkle*, inspiring respectful clapping from some audience members in the movie theater.



The larger world of *Sparkle* hits all the compulsory aspects of an entertaining, trying-to-make-it story, sometimes too predictably. Sparkle is a genius pop songwriter (yes, it's "her gift") destined for the background. Sister is the manipulative, sexy siren who knows how to work it on stage. And Dee (Sumpter) is along for the ride until it's time for medical school. The thinly drawn characterizations feel better suited for a juicy TV movie than a big feature film.

This movie will have strong appeal to all that liked **ROCK OF AGES, MAGIC MIKE, FOOTLOOSE, THE HUNGER GAMES, 21 JUMP STREET, JOYFUL NOISE, and HANGOVER 2.**