

12/4 2 BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

DRAMA \$13 MILL BO 328 SCREENS 93 MINUTES

For once, you can believe the hype. This Sundance narrative jury prize winner was surely one of the best films at 2012's (mostly mediocre) Sundance fest, and it's an added feather in the Sundance cap that the project was nurtured for over three years in the Institute's labs before filming began. That long development process could hurt this challenging but well-wrought Hurricane Katrina fable, which might have resonated with audiences more strongly on the fifth anniversary of the disaster than it will on the seventh. But this exuberant and sustained parable of renewal was always going to be driven by discerning audiences and critical response, which is sure to be ecstatic. Sane print and advertising expenditures and a modest art-house run should recoup Fox Searchlight's small (less than a million) acquisition

investment; seek this one out though, because it's too unique and too defiantly strange to survive for long in today's Darwinian and consumerist exhibition environment.

Working with a cast of well-chosen non-actors, first-time director Benh Zeitlin accomplishes a remarkable debut—energetically staged, alternately lyrical and surreal, and fueled equally by righteous anger over the destruction of the Gulf Coast and by an awestruck wonder at the tenacity of the region's peoples. *Beasts* is catastrophe as fairytale: a flood is coming to "the Bathtub" (read: the low-lying wards of New Orleans), a poor but rowdy world of makeshift housing, raunchy revelers and pagan energy, perched precariously on the wrong side of a Gulf Coast levy. Most of the residents are packing up to leave, but not African-American patriarch Wink (Dwight Henry), and not his 6-year-old daughter Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis).

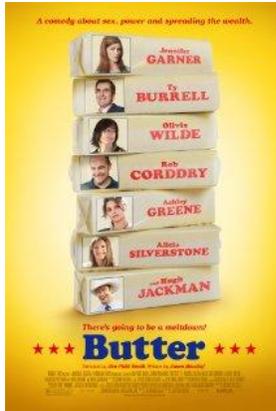
Despite Wink's failing health and Hushpuppy's youth, father and daughter ride out the storm, only to be ripped from their waterlogged home by callous government relief workers after Wink blows a hole in the levy to drain the Bathtub by flooding the more affluent communities on the other side. But Wink, Hushpuppy and the equally resilient band that survived the storm beside them aren't about to be relocated to a "safer" place—they know where they belong, and they'll die if they must to return there.



The folktale microcosm allows Zeitlin and co-writer Lucy Alibar a wide latitude in creating a Katrina zone with a mythic visual force powerful enough to suggest the unimaginable scale of the 2005 disaster. The Bathtub's residents are society's cast-offs, and they live in a world fashioned from debris—houses that are equal parts mobile home and industrial discards, boats made of repurposed pick-up truck beds. When the storm hits with missile-like force, Wink reacts by climbing onto his patchwork roof and shooting back at it—a mad and exhilarating image of individual defiance against impossible and inhuman force.

In remaking one of the most destructive natural disasters in American history into a bildungsroman of resurrection and rebirth, Zeitlin makes the point that the life force he sees everywhere in the disaster region is stronger and more persevering than anything God or man can throw at it. Despite the tragedy that inspired it, the movie is ultimately not a requiem but a celebration—a survival tale, told in the leering, hallucinatory colors of a garish Mardi Gras float. Weird, resonant and moving, it honors the Gulf Coast in the most appropriate way possible: by inventing a ferocious cinematic patois that, as the storm rises, rages right back.

Fans of **CROOKED ARROWS**, **MOONRISE KINGDOM**, **SEEKING A FRIEND FOR THE END OF THE WORLD**, **START UP-REVOLUTION**, **SUPER 9**, **CHRONICLE** and **MAGIC OF BELLE ISLE** will all find lots to like with this one.



12/4 3 BUTTER COMEDY
\$1 MILL 120 SCREENS R 90 MINUTES

Jennifer Garner (13 GOING ON 30, JUNO, CATCH AND RELEASE, DAREDEVIL, FELICITY)
Ty Burrell (TV's MODERN FAMILY, GOATS, THE INCREDIBLE HULK, DAWN OF THE DEAD)

The story is relatively simple: Jennifer Garner plays Laura Pickler, a disturbingly determined woman bent on securing her husband's 15-year streak as winner of the Iowa State Fair butter-carving championship after he's asked to retire. Her maniacal desire to succeed is complicated when a 10-year-old black orphan too appropriately named Destiny (Yara Shahidi), a prodigious butter carver, decides to enter the contest as well.



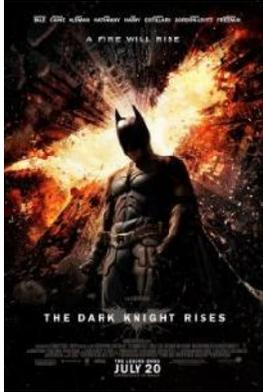
Directed by Jim Field Smith and written by Jason Micallef at the height of the 2008 U.S. presidential race, it's obvious to see the allusions to the once strong national fascination with Sarah Palin and the "messiah-like" rise of Barack Obama. In this case, Obama comes in the form of a little black girl with a heart of gold, taken in by a foster couple she describes as the "whitest people ever" (the appropriately cast Rob Corddry and Alicia Silverstone). She has striking looks, masterful oratory skills, a dignified and graceful bearing that's a little disconcerting on someone so young. Garner, on the other hand, gnaws on the scenery as an impeccably dressed housewife who's genial and God-fearing and says things like "Screw that little Afro-girl" and "I'm sorry I was born white and tall and pretty" without even a hint of irony.



It's the movie's unwillingness to deal with the sometimes hilarious and often problematic things its characters say and do that also stands as one of its ultimate failings. Race, as much as politics, forms a constant hum just beneath the visual din of bizarre butter sculptures based on *Schindler's List* and *The Passion of the Christ*

The film doesn't know if it wants to be a darkly humorous social commentary or a heartwarming tale of hard work and the triumph of the human spirit. Ultimately, what seems to be an attempt to expose the absurdity of politics through the absurdity of butter carving. This makes it work as a good political satire with a cast that seems to understand their roles.

Fans of **YOUR SISTER'S SISTER, THE BEST EXOTIC HOTEL, BLUE LIKE JAZZ, BERNIE, FRIENDS WITH KIDS, RAMPART, and LIKE CRAZY** will all enjoy this one.



12/4 1 THE DARK KNIGHT RISES ACTION
\$445 MILL BO 4404 SCREENS PG-13 165 MINUTES

Christian Bale (3;10 TO YUMA, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, THE FIGHTER, I'M NOT THERE)

Michael Caine (HARRY BROWN, GET CARTER, HANNAH AND HER SISTERS, BLAME IT ON RIO, CALIFORNIA SUITE, BEWITCHED)

Anne Hathaway (LOVE AND OTHER DRUGS, BRIDE WARS, BROKE BACK MOUNTAIN, THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA)

At two hours and 44 minutes, **THE DARK KNIGHT RISES** is way too long ... and way too short. Welcome to the temporal paradox that is the third, final and a bit overladen entry of Christopher Nolan's tripartite take on the caped crusader.

BATMAN BEGINS, Nolan's 2005 reboot of DC Comics' second-most popular superhero reinvested the character and franchise with a dignity not seen since Joel Schumacher led it into a garish, neon-bedecked back alley in the 1990s and emerged later, alone. Turbocharged by Heath Ledger's Oscar-winning turn as the Joker, Nolan's 2008 follow-up achieved escape velocity—*The Dark Knight* forced many critics to redraw the line between comic book and "serious" films. (Audiences were content with just enjoying the movie.)

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES also matches its predecessor in the quality and intensity of its action set pieces. As Bat-cycles, Bat-planes and assorted non-Bat vehicles careen about and occasionally crash within the claustrophobic confines of Gotham City, Nolan's command over every participant—man and machine—reminds the viewer the extent to which the skills of a good director overlap those of a good choreographer.

And then, especially when it comes to science fiction-and fantasy-based films, there's that most mistreated of dramatic conceits—suspension of disbelief. For some reason, script writers and directors the world over seem to think the suspension of disbelief required to accept a world with superheroes (or wizards, or aliens ...) stretches farther than that normal stuff used with family dramas, legal thrillers and plays by Oscar Wilde.

A brief recap. Batman is retired; a recluse alone at home with only Alfred (Michael Caine) for company, hobbling around on his stick, out of the game. He's been blamed for the death of Harvey Dent (now acclaimed as the hero of Gotham City), and is mourning the loss of his lover. Elsewhere, rookie cop John Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is patrolling the streets; Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway) is operating as a highly skilled cat burglar; Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman) is still running Wayne Enterprises; Commissioner Gordon (Gary Oldman) has suppressed his knowledge of what really happened with Harvey Dent, and there's a new woman in town, Miranda Tate (Marion Cotillard) who has been helping finance plans for a clean source of energy. You see what I mean about too much narrative, as well as too many characters.

The opening sequence of the film sees Bane (Tom Hardy) being rescued from an aeroplane, in a piece of bravado film-making, whereupon he proceeds to recruit an army of thugs who create chaos in the city. It is up to Batman to come to the rescue of the citizenry, assuming he can cope with the unstoppable brute force that is Bane, as well as treachery from unexpected places. And from then on in, it's nearly three hours of shooting, fighting, high speed chases, stuff being blown up, and a veneer of deeper meaning, which slightly escaped me. Something to do with loyalty and duty, I think. There's some kind of contemporary relevance suggested by Bane and his goons taking down Wall Street, which some commentators have suggested is a negative reflection on the Occupy movement. I think that is somewhat fanciful. Bankers and stockbrokers are always a popular target.

Comparisons with Heath Ledger and **THE DARK KNIGHT** are inevitable. The notion of a villain being the dark half of the hero is not new, but it is a powerful one, and when done well, as it was in that film, it works. Ledger's Joker was an appealing as well as an appalling character; he was fun to be around with



his manic glee at the mayhem he caused. Tom Hardy's Bane is a lump, and it's impossible to tell if he's enjoying himself since no facial expressions are visible.

I imagine you and most people you know will go and see this film, and why not? It's got a lot going for it. But if I can caution you to moderate your expectations, I may be doing you a favour. It's not as delightfully wicked as its predecessor, and although the trilogy is now completed, it does look as though there may be more films coming down the line, judging by an ending that leaves its options open.

Fans of **THE AVENGERS**, **LORAX**, **BATTLESHIP**, **THE HUNGER GAMES**, **SAFE HOUSE**, **THE WATCH**, **MEN IN BLACK 3** and **PROMETHEUS** will be thrilled with this film too.



12/4 1 HOPE SPRINGS DRAMEDY \$64 MILL BO
2411 SCREENS PG-13 100 MINUTES

Meryl Streep (SOPHIE'S CHOICE, KRAMER VS. KRAMER, THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA)

Tommy Lee Jones (COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER, THE FUGITIVE, COBB, MEN IN BLACK, UNDER SEIGE)

Steve Carell (THE 40 YEAR OLD VIRGIN, DATE NIGHT, DINNER FOR SCHMUCKS, LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE)

HOPE SPRINGS is an altogether pleasant surprise: a mainstream dramedy that frankly and intelligently addresses the challenges facing a couple after 31 years of marriage. At once entirely accessible and quietly radical in its intimacy and directness, helmer David Frankel's latest picture to weigh the comforts and dissatisfactions of domestic life wisely lets Meryl Streep and Tommy Lee Jones carry a simple but deeply felt story like the pros they are. After more than three decades as husband and wife, Arnold (Jones) and Kay (Streep) have settled into a stultifying routine.

Their kids have grown up and moved out. Conversation is rare, sex non-existent; it's been years since they've even slept in the same bed, a situation Kay awkwardly attempts to rectify in the film's opening scene. Determined to break out of their rut, Kay manages, with great difficulty, to persuade her perpetually grumpy, uncommunicative hubby to join her on a retreat to the coastal Maine town of Great Hope Springs, where she's scheduled a week's worth of sessions with a renowned marriage expert.

Polite, soft-spoken but maddeningly insistent, Dr. Feld (Steve Carell) subjects the couple to round after round of increasingly blunt, probing questions -- many of them variations on, "How did you feel about that?" -- to which they respond with considerable unease and, in Arnold's case, extreme negativity and resistance. While the appearance of Carell might have signalled an incipient shift into broad-comedy terrain, the actor's impeccably measured turn is perfectly in line with the sense of composure and seriousness that governs the whole enterprise, at times lending it the feel of a chamber drama with an overlay of laughs.

In a series of expertly paced, written and acted scenes replete with humor, tension and clenched emotion, Kay and Arnold gradually open up to Dr. Feld and each other, describing their troubles with intimacy, their sexual proclivities and hang-ups, and the waning of their desires with the onset of old age. These moments are handled sensitively enough that the viewer can share the characters' discomfort and still be amused by it, and Frankel has the decency not to further embarrass characters already well outside their comfort zone.



Though the film finds its way to a sweet, hard-won conclusion, its key achievement is its engagement with the mechanics of therapy, the indignities of the aging process, and the characters' desperate, fumbling attempts to recover something that may be irretrievably lost -- scarcely the most fashionable or marketable movie topics, yet scrutinized here at length and without apology.

Fans of **MAGIC MIKE**, **BRAVE**, **MEN IN BLACK 3**, **BERNIE**, **THE VOW**, **MONEY BALL**, **THE GUARD**, **FRIENDS WITH KIDS**, and **COMPANY MEN**.



12/4 1 THE ODD LIFE OF TIMOTHY GREEN
DRAMA \$51 MILL BO 2717 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES

Joel Edgerton (WISH YOU WERE HERE, WARRIOR, THE THING (remake))
Jennifer Garner (JUNO, VALENTINE'S DAY, GHOSTS OF GIRLFREINDS PAST, THE INVENTION OF LYING, CATCH AND RELEASE)

This movie is an odd, at-times moving meditation on parenthood—the desire to be a parent and the challenges of being one—wrapped in a fairy tale with creepy side-effects. Kid-friendly but not for kids, writer-director Peter Hedges' family fantasy drama is sentimental and slickly produced.

Jim (Edgerton) and Cindy (Garner) Green want nothing more than to have a child but have exhausted all their options for conceiving one of their own. Adoption is an alternative, of course—the entire film is set up as backstory to their interview at an agency—but for now they're grieving, and, in a touching scene, they spend an evening fantasizing about what their kid would have been like. At the end of an emotional night, they gather up the dreams they've scribbled on notebook paper, lay them in a wooden box and bury them in the garden.



Then, in the middle of a drought, a storm rolls through, and Timothy (CJ Adams, utterly delightful and a brilliant bit of parent-child casting) bursts forth—a 10-year-old boy of their very own. With leaves sprouting from his legs. (These growths are kind of icky, actually, but they serve a role in the magical aspect of the story.) Jim and Cindy have made a wish, and in stories like these—**BIG** and **FREAKY FRIDAY** and Garner's own **13 GOING ON 30** come to mind—things go back to normal once the wisher realizes the vanity of his or her wish and learns a valuable lesson. Except here, the Greens' wish is not vain, and they don't necessarily have a valuable lesson to learn.

Meanwhile, running in the background is a story line about a town struggling with the imminent closure of its pencil factory. Why the factory has to close isn't made clear, nor is how a Timothy-inspired innovation would save it. And Timothy falls for an older girl named Joni (Odeya Rush, in her first feature part) in a development that serves the parenting plot but misses an opportunity to explore the toll of Timothy's role on the boy himself.

Perhaps that's asking too much. *Timothy Green* is a well-done, earnestly feel-good end-of-summer movie. But it doesn't dig deep and as a result is as scattered and fleeting as leaves blowing in the fall wind. Fans of **MADAGASCAR 3**, **THAT'S MY BOY**, **BRAVE**, **THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN**, **RIO**, **UP** and **SUPER 8** will find lots to like here.



12/11 1 ICE AGE: CONTINENTAL DRIFT

ANIMATED/FAMILY

\$160 MILL BO 3886 SCREENS PG 88 MINUTES

Voices of: Denis Leary, Ray Romano, Jennifer Lopez and Queen Latifah

Carried over from the previous installments is the trio of protagonists, surrounded by a gaggle of obnoxious, archaic racial caricatures. Their landscape is 95% rollercoaster; six Six Flags theme parks put together would scarcely be sufficient to accommodate such wonders. The guys travel hither and yon, making smart-aleck remarks to us along the way.

There's a running joke (well, not really a "running joke" as much as "a thing in the script that gets mentioned more than once") about Sid's Granny's invisible friend, whom she calls Precious. The characters assume the grandma sloth is touched in the head.

The only thing that matters here is that the kids will love it, it's harmless, colorful and fun. Fans of **RIO, HUGO, RANGO, KUNG FU PANDA, THE SMURFS, HAPPY FEET 2, CARS 2** and **PUSS N BOOTS** will like it a lot.



12/11 1 TED COMEDY

\$219 MILL 3303 SCREENS R 106 MINUTES

Mark Wahlberg (CONTRABAND, THE FIGHTER, BOOGIE NIGHTS, THE DEPARTED, DATE NIGHT)

Mila Kunis (DATE NIGHT, FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, BLACK SWAN, THE BOOK OF ELI)

Seth McFarlane (TV'S FAMILY GUY, AMERICAN DAD, THE CLEVELAND SHOW)

It all begins with a Christmas wish made in 1985, a tongue-in-cheek miracle relayed by narrator Patrick Stewart. Desperate for a playmate, a lonely Boston kid named John (Bretton Manley) asks the stars to bring his stuffed animal to life. The boy and his bear become best friends, pledging always to be there for one another, and Ted holds up his end of the bargain, even as the novelty of a talking toy turns Ted into something of an overnight celebrity on roughly the level of a C-list child star. Flash forward to the present. John has grown up to be Wahlberg, and Ted is starting to look a bit threadbare. As personalities go, John is stuck in manchild mode, barely responsible enough to hold down his job at a rental-car company, much less propose to Lori (Kunis), his impossibly patient g.f. of four years. Meanwhile, Ted has advanced to a dark place, his happiness now dependent on hookers and drugs, though his raunchy antics are rendered more hilarious than horrifying by MacFarlane's incompatibly deep voiceover.

As with Puff the Magic Dragon, it's time that John retired his childhood plaything and moved on with his life. The same story could be told with a boorish, John Belushi-like roommate in Ted's place, only then, MacFarlane couldn't get away with half the jokes, which seem more outrageous when coming from a stuffed animal.

It must be said, Ted is one ugly bear -- the poor man's Teddy Ruxpin. Just imagine the countless design meetings that must have gone into deciding the style for a stuffed animal that appears roughly the size of a human 6-year-old while also looking paunchy enough to be pushing 40. That must surely have been followed by still more meetings to determine Ted's abilities, expressivity and weight (those foley punches sound like he's stuffed with flour), all of which translate to a visually bland, occasionally disembodied anthropomorphic teddy, with the character animation the weak link in an otherwise polished production.



However badly adjusted John may be, he's no match for those who were denied their ideal toys as kids. That's an entirely different class of malcontents, represented here by Giovanni Ribisi, intense as ever as a jealous single dad determined to steal Ted to amuse his tubby son (Aedin Mincks).

Besides, it's relatively easy to offend. The real cleverness comes in "Ted's" more abstract bursts of inspiration, including self-deprecating cameos by singer Norah Jones and "Flash Gordon" star Sam J. Jones (no relation). Nearly every pop-culture gag in the film -- and there are many -- comes with a built-in explanation, lest the references escape a broader audience than the target pothead-and-frat-boy crowd.

And yet, by waiting this long to make his feature debut, MacFarlane was able to establish a reputation solid enough to inspire confidence from Universal and attract a cast of this caliber. Few stars can adapt to the needs of comedy, drama and action as well as Wahlberg, who gets to do a little of each as the pic's naive straight man, while delivering a few sly in-jokes -- from dropping his pants to singing a nearly-forgotten '80s hit -- that poke fun at his Marky Mark origins.

MacFarlane deftly manages the various styles, too, though sincerity seems to be just beyond his ironic grasp. Clearly, it's easier for him to write a sarcastic narrator than a sentimental finale, and though "Ted" tries to get emotional in the end, the resolution rings hollow, if only because the "Velveteen Rabbit" formula doesn't leave room for dick jokes.

Fans of films as varied as **MAGIC MIKE, PROMETHEUS, THAT'S MY BOY, MEN IN BLACK 3, BERNIE, AMERICAN REUNION, THE DICTATOR, THE VOW, THE GUARD,** and **MONEYBALL** will love it all over again.



12/11 1 THE BOURNE LEGACY ACTION
\$113 MILL BO 3753 SCREENS PG-13 135 MINUTES

Jeremy Renner (THOR, THE AVENGERS, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 4, THE HURT LOCKER, THE BOUNTY HUNTER)

Rachel Weisz (THE CONSTANT GARDENER, THE BROTHERS BLOOM, THE MUMMY)

Edward Norton (PRIME SUSPECT, FIGHT CLUB, DEATH TO SMOOCHY, KEEPING THE FAITH, LEAVES OF GRASS)

Jason Bourne is nowhere to be found in here. Instead, the villains' storyline continues as ruthless government agencies try to decommission an entire line of Bourne-like super-soldiers, but fail to eliminate one: Aaron Cross. (Renner). He belongs to a companion program, Outcome, similar to Bourne's Treadstone, except that its genetically modified operatives are controlled by means of two pills: The blue capsules boost brain functioning, while the green ones improve their physical performance. When the supply runs out, the agents regress to their unmodified state, a prospect unappealing enough that Cross, trained to assassinate at the CIA's whim, will kill to continue his dosage.

To get more drugs, Cross must locate Dr. Marta Shearing (Weisz), who barely survived a brutal workplace shooting in a scene that would be disturbing enough without Aurora, Colo., still fresh in the mind. Theatrical line readings aside, Shearing behaves realistically under pressure, fighting off panic while Cross tries to protect her until the very end, when the film gives her a chance to assert her own survival instinct.

Renner features throughout the first act, but his hazy character has been dispatched to remote Alaska on an ambiguous training exercise. While Cross slogs through the snow, Norton's cold-blooded power broker, Eric Byer, cleans up the mess exposed by Bourne, whose one-man vendetta compromised not only not only Treadstone but Outcome as well.

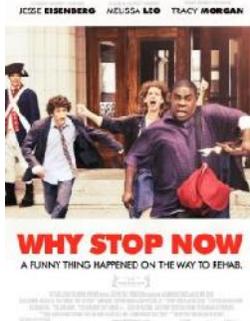
In **THE BOURNE IDENTITY** the hero's amnesia mirrored that pic's way of dispensing information, effectively putting auds in Bourne's shoes. Repeated on a character with a functioning memory, the approach feels like a tease, as Gilroy's script (co-written with brother Dan) not only withholds crucial exposition, but wrongfully assumes that auds will automatically care about Bourne's replacement.



An around-the-world montage introduces the program's five other agents, whose mix of races and genders might have been intriguing, had Byer not succeeded in snuffing them out so quickly. These assassins typically work alone, which makes for a tense meeting when Cross encounters his first fellow Outcome agent (Oscar Isaac).

Unlike Bourne, Cross knows what he is and can fairly deduce who might be trying to kill him, but his top priority is finding a way to "viral out," relying on Shearing to administer the serum that will make his enhancements permanent. To do so, they must travel to Manila, where "The Bourne Legacy" finally decides to become a Bourne movie, clumsily trying to squeeze as much action into the final reel as possible. If the filmmakers hope to carry on with Cross, they will have to rethink what auds expect from the character, offering more confrontation and less conspiracy.

All fans of **SAVAGES, LAWLESS, RED LIGHTS, SAFE, BATTLESHIP, THE HUNTER, LOCKOUT, KILLER ELITE, THE MECHANIC,** and **TRANSPORTERS** will love this movie.



12/11 3 WHY STOP NOW COMEDY
\$1 MILL BO 92 SCREENS R 85 MINUTES

Jesse Eisenberg (THE SOCIAL NETWORK, 30 MINUTES OR LESS, TO ROME WITH LOVE, ZOMBIE LAND)
Tracy Morgan (TV's 30 ROCK, DEATH AT A FUNERAL, COP OUT, HALF BAKED)

Shifting between wacky situation comedy and somber familial drama, this movie, isn't invested enough in either mode to convincingly pull off its genre-hopping ambitions. Starring Jesse Eisenberg as piano wunderkind Eli Bloom, preparing for his big audition while trying to take care of his junkie mother and pre-teen sister, Philip Dorling and Ron Nyswaner's film follows the young man over the course of a very busy day. By the time the sun sets, Eli will have tried unsuccessfully to check his mom into rehab, turned inadvertent drug dealer, dealt with his sister's behavioral problems, won the girl of his dreams, attended two piano tryouts, and come to terms with

So, we may raise an eyebrow when Eli brings his mother, Penny (Melissa Leo), to the rehab clinic and they tell her that they can't take her in because her urine is clean and she needs to go out and cop before she can be admitted. And we may shake our heads when Eli meets Penny's dealer, Sprinkles (Tracy Morgan), and his brother, Black (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), and learns that neither can communicate with their drug connection because they don't speak Spanish, causing our young Spanish-speaking hero to step in and broker a coke and heroin deal. But such are the setups for the film's comic antics, as Eli attempts to put everything right and ends up in a bunch of ludicrous situations. More bothersome than the implausibility of the precipitating events is the lack of imagination of the payoffs.



Still, the comic events at least provide a few pleasantries, mostly thanks to Morgan's amusing mugging and Whitlock's studied befuddlement. By the time the film reverts to dramatic mode, Dorling and Nyswaner have rather seriously misjudged our level of involvement with the characters. Sprinkles delivers life lessons over tequila shots, mother and son have a heart to heart, Eli makes a confession of his love to his gal pal.

There are some nice moments here to be sure. The cast is appealing and will help the movie reach those that liked **THE WATCH, DAMSELS IN DISTRESS, THINK LIKE A MAN, GOD BLESS AMERICA, THIS MEANS WAR** and **THE SITTER**.



12/18 3 10 YEARS COMEDY
 \$1 MILL BO 128 SCREENS PG-13 100 MINUTES

Channing Tatum (THE VOW, 21 JUMP STREET, MAGIC MIKE, THE EAGLE, HAYWIRE)
Rosario Dawson (ZOOKEEPER, SEVEN POUNDS, UNSTOPPABLE, KILLSHOT)

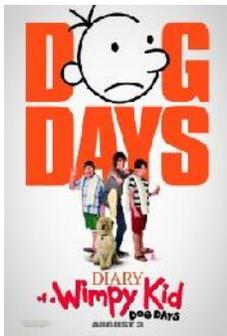
10 YEARS bears many of the hallmarks of your standard reunion movie. Tatum plays Jake, the high-school stud nervous about seeing his first love Mary (Dawson) again, despite the fact that he's ready to propose to Jess (Tatum's real-life wife and *Step Up* costar, Jenna Dewan-Tatum). Marty (Justin Long) breezes in from New York City, but his Wall Street lifestyle may not be all that he claims. AJ (Max Minghella) reprises his not-so-friendly competition with Marty for the attention of party girl, Anna (Lynn Collins).

Meanwhile, Reeves (Oscar Isaac) is a bona fide rock star now shyly making his move on his high-school crush, Elise (Kate Mara). Cully (Chris Pratt) is on a mission to apologize to all the classmates he bullied; his one-time-cheerleader wife Sam (Ari Graynor) watches on in horror as he reverts to his douchebag ways. And Garrity (Brian Geraghty) has changed in a manner that surprises both his classmates and his wife, Olivia (Aubrey Plaza).

The concept isn't especially original, and the answer to the central mystery—what happened between Jake and Mary?—is a bit anticlimactic. But the movie does speak to a universal experience and is well enough executed to satisfy the date-night crowd—a modest yet respectable first chapter of Channing's producing career.



Fans of **YOUR SISTER'S SISTER, 2 DAYS IN NEW YORK, TAKE THIS WALTZ, FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY, LOLA VS., THE LUCKY ONE, FRIENDS WITH KIDS,** and **THE GUARD** will like this one too.



12/18 1 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: DOG DAYS
 \$49 MILL BO 3401 SCREENS PG 94 MINUTES

Zachary Gordon (DIARY OF A WIMPY KID, NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS, THE BROTHERS BLOOM)
Steve Zahn (SUNSHINE CLEANING, A PERFECT GETAWAY, RESCUE DAWN, EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH)

This is aimed squarely at the pre-teen set, the third film based on Jeff Kinney's series of young-adult novels, is conspicuously devoid of any sops to the adults in the audience. Its story of titular tween Greg Heffley (Gordon) trying to overcome obstacles, parental and otherwise, to the enjoyment of his summer vacation is strictly for the kiddies. It's a harmless enough exercise, though by this late date in the franchise, Heffley seems not so much wimpy as squirmy and almost maliciously devious, and as such the film shapes up into a morality tale about taking responsibility for your actions as a sign of impending maturity, no matter how irresponsible those actions are and no matter how perfunctory the self-awareness may be.

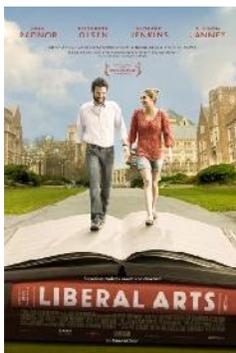


Opening on the final day of the seventh grade, the film begins with its hero expectantly enthused, fantasizing about a summer spent entirely in front of the television playing video games, with maybe some breaks to make time with his love interest, Holly (Peyton List). Too bad his father, Frank (Zahn), has other ideas. Mostly in an attempt at keeping up with the Joneses' (or, at least, the "perfect" family next door), this suburban dad (and, in an odd touch, Howard Zinn reader) insists his son take up outdoor activities, whether it's playing sports with friends or joining a Boy Scouts-like organization. The father's inability to connect with his boy is presented as an instance of undue parental control: Ignoring the kid's own interests, Frank tries to make his boy engage in his own.

Under these circumstances, Greg's deceptions seem almost understandable, even if they keep blowing up in his face. When his best friend takes him to his country club where Holly also belongs, Greg decides to spend every day there, lying to his father that he got a job at that establishment. After a falling out with his friend prevents him from entering the club as an official guest, Greg keeps sneaking back in to flirt awkwardly with Holly and (unknowingly) run up a huge smoothie bill on his friend's family's tab.

When Greg first visits the country club, he's warned that the pool is unusually crowded on that particular day, only to take a look for himself and see that "crowded" in this context means about five people. Thus the country club represents, at least initially, an idyllic retreat from the overstuffed public arena, but even this place has its lurking dangers. Similarly, Greg's continued access to the club, based on the staff's familiarity with his appearance from his time as a legitimate guest, becomes increasingly tenuous, and the film proceeds with a certain looming inevitability, as we queasily await the moment when all will be revealed and Greg is exposed as a phony.

The story will attract all that liked **BRAVE, MEN IN BLACK 3, HUGO, MAGIC OF BELLE ISLE, DARLING COMPANION, SUPER 8,** and **HOP.**



12/18 3 LIBERAL ARTS COMEDY
\$1 MILL BO 120 SCREENS PG-13 97 MINUTES

JOSH RADNOR (happythankyoumoreplease, NOT ANOTHER TEEN MOVIE, TV's HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER)
ZAC EFRON (THE LUCKY ONE, 17 AGAIN, CHARLIE ST. CLOUD, HAIRSPRAY)
ELIZABETH OLSON (RED LIGHTS, PEACE LOVE AND MISUNDERSTANDING)

LIBERAL ARTS is Josh Radnor's second film as a writer and director, and like his debut, **happythankyoumoreplease**, This movie deals with man-children refusing to become men, be it in their love life or with their job, and the women surrounding them trying to deal with similar issues. Radnor plays Jesse, a 35-year-old college admissions advisor in New York who heads back to his old college campus in Ohio to celebrate the retirement of one of his old professors, Peter Hoberg (An excellent but underused Richard Jenkins), and meets young Zibby (Elizabeth Olsen), a 19-year-old with exactly the same likes as him.

Despite the distance between the two, they write (actual letters as indie films need that quirk), and discuss life, love, and classical music. In a cracking gesture towards modern indie dramas, Jesse is given a mix CD of classical compositions, and utters the line "I don't have to listen to obscure indie bands all of the time", or something to that degree. Knowing where the American independent drama landscape is, Liberal Arts welcomes the clichés, in the characters who are quirky and oddball, with a touch of pretention, and the plots, characters learning about themselves through relationships with others and ultimately growing. But Liberal Arts dons these elements with a great deal of smart, witty humor, and a strong element of beauty, particularly in a classical-music set montage in New York.

Elizabeth Olsen's Zibby is one of the film's crowning achievements, a whip-smart, light and charming presence, she manages to play the 19-year-old with such maturity that comes crashing down as the kid in her comes through in the final act, without ever being painfully immature and sudden in the transition in character. A sublime performance from an already stunning actress.



Zac Efron pops up as Nat, a possibly imaginative hippie-student type on the campus doling out advice to Radnor on life and love over a few scenes, being the catalyst for his relationship with Zibby and his change in life as a whole, and Allison Janney's cold hearted English Lit professor is small but perfect for her, with a lot of moments of pure disdain and hatred for the world coming through.

LIBERAL ARTS is sweet, honest and witty as hell, a great take on a coming of age flick through the eyes of a mid-30's man. It may be a subjective film, but there's a lot to love, from Radnor's matured, beautiful direction, to his wonderful script and Elizabeth Olsen's performance is just sublime. It has some ragged edges and could do with maybe a bit of a trim, but it is more than worth your time, and certainly a step up from the alright, but ultimately unsatisfying and recycled **happythankyoumoreplease**. Josh Radnor found his voice, and used it well

Fans of **SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED, THE BEST EXOTIC HOTEL, BERNIE, MARGARET, BEING FLYN, WAR HORSE, LIKE CRAZY** and **WE BOUGHT A ZOO** will all like this one too.



12/18 3 SLEEPWALK WITH ME COMEDY
\$3 MILL BO 135 SCREENS NR 90 MINUTES

Lauren Ambrose (TV's SIX FEET UNDER, LAW AND ORDER, PARTY OF FIVE)

James Rebhorn (TV's HOMELAND, BLUE BLOODS, WHITE COLLAR, 30 ROCK, ROYAL PAINS)



For a time, this movie plays like an echo chamber of thirty something male malaise, its arrested-development tropes and bromides bouncing around infernally. As the camera tags along with writer-director-star Mike Birbiglia, who, via the frequent use of direct address, recaps the largely autobiographical tale of his on-screen self, Matt Pandamiglio, interest steadily drifts away from Matt and toward his girlfriend, Abby (Lauren Ambrose), who actually has unique interests, dreams, and inner life worth exploring. The movie makes you think, "Why aren't there more films about women in post-20s funks?" But as the story gradually plays its hand, it thankfully reveals itself to be more than more of the same, and Birbiglia, a harmless semi-oaf whose trendy, monotonous shtick riffs on Cookie Monster and THE A-TEAM, proves to be more than just the Gen-Y Ellen Degeneres.

An expansion of Birbiglia's celebrated one-man show, which sold out Manhattan's Bleecker Street Theatre for eight months in 2008, **SLEEPWALK WITH ME** has more apparent truths to tell about the life of a stand-up comic than anything in Judd Apatow's **FUNNY PEOPLE**. That the film pulls back a curtain

on a trade is one of its saving graces, and though they're certainly molded to fit a script formula, none of the work details are ever made to appear glamorous. "I went from wanting to be famous doing stand-up, to making a living doing stand-up, to picking up 20 dollars in the street," a bit player says early on. As for Matt, he may be lazy, but he's realistically suffering for his art, initially tending bar at the only venue that'll let him hit the stage, then schlepping it to truly pitiful, far-off gigs, unable to say no to a third-rate female agent who calls to mind the chain-smoking broad Joey Tribbiani confided in on *Friends*. Anyone who's accepted less than what they're worth in the name of passion will instantly empathize with Matt, whose road trips teach him to add more real-life anecdotes to his act, while exposing him to the vicious ire of comedy patrons who don't get the laughs they paid for.



The movie's secret weapon and elephant in the room is REM sleep behavior disorder, a condition from which the real-life Birbiglia and his filmic persona suffer, and a conflict that's observed peripherally until it becomes the ultimate focus. The disorder, which trumps sleepwalking in that the sleeper physically interacts with his dream environment, can be tricky when it comes to safety and relationships, as sufferers can very realistically kill themselves or others. The way the movie utilizes this perfectly idiosyncratic element, delaying its impact and then humbly respecting its darkly funny menace, allows for all sorts of incidental benefits, including startling dream sequences that enhance the film's aesthetic, and a built-in metaphor for Matt's life-consuming lethargy. Co-developed by NPR's Ira Glass from a THIS AMERICAN LIFE segment detailing Birbiglia's act, the film is the first of many being spawned from episodes of Glass's show, which has grown its own film production arm.

An offbeat film for sure, but for folks that liked **YOUR SISTER'S SISTER**, **DETACHMENT**, **MOONRISE KINGDOM**, **MAGIC MIKE**, **SAFETY NOT GURANTEED**, **BEING FLYNN**, **RAMPART**, and **THE IRON LADY**, there will be lots to like here.



12/18 1 TOTAL RECALL (REMAKE)

SCI/FI/THRILLER

\$59 MILL BO 3601 SCREENS PG-13 118 MINUTES

Colin Farrell (IN BURGESS, HORRIBLE BOSSES, PHONE BOOT, HART'S WAR, CRAZY HEART)

Kate Beckinsale (UNDERWORLD, SERENDIPITY, SNOW ANGELS, CLICK, FRAGMENTS, PEARL HARBOR)

Jessica Biel (VALENTINE'S DAY, THE A- TEAM, NEW YEAR'S EVE, PLANET 51, POWDER BLUE)

Bryan Cranston (ROCK OF AGES, TV's 30 ROCK, ARCHER, THE SIMPSONS)

Kurt Wimmer and Mark Bomback's screenplay arrives bearing the weight of multiple story credits, citing the first pic's scribes as well as Philip K. Dick, whose short story "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" initially inspired this futuristic tale of a brainwashed secret agent trying to figure out who he is and which side he's fighting on. That would be Douglas Quaid (Farrell), introduced awakening from an all-too-vivid nightmare, a remnant from a past he's been forced to forget.

Chemical warfare has left the Earth uninhabitable except for the Colony (formerly known as Australia), where Quaid lives, and a cluster of European nations called the United Federation of Britain. The relationship between these two continents is fraught with tension and the UFB's chancellor, Coahaagen (Cranston), is hell-bent on squashing an uprising Down Under by a mysterious revolutionary known as Matthias (Bill Nighy).

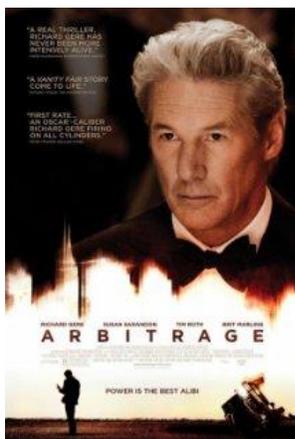
Quaid realizes he's somehow connected to all this socio-political turmoil after an ill-fated trip to Rekall, a corporation whose artificial memory-implant services bring about several unpleasant revelations. Among these is the fact that his heretofore loving wife, Lori (Kate Beckinsale), is actually a cold-blooded killer with catlike reflexes and Energizer Bunny-like stamina, turning business into a personal grudge as she ruthlessly hunts down Quaid and Melina (Biel), the great love of his past life.



Gone is the first TOTAL RECALL'S concept of interplanetary travel; in this version, the hottest form of transit is a massive vessel that moves through the Earth's core in minutes, toggling from one end to the other in one pleausrably gravity-defying sequence. Similarly, the pic's other highlights are almost exclusively visual: The midsection is largely devoted to extended, elevated chase sequences involving first the Colony's magnet-powered highway system, then a labyrinthine network of criss-crossing elevators that takes Patrick Tatopoulos' production design to a mind-bendingly cubist extreme. The future, as rendered here, is crammed with all kinds of nifty technological wonders, from hand-embedded cell phones to identity-concealing neck rings.

Wiseman, who showed off his action chops to fine effect in 2007's "Live Free or Die Hard," takes advantage of the myriad staging possibilities offered up by this elaborate, neon-tinged dystopia, and he directs the film's numerous fight scenes with speed and energy, even if those qualities never translate into sustained tension or exhilaration. Strangely, there's no psychological underpinning to the violence; the crucial moment when Quaid realizes his superhuman fighting abilities is lensed in show-offy, videogame-like fashion, with the camera whooshing about the room like a hummingbird having a seizure.

Performances are functional but fine. Absent Schwarzenegger's imposing physicality, Farrell plays the role closer to that of a Jason Bourne 5.0, although the actor's soft-eyed vulnerability makes sense for a character who finds the rug pulled out from him at every turn. Stepping into a role played in the 1990 pic by Sharon Stone, Beckinsale (Wiseman's wife, whom he directed in the first two "Underworld" pics) is pure, one-note malevolence, though she and Biel make for a nicely matched pair of fierce femmes. Diverse supporting cast boasts an unusual number of Asian faces, from John Cho's Rekall employee to various extras, perhaps as a speculative nod to a rapidly changing global order. The appeal will be quite strong for those that liked **PROMETHEUS, MEN IN BLACK 3, THE WATCH, DARK SHADOWS, LOOKOUT, UNDERWORLD 4, GONE, HAYWIRE** and **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**.



12/21 **2** ARBITRAGE DRAMA

\$7 MILL BO 356 SCREENS **R** 107 MINUTES

Richard Gere (BLOOD BROTHERS, AMERICAN GIGOLO, PRIMAL FEAR, BROOKLYN'S FINEST, NO MERCY, DAYS OF HEAVEN)

Susan Sarandon (ATLANTIC CITY, THELMA AND LOUISE, THE LOVELY BONES, MOONLIGHT MILE, DEAD MAN WALKING, THE CLIENT)

Tim Roth (PULP FICTION, WHIP IT, LUCKY NUMBERS, HOODLUM, NO WAY HOME)

Straddling the line between celebration and vilification of its nasty protagonist, ARBITRAGE plunges into the world of corporate fraud with chilly detachment. Writer/director Nicholas Jarecki's film begins with Robert (Gere)—the president of a lucrative investment firm—deep in crisis, having secretly borrowed \$412 million to hide losses from an ongoing audit and to keep alive his firm's sale to a rival. A man comfortable begging for more time on his loan to cover up his crimes (which would land him in jail for

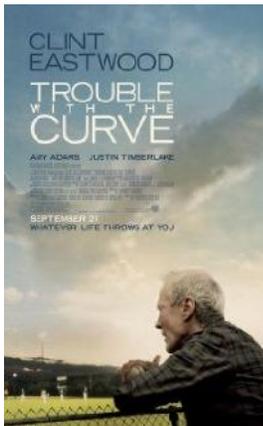
upwards of twenty years) and then going home to his family to celebrate his birthday, Robert is a wheeler-dealer without scruples. This extends to fidelity, as Robert ditches wife Ellen (Sarandon) not long after the birthday candles have been blown out to see his art dealer mistress, Julie (Laetitia Casta). If trouble in the boardroom has Robert increasingly anxious, trouble with Julie has him equally strained, as his repeated failures to commit and to see her as scheduled lead to tensions that Robert eventually tries to diffuse with a drive to the country. This leads to tragic consequences when he falls asleep at the wheel, flips the car, and Julie dies, compelling Robert to flee the scene with the help of his former chauffeur's son, Jimmy (Nate Parker).

Threatened with incarceration, Robert gets pro-active, working to clear Jimmy from any suspicion once detective Bryer (Roth) begins snooping around, as well as struggling to have the audit finished and to get a meeting with the buyer so the firm's sale can be completed and he might pay back the many investors he owes. Jarecki dramatizes Robert's shady maneuvering with remoteness, visually highlighting the gilded spaces inhabited by Robert and his brood—including daughter Brooke (Brit Marling), who also serves as his Chief Investment Officer—without ever succumbing to fawning, so that the glittery high rises, opulent apartments and limousine interiors feel like cold, nasty arenas where bad behavior is accepted as the norm. That said, while Jarecki shows no particular love for Robert or his milieu, and makes sure to contrast it with the everyday urban home of Jimmy, the writer/director also refuses to pedantically condemn as well. Instead, he seems content to operate at a distance, as if he were watching a fascinating, deadly species under glass. None of those characters prove as nasty as Robert, whose defensive claims that his actions are intended to protect his innocent employees and relatives sound like the self-justifications of a fundamentally greedy cretin.



And yet, the story doesn't intend for its audience to loathe Robert; on the contrary, in Gere's capable hands, the businessman comes off as someone who, though drowning in quicksand due to his own failings, is as charming and impressively cunning as he is abhorrently selfish. Gere vacillates between rampaging rants and winning smiles with the grace of an old professional schooled in the art of deception and gamesmanship. As the police close in on Robert and Jimmy, Gere captures a sense of not only his character's anything-goes personal and professional ethos, but also the way in which he's deluded himself into believing his own hot air. The result is a portrait that gets at what Jarecki sees as the heart of a corporate immorality driven by avarice and allowed to flourish courtesy of wrongdoers' charisma, stature and power—not to mention the presence of so many other likeminded businesspeople. Less convincingly, the film suggests that even little people like Jimmy have something to gain from allowing Robert and his ilk to perpetuate their scams. A subplot involving Brooke discovering that dad's books are cooked adds even more melodrama to the proceedings, all in order to set up a somewhat preposterous finale predicated on an unprincipled person's unbelievable motivations, but that misstep doesn't lessen the sting of the film's moral, which concludes with a ballroom standing ovation in which everyone present seems to deserve little more than boos.

This movie will have strong appeal to all that liked **RED LIGHTS, THE CAMPAIGN, WALL STREET, BOILER ROOM, BEING FLYNN, THE HUNGER GAMES, THE DESCENDANTS, THE GUARD, THE DEBT,** and **MONEYBALL**.



12/21 1 TROUBLE WITH THE CURVE DRAMA
\$33 MILL BO 3212 SCREENS PG-13 111 MINUTES

Clint Eastwood (PLAY MISTY FOR ME, GRAN TORINO, UNFORGIVEN, MAGNUM FORCE, PALE RIDER)
Justin Timberlake (FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, BAD TEACHER, THE SOCIAL NETWORK, BLACK SNAKE MOAN)

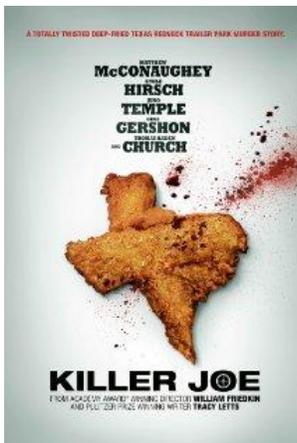
TROUBLE WITH THE CURVE is the antithesis of **MONEYBALL**, last year's baseball flick about the ironic humanity of computer-based scouting, which sticks

to stats and puts outlying misfits on an even playing field with square-jawed superstars. A precious banality best suited for 1950s TV, Robert Lorenz's directorial debut argues that such a newfangled process is a bunch of malarkey, and that on-site player assessments can't be topped by the dreaded creep of technology. In the stands, you can hear the way an aluminum bat strikes a curveball, you can hear the way a shy amateur nearly cripples catchers with his pitch, and, if you're at a game attended by legendary scout Gus Lobel (Clint Eastwood), you can hear a crotchety, octogenarian cliché hem and haw about the "Interweb"



The introduction of Gus comes with a miserable morning grumble, followed by an arduous urinating session in which he boasts that he's outlived his penis. It's then on to kicking a coffee table, stubbornly wolfing down Spam for breakfast, referring to yoga as "voodoo," and calling a young doctor "Sonny." Gus wasn't written for Eastwood, but he might as well have been, as the role encourages every blue-collar, gritted-teeth trademark of the aging legend, from the diner meals to the scratchy cussing. It's an awfully tired persona, and costars seem to encircle it as if regarding a past-prime boss, his presence as revered as it is tolerated. As Gus's estranged, go-getter daughter, Mickey, who risks a big law-firm promotion to help her dad through a bout with glaucoma, Amy Adams brings a breath of life while gamely delivering limp dialogue, doing her best to bail out a sinking ship in a way not seen since **CRUEL INTENTIONS 2**. As Johnny Flanagan, a high-school-phenom-turned-baseball-scout-slash-aspiring-announcer, Justin Timberlake seems thrilled to be on board, but his boyish enthusiasm offers mere moments of relief. Most often, the movie is fixed on the reward-free taming of an old beast, the slow cracking of his hard shell coinciding with his victory over one-dimensional villains (as a hollowly cutthroat hotshot who swears by the **MONEYBALL** method, Matthew Lillard is the Dennis to Gus's Mr. Wilson). The climactic meat of the story concerns a dark past between Mickey and her pops, who abandoned her years ago, leaving unexplained emotional bruises. Confrontational scenes provide some dramatic working space for Eastwood and Adams, but it all feels undercooked, and matters wind up gratingly unresolved while nevertheless tied in a wince-inducing bow. Things are nearly saved somewhat by a final-act showdown, which, in pinning the digitally ranked batting favorite against a rocket-armed wallflower nabbed on instinct, presents a surprisingly strong metaphor for the film's opposing themes. But, wouldn't you know it, the movie had to go and make the dark horse an underprivileged Latino, at last tacking on a good, old-fashioned boost of white heroism.

Fans of **MONEY BALL**, **RUBY SPARKS**, **MAGIC MIKE**, **BERNIE**, **MEN IN BLACK 3**, **MOONRISE KINGDOM**, **THE DEBT**, **THE IRON LADY** and **WE BOUGHT A ZOO** will be happy with this movie too.



12/21 **2** **KILLER JOE** ACTION

\$3 MILL BO 85 SCREENS NC-17 102 MINUTES

Emile Hirsch (TAKING WOODSTOCK, MILK, INTO THE WILD, SAVAGES, ALPHA DOG)

Matthew McConaughey (THE LINCOLN LAWYER, SURFER DUDE, TROPIC THUNDER, GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST, U-571, THE NEWTON BOYS)

Gina Herson (DREAM LOVER, SLACKERS, THE INSIDER, DELIRIOUS, COCKTAIL)

Thomas Hayden Church (SIDEWAYS, SPIDER MAN, SMART PEOPLE, ALL ABOUT STEVE, SPANGLISH)

The family that slays together pays together in "Killer Joe," a nasty little Texas noir that transfers Tracy Letts' 1993 play from page to screen with generally gripping results before devolving into an over-the-top splatterfest. Aggressively sordid story benefits from a less stifling, more opened-up structure than William Friedkin's previous Letts adaptation, "Bug," but still makes the mistake of treating savage screen violence as its cinematic raison d'être. While cast names could sweeten the pic's theatrical life insurance policy, this hicksploitation dark comedy reps a tough sell indeed. Post-screening showers will be mandatory.



Speaking of showers, the action begins in a torrential downpour, with repeated in-your-face cutaways to dogs barking and snapping viciously in the rain. It's a dog-eat-dog world, after all, as the Smith family is about to learn -- or would be, if Letts' screenplay treated them as capable of learning anything.

On this dark and stormy night, ne'er-do-well Chris Smith (Emile Hirsch) turns up unannounced at the Dallas mobile home inhabited by his father, Ansel (Thomas Haden Church), and his slutty stepmom, Sharla (Gershon). Recently kicked out of the house by his mother, Ansel's unseen first wife, and in desperate need of cash after a botched drug deal, Chris proposes a "Double Indemnity"-like scheme in which they bump off the old hag, collect on her \$50,000 life insurance policy and split it among themselves.

The man for the job, Chris suggests, is Joe Cooper (McConaughey), more commonly known as Killer Joe, an NYPD detective who moonlights as a professional hit man. Smooth, in control and aware of the risks involved in matricide, Joe lays out strict conditions for the transaction. But when deadbeat Chris is unable to come up with the \$25,000 down payment, Joe agrees to accept collateral in the form of Chris' younger sister, Dottie (Juno Temple). Like an unspoiled flower blooming out of the putrescent soil that is her family, Dottie is the very picture of sweet, virginal innocence, at least until Joe expertly deflowers her in a riveting scene that retains the play's nudity and potent erotic charge.

To be sure, the director, Friedkin is clearly amused and appalled by his slovenly, foul-mouthed characters, with their off-the-charts levels of dysfunction and incompetence. But he directs them vigorously enough, pushing them past the realm of caricature to individuate themselves onscreen.

As the assassin who turns out to be the closest thing to a moral conscience in the picture, McConaughey pours on the suave Texas charm, perfectly offsetting the more barking tenor of the rest of the cast, namely Gershon and Hirsch, whose Chris seems the most prone of the bunch to bellow obnoxiously for no reason. Church locates a core of dignity within his clueless father figure, while Temple sweetly distinguishes herself as the family's most prized and deceptively passive member.

This is a very gory film that is pretty well done with a good cast. There is no question that those that liked **SAVAGES, HAYWIRE, LAWLESS, THE EXPENDABLES 2, RED LIGHTS, SAFE, BATTLESHIP, THE HUNTER,** and **LOCKOUT** will love this one too.



12/21 2 PREMIUM RUSH ACTION

\$23 MILL BO 2255 SCREENS PG-13 91 MINUTES

**Joseph Gordon-Levitt (500 DAYS OF SUMMER, WOMEN IN TROUBLE, THE BROTHERS BLOOM, KILL SHOT)
Michael Shannon (THE MACHINE GUN PREACHER, TAKE SHELTER, RETURN, BROKEN TOWER)**

The lovably ridiculous bike-messenger thriller is a welcome throwback. In a film world where genre fare is elevated to the level of serious cinema, and B-movie helmers have a penchant for self-aware irony, they just don't make dumb movies like they used to. But "Premium Rush" deftly straddles the line between stupid and clever for the entirety of its brisk running

time, wearing its inessentiality on its sleeve, and though B.O. will be modest, the pic could thrive in its natural habitat as lazy Sunday cable fodder.

Spending the vast majority of his screen time sweating atop a bicycle, Wilee is a former law student who fancies himself a samurai of the bike-messenger trade, perilously weaving through traffic on a fixed-gear all-steel model with no brakes. Lest the danger of the job escape audiences, the film opens on Wilee's flailing body hurtling through the air in slow-motion after a collision, immediately flashing back to several hours prior. Embroiled in some pre-existing drama with fellow messenger and girlfriend Vanessa (Dania Ramirez), who herself seems to be taking a fancy to another co-worker, the jockish Manny (Wole Parks), Wilee had taken on a mysterious delivery earlier in the day, agreeing to shepherd an envelope from Vanessa's roommate, Chinese exchange student Nima (Jamie Chung), across the borough to a Chinatown dive. Immediately intercepted by a sweaty, malevolent detective (Michael Shannon) who's keen to recover the envelope, Wilee takes off on a street chase that will essentially constitute the rest of the film, further complicating things by attracting the attention of a dogged, accident-prone bike cop (Christopher Place).

Through all the time-jumping and nonstop pedaling (even Bradley Wiggins would struggle to keep pace with this crew), a story emerges involving organized crime, immigrant smuggling and the perils of Pai Gow poker addiction, with hints of a "Chinatown"-esque skeleton in Wilee's closet explaining his curious aversion to brakes. Paying attention to this irregularly unfolding narrative is entirely optional, however, and not particularly recommended, as the film never pauses long enough to linger.

In the early going, the film does well to exploit the anarchic geography of downtown Manhattan for a series of set pieces, though it runs out of ideas toward the end, eventually dispensing with all attempts at creativity and simply dropping huge cranes and balance beams into its cyclists' paths. In the film's most eye-rolling gimmick, Wilee weaves through traffic by essentially stopping time and visualizing all possible routes through traffic.

This all works well enough to attract fans of **THE EXPENDABLES 2**, **LAWLESS**, **RED LIGHTS**, **THE HUNTER**, **LOCKOUT**, and **KILLER ELITE**.



12/21 1 RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION

SCI/FI/THRILLER

\$43 MILL BO 3016 SCREENS R 96 MINUTES

Milla Jovovich (RESIDENT EVIL: EXTINCTION, THE FOURTH KIND, DIRTY GIRL)

Ever since the rabbit-season/duck-season, push-me-kill-you montage that kicked off RESIDENT EVIL: AFTERLIFE series creator Paul W.S. Anderson has thrown onto the field whatever flag is supposed to indicate that he harbors no illusions that the series will ever again reacquire linearity—assuming it ever had it to begin with. Only a few values seem to concern Anderson: endless pleasure through endless bone-crunching mayhem, balletic ass-kicking, abstract visual design, and photographing his wife and muse, the always extraordinary Milla Jovovich.

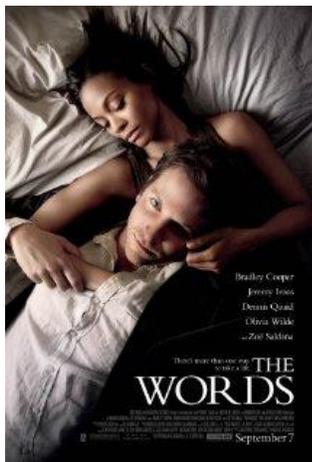
That's why **RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION** brooks no dissent regarding its innate pointlessness. These people, these last remnants of humanity, are never going to catch a break from the all-consuming apocalypse, or the Umbrella Corporation that ignited the end of days—no more, anyway, than Wile E. Coyote or Doctor Doofenshmirtz are ever going to be able to quit the Road Runner or Perry the Platypus, respectively. Like the new self-aware-computer-controlled Umbrella, the series is now self-powered, and its spiral momentum is perpetual.

This beautiful film, shot with the Red Epic camera and edited with nimble grace by Anderson's regular cutter, Niven Howie, opens by walking backward through the sea-air massacre that must have followed the last installment's cliffhanger. This sequence and the two that follow indicate nothing less than a willful break from correct Hollywood storytelling and audience-pampering protocol: Alice is a witless suburban homemaker living the identical zombieocalypse that kicked off Zack Snyder's DAWN OF THE DEAD remake; and Alice is a tissue-clad detainee, tormented by an omniscient Umbrella henchwoman. At times, this long, three-stage passage, which is either wordless, or its dialogue consists of trifles or mesmerized repetitions, exudes a kind of anti-story hostility on the order of maladjusted Japanese master Seijun Suzuki (his PISTOL OPERA in particular).

All right, the script has to erect some kind of easy-bake premise, some foothold for the audience to grab onto. When it's about halfway over, Anderson introduces a squad of gung-ho commandos on some vague mission to infiltrate Umbrella. In professional-wrestling parlance, old enemies have turned face, and old friends have turned heel. There's a big bomb, a timer, and a large beastie with an eight-foot tongue. At this point in the franchise, Anderson is content to alight the saga on a perpetual rewind loop, ever-ending, ever-rebooting, all subsidized by his nonpareil compositional sense, and the good sense he has to quash his own dialogue with nonstop movement and fury. He's cast aside even the pretense that closure is forthcoming, opting instead for the zombie world without end, forever and ever, amen. And who can blame him, when his conditions produce loving portraiture of death goddess Milla, and you're never five minutes in any direction from a pitched battle between the immovable Alice and the irresistible army of the mutant undead?



All fans of **UNDERWORLD, ZOMBIELAND, THE RAVEN, ABRAHAM LINCOLN: VAMPIRE SLAYER, CABIN IN THE WOODS, LOCKOUT, SILENT HOUSE, 28 DAYS, JACK AND JILL, TOWER HEIST, KILLER ELITE,** and **FINAL DESTINATION 5** will all be very happy.



12/26 2 THE WORDS DRAMA

\$14 MILL BO 2801 SCREENS PG-13 97 MINUTES

Bradley Cooper (THE HANGOVER, THE HANGOVER 2, LIMITLESS, VALENTINE'S DAY, ALL ABOUT STEVE, THE A-TEAM)

Jeremy Irons (MARGIN CALL. APPALOOSA, PINK PANTHER 2, STEALING BEAUTY, DEAD RINGERS)

Dennis Quaid (THE ROOKIE, THE BIG EASY, PANDORUM, SOUL SURFER, FOOTLOOSE, SILVERADO, SWITCHBACK, ANY GIVEN SUNDAY, EVERYBODY'S ALL AMERICAN)

Olivia Wilde (COWBOYS AND ALIENS, THE CHANGE-UP, TURISTAS, THE GIRL NEXT DOOR)

A literary film that stands to work best for those who don't read, "The Words" is a slick, clever compendium of stories about authors of uncertain talent and varying success. As is the case in too many films about writers, the pic avoids sharing actual prose in more than teasing snippets -- a choice that, along with the multigenerational casting of Jeremy Irons, Dennis Quaid and Bradley Cooper, bespeaks its bid for the widest possible appeal. As delivered by co-writer-directors Brian Klugman and Lee Sternthal, the movie's blink-and-you'll-miss-'em flashes of text onscreen utterly fail -- presumably on purpose -- to establish the exact nature of "The Window Tears," a postwar European page-turner whose yellowing

manuscript callow Rory Jensen (Cooper) finds tucked in an old Parisian satchel and passes off as his own. Celebrated as a work of genius (who's an uninformed viewer to argue?), "Tears" brings joy to Jensen until the book's true author, known only, and absurdly, as the "Old Man" (Irons), comes to threaten the younger scribe's reputation.

As it happens, all this is merely the plot of a pulpy and popular novel called "The Words," whose hotshot author, Clayton Hammond (Quaid), appears onstage in New York reading it aloud -- in portions lengthy enough to let us know he's a hack, if not a full-on plagiarist himself. What's shrewdest about this stories-within-a-story conceit is how it allows the pic to suggest that its lack of literary flair is primarily Hammond's fault and not the film's.

At least "The Words" works visually to a point, capably embellishing not just Hammond's fiction but his real life backstage in the Columbia U. grad student (Olivia Danielle is but one of the pic's women-behind-the-men, along with wife, Dora (Zoe Saldana), and Arnezeder), who not only self but loses his precious While Irons, yellow-toothed and



company of a fawning young Wilde). Alas, Wilde's pushy stereotypically bothersome with Jensen's upwardly aspirant '40s-era Euro barmaid Celia (Nora abandons the Old Man's younger manuscript as well.

cane-toting, is forced to play a would-be administer of comeuppance who gets all misty-eyed and gentle whenever it comes time to cue a flashback, Cooper and Quaid prove highly effective as men who fear they may not deserve their success. In particular, Quaid works wonders,

subtly suggesting that Hammond's tale of a literary thief could well be a work of veiled autobiography.

Fans of **STEP UP REVOLUTION, YOUR SISTER'S SISTER, TAKE THIS WALTZ, THINK LIKE A MAN, BEING FLYNN, DEEP BLUE SEA, WAR HORSE, THE DESCENDANTS, 50/50, THE WHISTLE BLOWER,** and **THE BEAVER** will enjoy this one.



12/26 1 PITCH PERFECT MUSICAL DRAMA
\$38 MILL BO 2787 screens **PG-13** 112 MINUTES

Anna Kendrick (UP IN THE AIR, 50/50, TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON, SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE WORLD)

Brittany Snow (TV's MAD LOVE, GOSSIP GIRL, HAIR SPRAY, PROM KNIGHT, FINDING AMANDA)

The first sign that something strange is going on in this move is when we learn that 27-year-old Anna Kendrick is playing an incoming college freshman. The second is that Kendrick's character, an aspiring DJ named Beca, is considered the "alt-girl" because she has earrings running up her earlobes and wears black nail polish, never mind the fact that she's heavily caked with glamour-girl makeup throughout. But soon enough, we realize that if the film isn't quite in on these jokes, it's hip enough to others, and treats the proceedings with adequate comic distance to enliven an otherwise cliché-ridden tale of girl-bonding and boyfriend-getting set against the exciting world of collegiate a cappella vocalizing.

Adapted from Mickey Rapkin's straightforward exposé about undergraduate singing competitions, the Jason Moore film is more or less successful in inverse proportion to the degree that it plays its material by the book. The group, after being humiliated at the national competition when their rendition of Ace of Base's "The Sign" is punctuated by group leader Aubrey (Anna Camp) nervously staining the Lincoln Center stage with projectile vomit, the Barden Bellas start the next season looking for fresh blood. They assemble a group less cosmetically pleasing than last year's ensemble, but with a wider range of

talent, all with the goal of returning to New York to take down their arrogant cross-campus male counterparts. The most talented new member is Beca, who would rather be making electronic mixes in her dorm room or hanging out at the college radio station, but is cajoled into joining the group. She brings fresh energy and ideas to the Bellas, but will she be able to implement any changes over conservative Aubrey's repeated insistence on sticking to the "classics" ("Turn the Beat Around" and the aforementioned Ace of Base song)? Meanwhile, Beca begins making time with the new star of the boys' squad, but will she learn to open up and accept his love?

Ultimately, this is less a film about competition and getting boyfriends (though those are two of the key plot devices) than about sisterly bonding and having some good-natured fun. The latter goal is never more pleasurably realized than during film's rousing finale in which the Bellas, finally taking a page from Beca's DJ playbook, perform a mix-tape-style number, the seriousness even here undercut by the off-color commentary of the sexist announcer and the overheated libido of his female counterpart. It's sexy indeed, and also funny.



This film will work best for those that liked **JOYFUL NOISE, STEP UP REVOLUTION, TWILIGHT, FOOTLOOSE, SOUL SURFER, DOLPHIN TALE, and CHRONICLE.**



12/26 **3** THE APPARITION HORROR

\$ 5 MILL BO 910 SCREENS pg-13 94 minutes

ASHLEY GREENE (TWILIGHT, BUTTER, A WARRIOR'S HEART, KING OF CALIFORNIA)
SEBASTIAN STAN (SPREAD, BLACK SWAN, THE ARCHITECT, RED DOORS)

The heart of the story, about a young couple (played by Ashley Greene and Sebastian Stan) who begin to see a strange kind of fungus and rot take over their home, accompanied by all manner of paranormal flim-flam, is essentially about the fracture of a fortified trust between the couple in the face of an advancing romantic relationship.

There are glimpses of actual menace amid the muddled melodrama and shock-scares. Stan's Ben, as we learn, was part of an experiment to summon a spirit from the afterlife, an experiment that ended in the death of his then-girlfriend, who we see being swallowed by a wall in typical Americanized J-horror fashion. That spirit now haunts Ben and the only other sole survivor of the experiment, Pat (Tom Felton), and in fleeting moments, Lincoln allows things to get hairy: a hotel bed sheet that suffocates Greene and an apocalyptic, spirit-protecting shelter hidden in Pat's home provide the sort of menace that the film never fully embraces.

Greene, best known for her role in the *Twilight* saga, is never called on to do much else than look good in various states of dress and undress. Not a bad thing. To be fair, the film does offer a faint hint of provocation when Ben's insistence on keeping the experiment and his ex a secret from Greene's Kelly blows up in his face, but Lincoln has seemingly only introduced this to create a scenario where his characters fight, only to be reunited by fear of the titular presence.

The film will have some appeal to those that liked **REC 3, THE RAVEN, CLEANSKIN, BATTLESHIP, DARKEST HOUR, SILENT HOUSE, DRIVE, and HANNA.**

