

4/1 1 ANCHORMAN 2: THE LEGEND CONTINUES COMEDY

\$126 MILL BO 3976 SCREENS PG-13 119 MINUTES

Will Ferrell (THE CAMPAIGN, SEMI-PRO, THE PRODUCERS, STRANGER THAN FICTION, WEDDING CRASHERS, BEWITCHED)

Christina Applegate (TV—MARRIED WITH CHILDREN—FILM--GOING THE DISTANCE, THE ROCKER, WONDERLAND, JUST VISITING)

Harrison Ford (THE FUGITIVE, WITNESS, FRANTIC, PRESUMED INNOCENT, 42)

Paul Rudd (THIS IS THE END, THIS IS 40, ADMISSION, WONDERLUST, OUR IDIOT BROTHER, I LOVE YOU MAN)

Steve Carell (THE 40 YEAR OLD VIRGIN, HOPE SPRINGS, THE WAY WAY BACK, CRAZY STUPID LOVE, GET

SMART, DATE NIGHT)

The sequel begins with the epically mustachioed Ron Burgundy (Ferrell), now a celebrated newscaster in New York, getting swiftly emasculated, as his wife and co-anchor, Veronica (Applegate), is chosen over him to replace lead nightly news anchor Mack Harken (Ford). Fired from his job and estranged from his family, Ron spends six months shuffling through nightmare gigs before he's given the chance to rejoin his previous news team—Champ (David Koechner), Brian (Rudd), and Brick (Carell)—at Global News Network (GNN), a new 24-hour news network. It's a dull setup, and once the news team assembles for their first broadcast at GNN, the film settles into a familiar rhythm of hit-or-miss episodic sketches, faintly strung together by a flimsy plot. For the fans, Champ's "Whammy!" screams, Ron's awkward emotional exclamations, and Brick's existence-as-dross are all dutifully recycled, but utilized to severely diminished effect.

When Ron sees his team's graveyard shift as an opportunity to create an American-centric news bonanza, there are a few solid yucks to be had, such as when the news team defies their overseers by smoking crack and mulling over the best vaginas of all time on the air, causing GNN ratings to soar.

As the story continues, it becomes Ferrell's show almost entirely. The film proceeds into a unique realm of nonsense that's tinged with a tinny sentimentalism, and one that marginalizes the supporting cast, including James Marsden, Greg Kinnear, and Dylan Baker, along the way. Even the climactic all-out anchor brawl, replete with cameos from Kanye West, John C. Reilly, Sacha Baron Cohen, and Jim Carrey, among others, feels limited in scope, as the absurdity of the fight is grounded by Ron's need to—no kidding—make his son's piano recital.

Where the cast played delightfully off of the film's simple central conceit in the original, the sequel seems to confine the playful performances to a plot that's engineered to overtly venerate the resilience of the American family. It limits the energies of the myriad comedians, who are inarguably the only noteworthy element of the film. Rather than continue to plumb the manic, perverse creatures within their afforded, rigid archetypes, the actors now seem to simply be hitting their marks, passing through each comic scenario instead of digging in. One of the most memorable gags in *The Legend of Ron Burgundy* involves Ron saying whatever is on the teleprompter, including small and major errors.

The appeal for this one is across the board. Fans of **GRAVITY, DALLAS BUYERS CLUB, NEBRASKA, 12 YEARS A SLAVE, AMERICAN HUSTLE, DELIVERY MAN, ENOUGH SAID, GROWN UPS 2, THE WORLD'S END,** and **NOW YOU SEE ME** will all love this.





4/1 2 47 RONIN ACTION

\$39 MILL BO 2193 SCREENS PG-13 118 MINUTES

Keanu Reeves (THE MATRIX, SPEED, POINT BREAK, BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE, MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO, A WALK IN THE CLOUDS)

A 'national legend' in Japan, the true life story of the 47 Ronin (masterless samurai) who avenged the death of their master years after he was shamed by a rival lord is the most famous example of Bushido, the samurai code of honour, and has been committed to film many times before, most of time staying close to the real life events, give or take some tiny embellishments. But it would take Hollywood, in the first English language version of the tale, to inject a heavy dose of fantasy, throwing mythical beasts, witchcraft, and Keanu Reeves into the mix. He plays Kai, a 'half breed' outcast who was rescued by the benevolent

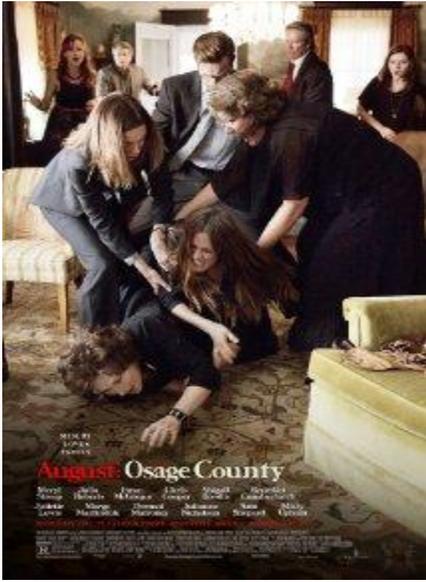
Lord Asano (Min Tanaka), granted permission to serve the nobleman, slowly falling in love with Asano's daughter Mika (Kou Shibasaki). When Asano is tricked into shaming himself, leading to his death, by the villainous Lord Kira (Tadanobu Asano) and the witch Mizuki (Rinko Kikuchi, in a role a million miles away from the soft spoken, good natured Mako in Pacific Rim), Kai teams up with Oishi (Hiroyuki Sanada), former head of Asano's Samurai, to seek revenge and rescue Mika.

Visually, 47 Ronin is stunning, with mostly spot on special effects (the odd, bird faced Tengu monks the only misstep) adding to the enjoyment of this fantasy adventure. The action scenes are well shot by director Carl Rinsch, every movement captured cleanly and crisply. The finale, a raid on Kira's stronghold, is wonderfully put together, huge in scope compared to the smaller scale events that preceded it. That the movie doesn't end there, and has the courage to stick to the melancholy resolution of the real life tale, is a credit to it. But it is a little too late. You get the feeling very early on that 47 Ronin isn't as epic as the really, really wants to be. The narrative is the biggest culprit, taking it's time to really get going, then letting itself get derailed by useless subplots once the real meat of the story reveals itself. The second act is a bit of a slog to get through, mainly down to exploring the origins of Kai, with nothing important to be said or revealed.

Acting wise, a wealth of international talent is on display here, and they do their job admirably, wasted as they are on one dimensional characters. If you're not a fan of Reeves, this won't change your mind, but he does put in some good work as the outcast struggling to be accepted. He handles himself well in the action scenes, excelling in one on one combat. He works well alongside Sanada as the endlessly loyal Oishi, who despite Reeves' name being on the top of the poster, is the real main star. Asano's Kira threatens to fall into cackling villain territory very early, but he pulls it back from cliché. It's Kikuchi who steals the show though, clearly having a ball as the evil witch. From hair that shoots out of her head like tentacles, to turning into a floating mass of robes, she is by far the most outrageous addition to the film, but Kikuchi loses herself in the role and makes it work.

Fans of **LAST DAYS OF MARS, ESCAPE PLAN, RIDDICK, FRIGHT NIGHT 2, REDS 2, AFTER EARTH, PACIFIC RIM, EVIL DEAD** and **GI JOE: RETALIATION**.





4/8 1 AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY DRAMA
\$36 MILL BO 2384 SCREENS R 121 MINUTES

Meryl Streep (HEARTBURN, SOPHIE'S CHOICE, IT'S COMPLICATED, THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA, DOUBT, MAMMA MIA!)

Julia Roberts (FLAT LINERS, MYSTIC PIZZA, PRETTY WOMAN, STEEL MAGNOLIAS, MIRROR MIRROR)

The film, like the play, follows one dynastic Oklahoma family as they cope with the suicide of their patriarch, Beverly Weston (Sam Shepard). His pill-popping, cancer-stricken wife, Violet (Streep), gathers the family together to mourn, and in doing so triggers an avalanche of voiced resentments, family secrets, and escalating physical violence. Violet—cutting, exhaustingly bitter, collapsing under the weight of her own regrets—is the primary instigator of this battle royale, but she's matched by her eldest daughter,

Barbara (Roberts), who escaped to Colorado years ago and can barely contain her enmity for Osage County and its inhabitants. Every branch of this family tree is eventually proven rotten, of course, through a series of revelations that impact every guest at the house.

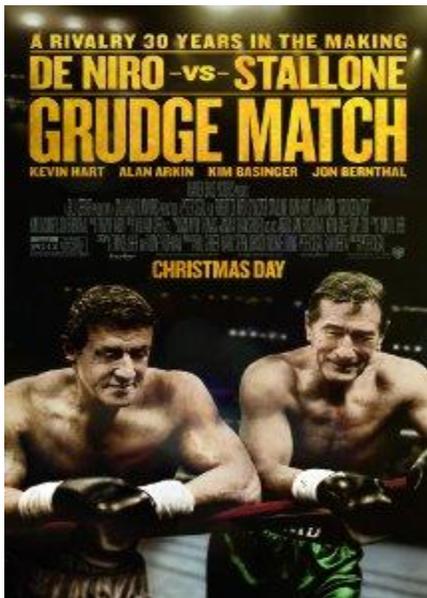
What works about the movie can largely be attributed to the original text, which is full of cruel twists and savage blows that Letts wisely retains for the screen. This isn't a chamber drama so much as Eugene O'Neill at a WWE match. Letts's words channel an aggression capable of winding first-time viewers, as the heightened dialogue ("Eat the fish, bitch!") and nihilistic overtones leave no room for subtlety. If anything, Letts's script, streamlined from the play's three-hours-plus running time, feels pulpier and wilder, undeniably exhilarating.

In one of the film's few straightforwardly poignant scenes, Violet flees a stopped car filled with angry relatives and runs aimlessly out into a hay field; Barbara follows her and catches her mid-collapse, and flatly whispers to her mother, "There's no place to go." It's a surprising, mysterious line, and filmed in long shots that engulf the women in their flat, barren surroundings, the scene feels genuinely cinematic.

Really, the movie begins and ends with its actors, and how well they can navigate the text's slalom course of cynicism, melodrama, and vulgar comedy. Wells's cast doesn't quite read like a credible family, but there's a flamboyance to the acting here that fits the text surprisingly well. Violet is a perfect vessel for Streep, whose more theatrical tendencies perfectly fit such an inherently performative woman; everything from her side-eyeing at the dinner table to her comically large sunglasses is an intimidation tactic. Roberts is even stronger, fueling Barbara with a bottomless supply of piss and vinegar without flattening the character or losing the audience's sympathy.

The story and the cast make this movie worth watching as the appeal will be for those that liked **OUT OF THE FURNACE, DALLAS BUYER'S CLUB, NEBRASKA, THE BUTLER, THE ICEMAN, 42, QUARTET, and THE IMPOSSIBLE.**





4/8 2 GRUDGE MATCH COMEDY
\$32 MILL BO 2165 SCREENS PG-13 113 MINUTES

Robert DeNiro (STANLEY & IRIS, CASINO, MEET THE FOCKERS, THE FAN, THE FAMILY)

Sylvester Stallone (FIRST BLOOD, FLATBUSH AVE., ROCKY, COPLAND)

Kim Basinger (WAYNE'S WORLD 2, 9 ½ WEEKS, THE DOOR IN THE FLOOR, CELLULAR, THE NATURAL, MARRYING MAN, L. A. CONFIDENTIAL)

The movie is its casting: Robert De Niro and Sylvester Stallone star as a pair of flaccid, blotch-faced former prizefighters who haven't touched gloves (or exchanged words) in three decades. While Razor (Stallone) has evaporated into blue-collar Pittsburgh, Kid (De Niro) owns both a steakhouse and a car dealership, immodestly cashing in on his legendary reputation—booze,

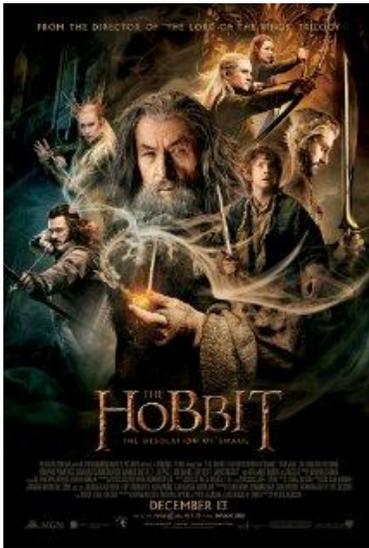
womanizing, mugging it up for the camera—whenever the opportunity strikes. Eventually a promoter (Kevin Hart) arranges for both men to lend their skills to a video-game firm, and Kid ambushes Razor's motion-capture session, demanding a rematch. The ensuing brawl, with both men dressed in spotless neon-green bodysuits, is picked up by an onlooker's phone, fast becoming a viral sensation. Emboldened, Hart arranges for them to re-enter the ring in an event he hypes as "Grudgment Day."

The film's sole mystery is what happened to turn Kid and Razor from mere opponents into enemies, and necessary background information about their past lives—and the woman (Kim Basinger) who came between them—is dumped on the audience in parallel to preparation for the big showdown. Freshly laid off, Razor is singleminded in his pursuit of victory, whereas Kid, who doesn't particularly need the money, has a more personal axe to grind

The resultant mix is crude: the tropes are mythic and universal on Stallone's end, shrilly biographical on De Niro's. It's a given that we're rooting for Razor, but his tortuous doubt about whether or not to go through with the big fight wears itself out well before he makes his final decision. (Stallone's grotesque self-seriousness is well mediated by left-hook one-liners from a supporting cast that includes Alan Arkin and LL Cool J.) Razor and Kid find a rapprochement that allows them to simply beat the hell out of each other, with a sadism and fury that's never once alluded to in the film's prior text, which could have given foundation to an entirely different exploration of the interplay between masculinity, media attention, and self-punishment.



This movie is just for fun, so leave your brain at work. Fans of **LAST VEGAS, GRUMPY OLD MEN, DELIVERY MAN, GROWN UPS 2, THE BUCKET LIST, FAST & FURIOUS 6** and **THE FAMILY** will enjoy this one as well. A nice respite from a busy day.



4/8 1 THE HOBBIT 2 FANTASY

\$257 MILL BO 4065 SCREENS PG-13 161 MINUTES

Ian McKellen (LORD OF THE RINGS, THE WOLVERINE, X-MEN 2, THE LAST ACTION HERO)

Martin Freeman (WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER?, THE WORLD'S END, HOT FUZZ, SHAUN OF THE DEAD)

"You are being used, hobbit," the great dragon Smaug (Benedict Cumberbatch) growls at Bilbo Baggins (Freeman) in Peter Jackson's latest jaunt through Middle-Earth. "You were only ever a means to an end." J.R.R. Tolkien purists especially will need to fully embrace this fact if they hope to tolerate the freewheeling liberties taken in *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, chapter two of Jackson's at once sprightly and ominous *Lord of the Rings* prequel trilogy.

Picking up just after the closing skirmish of the last film (yet beginning with a flashback prologue that suggests the *Hobbit* flicks will copy the structure, if not the spirit, of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), *The Desolation of Smaug* almost immediately gets down to fantastical business, pitting Bilbo, Gandalf (Ian McKellen), Thorin (Richard Armitage), and 12 other dwarves against orcs, a shady "skin-changer" (Mikael Persbrandt), and an army of CG spiders in the hallucinatory Mirkwood Forest. This is hardly laborious entertainment. If anything, Jackson seems to have surrendered to the demands of your typical fantasy spectacle, hurtling from one characterization-trumping stunt to the next. (Even Gandalf, whose wise words have always embedded this brand with regal gravitas, is often relegated to being the house deliverer of over-declarative one-liners.)

It isn't until the company is rescued—or, rather, captured—by the elves of the Woodland Realm that we get a moment to breathe in Tolkien's peerless talent for weaving grand historical grace into dazzling fantasy. Instantly showing frowned-upon feelings for handsome dwarf Kili (Aidan Turner), the warrior elf Tauriel (Evangeline Lilly, in a role invented for the films) speaks to her crush about the Light of the Eldar, the memory-laden, life-sustaining force of the elven race. Moments like this, so pleasantly prominent in the *Lord of the Rings* films, are far too few in *The Desolation of Smaug*, which prefers to bombard its audience with, say, a rather deplorable, dizzying whitewater-rapids action sequence, wherein Jackson leaves no circus-act gimmick unemployed, tossing in excessively choreographed orc-head impalements, and elves crossing the river by running atop the heads of dwarves, who are all riding in barrels as if they're about to descend Niagara Falls.

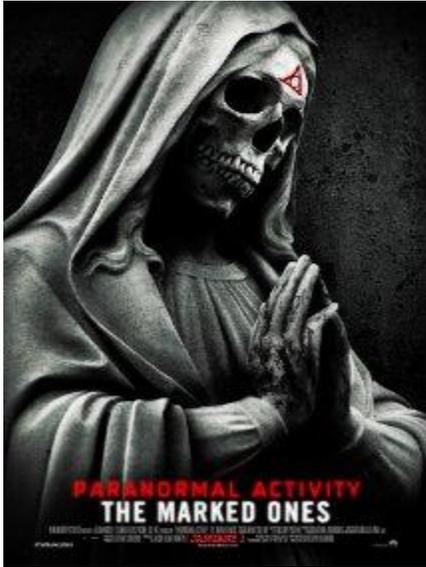
Tolkien's fascinations with mythology, lineage, and intimate detail are what have made his books such enduring doorstoppers, and they're what filled Jackson's initial, masterful trilogy with vast, era-spanning transcendence. It's an unexpected journey indeed to reach a point in here when it feels as if the film is touching this sort of classical greatness. Finally, when Bilbo and the dwarves encounter Bard the Bowman (Luke Evans), a gruff archer who smuggles them ever closer to their destination of the Lonely Mountain (the dwarves' home base that's been taken over by the treasure-hoarding Smaug), there's a trickling out of themes and visuals that feel expressly Tolkienesque, not to mention reminiscent of Jackson's former glory. From Bard to Thorin, there are issues here concerning the great stories and sins of ancestors, issues we know will be echoed in future tales, be it through Aragorn's need to restore peace after relative Isildur fell to temptation, or through Frodo's need to destroy what his uncle Bilbo snatched from a glittering cave. Greed and power struggles are also familiarly present, and they thankfully come to fruition when proceedings descend into the cavernous Lonely Mountain, one of few settings in the sequel to rightfully showcase the relics and monoliths of ages past.



Of course, the climax involves Bilbo's eventual encounter with Smaug, whose monstrous bed of gold coins slopes like desert hills in the mountain halls, and contains, somewhere, the dwarves' Arkenstone, a sacred gem seeming to have corruptive powers like those of the One Ring. Awesome to behold, the thick-scaled, fire-bellied, fluidly enlivened dragon is one of the single most magnificent creations to emerge from effects house Weta Workshop, which is to say it's one of the greatest CG creatures to hit the screen. Along with a jaw-dropping encounter concerning Gandalf and the ethereal Necromancer, whose true identity is one of a handful of *Lord of the Rings*-related reveals that doesn't feel proud of itself, Smaug's dwarf-realm standoff with Bilbo and friends

exemplifies this brand at its history-filled, aesthetically wowing best, and it raises the bar for Middle-Earth-ian cinematic spectacle.

All fans of **THE HUNGER GAMES**, **12 YEARS A SLAVE**, **GRAVITY**, **CAPTAIN PHILLIPS**, **THE BUTLER**, **RUSH**, **FAST & FURIOUS 6**, **HANGOVER III**, and **IRON MAN 3** will love this movie.



4/8 1 PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: THE MARKED ONES

HORROR/THRILLER \$33 MILL BO R 89 MINUTES

The image of a teenager crouched against a door, hiding from the possessed things in pursuit of him, shot from the ground because the camera he's been carrying has been fleetingly discarded will unnerve you. In this sequel characters navigate hallways while carrying a camera in an outward and probing manner that's designed to produce the same cheap gotcha moment over and over in order to keep audiences goosed up enough. Marketed as a spin-off, rather than as a direct sequel (that's due later this year), the movie initially benefits from a change in characters and locale. Rather than following the same doomed white family of the last four films, we're now tethered to the first-



person POV of Jesse (Andrew Jacobs), a recent high school graduate in a Latino neighborhood in Oxnard, California. For a little while, writer-director Christopher B. Landon appears to be taking advantage of the new perspective, as he shoots the close-knit community of cramped apartments in a manner that allows us to feel both the reassuring stability of multiple generations living side by side as well as the claustrophobia that arises from an atmosphere in which one never seems to be alone. The premise is ripe for a parable of the differences between generations and of the distancing familial effects of the time-honored American art of gentrification.

The delivery of this and the story from it should appeal to those that liked **YOU'RE NEXT**, **LAST DAYS OF MARS**, **CARRIE**, **INSIDIOUS 2**, **KICK ASS 2**, and **R.I.P.D.**
Andrew Jacobs (TV'S MAJOR CRIMES).



4/15 3 BLACK NATIVITY MUSICAL
\$9 MILL BO 1837 SCREENS PG 83 MINUTES

Forest Whitaker (GOOD MORNING VIETNAM, PLATOON, THE CRYING GAME, THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND, BODY COUNT)
Jennifer Hudson (DREAM GIRLS, THE THREE STOOGES, SEX AND THE CITY, FRAGMENTS)
Angela Bassett (MALCOLM X, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, THIS MEANS WAR, BOYZ N THE HOOD, JUMPING THE BROOM)

For anyone who prefers their assertive homilies to crust over like a syrupy sweet, director Kasi Lemmons's loose adaptation of Langston Hughes's beloved holiday tradition, this story will come on like a dream fulfilled.

Sullen Baltimore teen Langston (Jacob Latimore, assisted by Auto-Tune) and his single mother, Naima (Jennifer Hudson), are about to be evicted from their one-bedroom home. After their lender serves them with an eviction notice just in time for the holidays, Naima sends Langston to stay with his grandparents, whom he has never met, up in Harlem, the implication being that his stay will be entirely open-ended. Some catastrophic domestic event in the past has estranged Naima from her parents, the Reverend Cornell and Aretha Cobbs (Forest Whitaker and Angela Bassett), and in case it wasn't clear before, this is one of those movies where just about every character's name is a direct callback to some legendary cultural touchstone.

Though Langston's backpack is predictably lifted the moment he steps off the bus in Times Square, and he's mistaken for a thug when he tries to return a rich white man's wallet, landing him in jail faster than the protagonist of Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City," Lemmons's Harlem is portrayed as a rarified zone, where everyone knows and respects the Reverend, where pawn shops refuse hot merchandise, and where homeless, pregnant girls always have a smile on their face. It would be an urban paradise for Langston, but even though his grandparents lavish attention and gifts on him, he can't help but resent their comfortable and spacious brownstone digs at a time when he and his mother are about to have the rug pulled out from under them. Feeling robbed of his familial foundation, and plainly lacking any sort of spiritual perspective, he seems destined to lash out with one bad life choice after another.



This movie will wring your heart at the expense of logic and will have appeal to all that liked **PITCH PERFECT, STEP UP REVOLUTION, JOYFUL NOISE, FLASH DANCE, DREAM GIRLS, CHICAGO, IDENTITY THIEF, MOVIE 42, and THAT'S MY BOY.**



4/15 1 THE NUT JOB FAMILY ANIMATED
\$57 MILL BO 2581 SCREENS PG 85 MINUTES

Not long into the story, the film's squirrel antihero, Surly (Will Arnett), is justifiably banished by his community for his part in the destruction of their home within a city park's large tree. The damage comes from a nut cart flying like a bat out of hell into the tree, which explodes in flames, and the whole scenario uncomfortably brings to mind the events of 9/11. This impression may have been easier to shake off if the sequence wasn't immediately followed by an earnest discourse on criminal due process, with the leader of the park's animal community, Raccoon (Liam Neeson), forced to decide whether Surly should receive a fair trial or be sent away forever. The film makes a few other political intimations, mostly toward freedom of information and the nature of fascism, but attempts to render these ideas adorable by the mere fact that they're being discussed by talking animals.

Instead, inevitably, the nondescript writing provides Surly with a chance to prove he should be considered part of society, partnering as he does with another squirrel, Andie (Katherine Heigl), to steal a trove of nuts from a local store for the homeless denizens of the tree. Unfortunately for them, the store is also a front for King (Stephen Lang), a (human) gangster who's tunneling his way into the bank across the street.



This will be fun for all that liked **FROZEN, FREEBIRDS, TURBO 2, GROWN UPS 2, PLANES, MONSTER'S UNIVERSITY, and MEN IN BLACK 3.**



4/15 1 PHILOMENA DRAMA

\$39 MILL BO 989 SCREENS PG-13 98 MINUTES

Judi Dench (SKYFALL, CHOCOLAT, IRIS, THE SHIPPING NEWS, TOMORROW NEVER DIES, THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH)

Steve Coogan (WHAT MAIZIE KNEW, RUBY SPARKS, THE LOOK OF LOVE)

Mare Winningham (TV—MAD ABOUT YOU, 24, BOSTON LEGAL, CRIMINAL MINDS--FILM TURNER AND HOOTCH, SWING VOTE, NOBODY'S FOOL)

A human-interest story that claims spite for human-interest stories, *Philomena* has some pretty divisive issues at its core, ones that leave it torn between contrasting approaches. For writers Steve Coogan and Jeff Pope, adapting

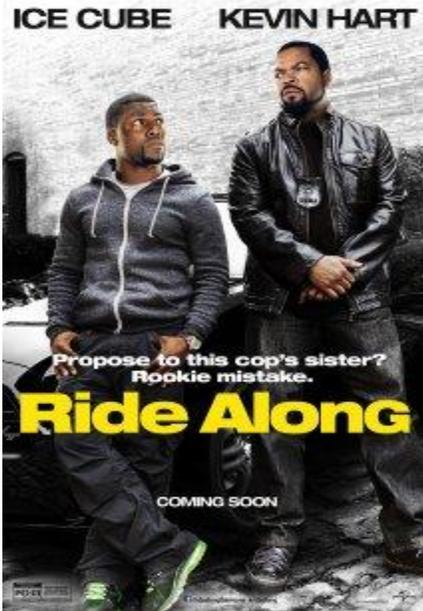
Martin Sixsmith's *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee* seems like an occasion to tweak familiar formulas, as they exhibit a compulsive need to distance themselves from the story's intrinsic sentimentality. For director Stephen Frears, it's a chance to play up that same sentimentality, underscoring emotional moments with excessive bathetic flourishes. Working at cross purposes, these two sides make for a fractious movie whose internal conflicts mirror those experienced by its odd-couple leads.

The story concerns the story of a teenager who, after a single youthful indiscretion, is forced into servitude by a gaggle of sinister nuns, her new baby whisked off to parts unknown. Philomena (Judi Dench) spends the next 50 years suffering quietly, aging into the apotheosis of an adorable Irish granny, all the while wondering what became of her son. She likely would have remained in the dark, if not for a chance run-in with Martin (Coogan), a disgraced government official whose brief, ignominious career as a spin doctor has just blown up in his face. Desperate to recover from the scandal that cost him his job, he tries to scuttle back to his former career as a serious journalist, instead applying his stubborn, inquiring personality toward the sort of puff piece that he claims to hate.



Setting up a twinned recovery narrative, the film spends most of its time in investigative mode, with clues leading the pair from the verdant hills of Ireland to a cold, sepulchral Washington D.C, their personal differences gradually coming to a boil. Martin is a staunch atheist, an arrogant Oxford grad with a fussy upper-class pedigree, who scoots about in BMWs and compares barmbrack to pan dulce. Philomena is steadfastly religious and wholly unpretentious, the kind of person who marvels over chain restaurants and breathlessly consumes bodice-ripper romance novels. The two inevitably learn from each other in their travels, but it's telling that Martin remains the active party and receiver of life lessons, with Philomena left to bravely shoulder emotional duress and impart hints of quiet dignity.

The acting and story is quite strong with a sub plot involving Michael and his job. Fans of **THE BUTLER**, **BLUE JASMINE**, **ENOUGH SAID**, **QUARTET**, **THE INTOUCHABLES**, and **FLIGHT** will all enjoy this one too.



4/15 1 RIDE ALONG ACTION/COMEDY
\$117 MILL BO 2896 SCREENS PG-13 99 MINUTES

Ice Cube (RAMPART, 21 JUMP STREET, BARBERSHOP, ARE WE THERE YET?)

Kevin Hart (THINK LIKE A MAN, THE FIVE YEAR ENGAGEMENT, LITTLE FOCKERS)

Kevin Hart spends most of this movie doing what he usually does, which is to say acting generally like a pre-teen who just noticed his first pubic hair. His character, Ben, is a natural foil to James (Ice Cube), the older brother of his girlfriend, Angela (Tika Sumpter), and the film opens with a bargain: If Ben, an Atlanta PD cadet, impresses James, a veteran undercover officer, on the titular outing, James will give Ben his blessing for marriage. The entire scenario seems initially custom-built for "old-fashioned" sexist types who believe they know what's best for the women in their life, but Ben, shockingly, calls bullshit on this thinking about halfway through the film. "This isn't Iraq," Ben not so sensitively exclaims when James deems him unfit to marry Angela, suggesting that she can—gasp—make her own decisions.

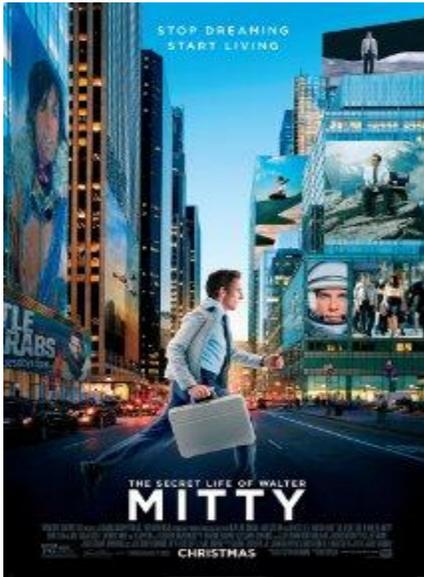
Following Ben's outburst, and despite being a blithe misogynist and an overall asshole, James continues to be treated as a likable figure, and the filmmakers clearly side with him, as Sumpter's character is used in the script solely to stoke James's machismo or comfort Ben. She's essentially a MacGuffin, appearing only as a utility to keep the men at odds until the very end when she has a gun to her head. The movie's most damning crime is that James ultimately comes off as the most attractive character, which admittedly isn't the biggest stretch considering the sheer abundance of "comical" whaling that Hart lets out over the course of the film.

James's likability has a lot to do with the fact that he's played by Ice Cube, who has retained a rather impressive on-screen magnetism over the years. He's a solid straight man here, but the film's stagnant crime plot consistently dashes any comedic lather he and Hart work up while picking up low-level criminals. Laurence Fishburne turns out to be a hammy hoot as Omar, a mysterious crime lord James has been tracking.

People die in here, but the film remains unwaveringly lighthearted, refusing to openly engage the isolationism and hardened cynicism that's often part and parcel of being a career police officer. The story is pretty open about how seriously he takes our culture of violence. During a shoot-out, Ben employs skills he learned through gaming to save James's life, and early on, Story cuts from an explosive chase involving James to Ben hunting the pixelated Taliban with his friend, Ass-Face. There's a sense that a young adulthood spent playing violent video games is perfect training for policing, and that the inevitable, subsequent police brutality, which the filmmakers pointedly excuse when they're not outright taking pleasure in it, is just boys being boys.

Fans of **DELIVERY MAN, THE HEAT, ESCAPE PLAN, THOR, RUSH, RIDDICK** and **BULLET TO THE HEAD** will love this one.





4/15 1 THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY
COMEDY \$54 MILL BO 2847 SCREENS PG 114
MINUTES

Ben Stiller (ZOOLANDER, MEET THE FOCKERS, THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY, ALONG COMES POLLY)
Kristen Wiig (BRIDESMAIDS, FRIENDS WITH KIDS, DESPICABLE ME, WHIP IT, SEMI-PRO)

A cinematic Hallmark card about the triumph of the human spirit, Loosely adapting the James Thurber short story that was previously filmed as a 1947 Danny Kaye vehicle, Stiller goes slushy for his saga of Walter (Stiller), an office drone whose dull, drab life is epitomized by opening images of him balancing his checkbook in a claustrophobic apartment kitchen. Walter works at *Life* magazine as a "negative asset manager," a title that's in tune

with his blank, empty existence, from which he periodically flees courtesy of daydreams in which he imagines himself charming co-worker Cheryl (Kristen Wiig) by leaping off of train platforms to save her three-legged puppy from a burning building, or wooing her as a dashing Arctic stud.

To make Walter's day-to-day life even drearier (and his loony reveries even more necessary), *Life* is about to be downsized into an online-only publication, a transition supervised by a corporate cretin, Ted (Adam Scott), whose villainy is made plain by his comically malevolent beard. That begins once he loses the picture that was to grace the last issue's cover (it reportedly conveys "the quintessence of life"). Driven by his desire to impress Cheryl and inspired by *Life's* motto ("To see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to..."), he endeavors to find legendary rough-riding shutterbug Sean O'Connell (Sean Penn), who roams the wild living out the very types of adventures Walter craves, and whom Walter hopes still has the precious photo.

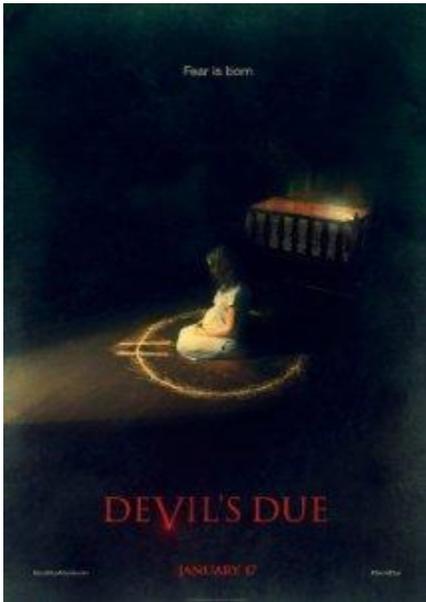
Stiller's visual storytelling is as obvious as his narrative, which soon also concerns a running thread in which, incapable of using eHarmony to "wink" at Cheryl, he strikes up a friendship with one of the site's tech-support agents (Patton Oswalt), who regularly calls Walter during his ensuing global odyssey to find Sean. Oswalt's phone rep is Walter's supportive virtual sidekick on a quest to transform himself from everyman to superman—a process that eventually succeeds when, in person, Oswalt's admiring schlub tells Walter that he resembles a cross between Indiana Jones and the lead singer from the Strokes.

Before such heroic self-actualization can occur, however, Walter must first go from fantasy fighting with Ted over a Stretch Armstrong doll during a videogame-ish race through midtown Manhattan, to literally battling beasts and the elements like a rugged, invincible he-man. From skirmishes with sharks off the coast of Greenland, to flights from erupting volcanoes in Iceland, to scaling mountains in Afghanistan, Walter soon changes into the man of his imagination—which is to say, a cartoon.

As befitting Stiller's fondness for product placement, not only does *Life* magazine's motto factor into the material's themes, but so does Chase bank, its name spied as Walter contemplates pursuing Cheryl, and Papa John's, which ties into Walter's enduring sadness over his father's death. The pizza chain's symbolic import is outright articulated to Walter by his mom (Shirley MacLaine), whose own participation is relegated to a piano-related subplot designed to provide the overstuffed action with further complications that can be easily resolved in a climax of everything-ties-together harmony.

Fans of **FROZEN, GRAVITY, AMERICAN HUSTLE, ENOUGH SAID, THE WAY WAY BACK, GROWN UPS 2, THE INTERNSHIP, ELYSIUM, and LAST VEGAS** will like this one too.





4/29 2 DEVIL'S DUE HORROR
 \$17 MILL BO 2134 SCREENS R 89 MINUTES

Zach Gilford (TV'S FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, THE MOB DOCTOR, GREY'S ANATOMY—FILMS—THE LAST STAND, CRAZY KIND OF LOVE)

Zach Gilford and Alison Miller play newlyweds Zach and Samantha, who, after a lost night on their honeymoon, are surprised to find out that Samantha is pregnant. Recording everything for posterity, Zach soon discovers that the pregnancy, and the dark changes it brings out in his wife, has sinister origins.

While it is steeped firmly in the realm of found footage. Most movies of the genre at least try to play off the conceit that the events you're watching actually happened, this movie moves forward in a much different way. It feels like the movie could have easily worked in a more traditional way, but the familiarity warranted a hook.. One scene, presented in silent, grainy CCTV footage, of a once vegan Samantha devouring raw meat in the middle of a supermarket is played perfectly, and really helps build tension. The scares are few and far between here, relying on generic jump scares to keep the action moving, and again it's the atmosphere that keeps you interested.

The story on the other hand spins it's wheels for much of it's run time. It also falls victim to the age old found footage problem of trying to explain why someone would still be filming when confronted with something that would normally have them running in the opposite direction. It takes it's time to get going, and when it feels like it could kick into high gear, it continues at a slow pace. The story is nothing new, seen before in not only Rosemary's Baby but countless other movies of this type. It also doesn't help that Zach and Samantha aren't that relateable or fleshed out, never really engaging you to care about what is happening to them. It's when the third act approaches that **DEVIL'S DUE** picks up, delivering a finale that really shows what the concept can deliver.



Fans of **CARRIE, YOU'RE NEXT, INSIDIOUS 2, TAKEN 2, CURSE OF CHUCKY** and **R. I. P. D.** will like this one.



4/29 2 LABOR DAY DRAMA
 \$17 MILL BO 2156 SCREENS PG-13 111 MINUTES

Josh Brolin (OLD BOY, MEN IN BLACK 3, GANGSTER SQUAD, TRUE GRIT)

Kate Winslet (LITTLE CHILDREN, CARNAGE, JUDE, ALL THE KINGS MEN)

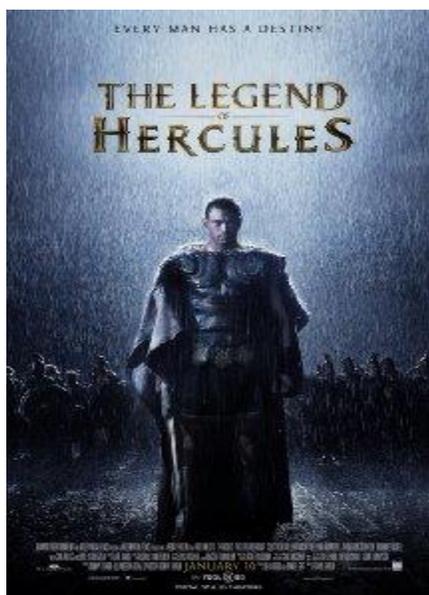
The key, all-encompassing scene in this movie, a film whose title is your first indication that it's a slice of Americana, fittingly takes place in a diner. During his weekly visit with his father, Gerald (Clark Gregg), Gerald's new wife, Marjorie (Alexie Gilmore), and Marjorie's teenage son, Richard (Lucas Hedges), 13-year-old Henry (Gattlin Griffith) assumes the role of resilient punching bag. He's chided about his thoughts of pursuing dance, patronized by Marjorie about his and Richard's good looks, and told by Gerald, who abandoned Henry's mom, Adele (Kate Winslet), that he "needs a man

around the house." Having grown precociously confident while quickly coming of age, sexually and otherwise, Henry shoots down any cheap shots about his non-traditional interests. He also calls out Marjorie for the incestuous nature of observing her son's desirability, and passive-aggressively tells his father that he might have a man around the house already.

This scene arrives rather late in Jason Reitman's fifth feature, specifically after Henry has felt the wallop influence of Frank (Brolin), an escaped convict who nonviolently urges Adele and Henry to house him, and whose sheer charisma and filling of the void left by Gerald elicit Stockholm Syndrome-lite from mother and son. Before Frank's arrival, Adele and Henry's lives were mostly miserable, with Adele suffering from crippling depression and agoraphobia, and Henry striving, with baldly Freudian earnestness, to double as Adele's husband in all ways but one ("I sensed my inadequacy," says a grown, recollecting Henry, played in characteristically vexing voiceover by Tobey Maguire). Adapted by Reitman from Joyce Maynard's novel and set in 1987, **LABOR DAY** excels by never letting one of its three protagonists take precedent over another. In Henry, Adele, and Frank, it presents a kind of unconventional love triangle, marked by hormonal awakening, romantic rebirth, masculine influence, and the fulfilling of common familial needs.

Lying somewhere in Massachusetts, Adele and Henry's home is unkempt and, most assuredly, *hot*. An amber color palette is matched with close-ups of buzzing fans, brewing coffee, and beads of sweat, and this is all before the riveting, meticulously realized preparation of a peach pie. An inexplicably accomplished cook, Frank gives Adele and Henry a crash course in baking, and all three plunge their hands into a bowl of sugared peaches, before Henry steps aside and Frank and Adele pull a *Ghost*, suggestively kneading dough as if it were wet clay. The scene is a whale of a multi-tasker, depicting power shifts, eroticism, innocent bonding, and the knife's edge on which these ostensible captives sit with their beguiling guest. Thanks in part to flashbacks and a few jolting revelations, the story starts to become a cautionary tale about the impossibility of changing the past.

This movie will certainly be enjoyed by those that liked **THE BOOK THIEF, SAVING MR. BANKS, THE SPECTACULAR NOW, ADORE, THE TO DO LIST, THE WAY WAY BACK, and ADMISSION.**



4/29 **3** THE LEGEND OF HERCULES ACTION \$19 MILL BO 1948 SCREENS PG-13 99 MINUTES

**Kellan Lutz (TWILIGHT SERIES, IMMORTALS, PROM NIGHT, STICK IT, DEEP WINTER)
Scott Adkins (EL GRINGO, THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM, ZERO DARK THIRTY, EXPENDABLES 2)**

On the surface, this movie is yet another big-budget Hollywood attempt to cash in on the success of **GLADIATOR, 300**, and other modern-day rehashes of the popular sword-and-sandal epics of the '50s and '60s. Director Renny Harlin even goes so far as to borrow both Zack Snyder's mannered stop-and-start rhythms in action sequences, frequently slowing down the frame rate within shots in order to emphasize supposedly awesome moments in fights, and Ridley Scott's taste for momentous arena spectacle. But the film has more on its mind than being a mere knockoff; its deeper aspirations are, in fact, religious in nature.

The story turns out to be a coming-of-age tale of sorts, with the Christ-like Hercules (Kellan Lutz) eventually learning to put his faith in his spiritual father, Zeus, after enduring a slew of physical, emotional, and moral challenges upon being exiled from his kingdom and sold into slavery. In stark opposition to the hero's selflessness stands his earthly father, King Amphitryon (Scott Adkins), ruthless in his petty, coldblooded cruelty to not only his family, but also his own people.



The story will appeal to those that liked **THE PASSION OF CHRIST, OLD BOY, THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS, IMMORTALS, R.I.P.D., AFTER EARTH,** and **BEAUTIFUL CREATURES.**