



4/4 1 OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY COMEDY
\$63MILL BO 2398 SCREENS R 105 MINUTES
DVD/ COMBO

Jason Bateman (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, HORRIBLE BOSSES 1 & II, IDENTITY THIEF, THE CHANGE UP)
Olivia Munn (TV—THE NEWSROOM---FILM—RIDE ALONG 2, ZOOLANDER 2, X-MEN: APOCALYPSE, MAGIC MIKE)

As Josh Parker, Jason Bateman plays yet another straight man to a band of eccentrics, among them Tracey Hughes (Olivia Munn), his equally bland co-worker and possible love interest. Kate McKinnon brings her usual android-like weirdness to straight-arrow Head of Human Resources Mary Winetoss, while Rob Corddry's aggressively in-your-face shtick as sad-sack Head of Customer Service Jeremy will be familiar to loyal Jon Stewart-era *Daily Show* viewers. Elsewhere, Randall Park plays a variation on his earnestly awkward *Fresh Off the Boat* patriarch, with the twist that his seemingly harmless character turns out to have a thing for S&M. And then there's Jennifer Aniston, playing yet another horrible boss: Carol Vanstone, the ice-cold Zenotek CEO with lingering resentment toward her privileged slacker brother, Clay (T.J. Miller), who's running the company's flailing Chicago branch.

The film's barebones plot sees the folks at Zenotek trying to throw a party in a last-ditch attempt to rescue the company from financial ruin by impressing Walter Davis (Vance) with their congenial office culture. Naturally, things go disastrously awry. But as one might expect, the plot often takes a backseat to the sheer chaotic feeling of seeing



all these comic actors inhabiting one enclosed space—at least until the shenanigans spill out onto the Chicago streets in the third act. This isn't necessarily a problem in and of itself. *Office Christmas Party* could be considered the fast-paced comic equivalent of the disaster movies that were prolific in the 1970s, with actors brought on less to play actual people than to bring their star wattage—or, in this case, their own distinctive comic rhythms and cadences—to the melee surrounding them.

This will rent as well as **BOO! A MADEA HALLOWEEN, KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES, THE HOLLARS, BRIDGET JONES BABY, SAUSAGE PARTY and BAD MOMS.**



4/4 1 ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

SCI FI \$557 MILL BO 4387 SCREENS PG-13

133 MINUTES DVD/COMBO 3 D COMBO

28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Felicity Jones (INFERNO, A MONSTER CALLS, THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN 2)

Forest Whittaker, Jimmy Smits

As *Rogue One* sets out to roam the property that Lucas sold to the Disney entertainment strip-mining complex, it turns out that hope is somewhat—but not entirely—well placed. The movie is initially set apart from J. J. Abrams's *Episode VII* by the loudly deployed subtitle, "A Star Wars Story". This leaves open the possibility for endless semantic wrangling over the difference between "Story" and "Episode". Are Wookies confined only to the former? How come Darth Vader appears in both? Are we destined to see *Rogue Seven: A Star Wars Bedtime Lullaby*?

Beyond such questions, this holiday season outer space war movie offers a whole new squad of characters. This is a risky move for any studio executive who remembers the grim green-screen efforts of Ewan McGregor, Liam Neeson, and a certain clumsy Gungan. While Edwards doesn't quite have Abrams' knack for crafting zippy ensembles, he does assemble his dramatic team with more aplomb than would have been suggested by his work on *Monsters* and *Godzilla*, both evincing more interest in beasts than people.

Planted in between Episodes III (*Revenge of the Sith*) and IV (*A New Hope*, or just plain *Star Wars* for regular folks), *Rogue One* at first sprints a good distance on its own merits, with nary a Jedi or original trilogy cast member to be seen. It's an origin story for the Rebel detachment that stole the plans to destroy the first Death Star, starting with a familiar orphaning tragedy at the hands of a cruel Imperial officer. This leaves the grown-up protagonist Jyn (Felicity Jones) just cynical and bereft enough to make her hold out a respectable length of time before agreeing to assist the Rebel Alliance in getting those secret plans. Jyn's backstory also helps answer a question that's plagued fans ever since 1977: why did the Empire spend all that time and all those resources building a moon-sized space station only to leave one rather glaring and easily exploited vulnerability?



Jyn's ethnically mixed gang of fellow rogues—a notable counterpoint to what looks like an all-white Empire—is an engaging lot. That's true even if they're for the most part jammed together with little organic interaction by Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy's schematic screenplay. As defected Imperial pilot Bodhi and morally compromised Rebel spy Cassian, Riz Ahmed and Diego Luna play fractured heroes in a seemingly hopeless war. Like most any guerrilla campaign, the Rebel Alliance's fight against overwhelming forces isn't a clean one. This truism is illuminated by Cassian's haunted speech about how he and his fellow assassins and saboteurs (previously kept to the shadows so that Luke and Han could white-knight around) for some form of redemptive victory to make their sins worthwhile. Forest Whitaker's raspy portrayal of Jyn's onetime mentor and schismatic Rebel extremist Saw underscores the film's understanding of war as a dirty business and not the surgical struggle portrayed in the first trilogy.

Rounding out the rag-tag band are a pair of onetime temple guardians, Baze (Wen Jiang) and Chirrut (Donnie Yen), who bring impressive firepower and combat acumen. As the blind martial arts master who can take out an entire squad of Stormtroopers with only a wooden staff and a stubborn non-Jedi's belief in the Force, Chirrut should have been the eye-rolling addition to the cast. But Yen's engaging portrayal makes him the star of group.

This will rent as well as anything you have ever had.



4/11 1 HIDDEN FIGURES DRAMA \$141 MILL BO
2876 SCREENS PG 127 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Octavia Spencer (BAD SANTA 2, ALLEGIANT, ZOOTOPIA, FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS)

Director Theodore Melfi's *Hidden Figures* sheds light on a little-known corner of history by outlining the stories of Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe), and Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer), three African-American women who worked at NASA in the 1960s. When the story begins in 1961, NASA doesn't yet have electronic computers, so it has to rely on people to calculate the mathematical data needed to successfully launch space missions. The open and unapologetic sexism of the time is reflected in the gender-stratified jobs: All the so-called "computers" are women, while only men get the more prestigious and better-paid jobs that involve using the numbers crunched by the women to launch rockets into space. And, since this is the Jim Crow South, the African-American computers all work in the same room, behind a door labeled "Colored Computers."

The resistance these women have to overcome just to do their jobs provides much of the film's drama. In one scene, the fact that Dorothy's car stalls out on a country road on their way to work morphs from mere inconvenience to menace when the three are approached by a casually disdainful white cop.

Dorothy, the de facto supervisor for the Colored Computer group, keeps trying fruitlessly to get a title and raise to go with her added responsibilities. She also has to teach herself and the others in her group how to program computers in order to save their jobs when NASA prepares to shift to electronic computers, though it means stealing



a book from the public library, since there are no computer manuals in the "colored" section. To get the engineering degree that's been denied her, Mary sues to attend a white high school that's the only place in the area that offers the courses she needs.

The bulk of the film's focus is on Johnson, a brilliant mathematician who makes it out of the Colored Computer ghetto, tapped to join the men in the high-status room when they need a computer to check figures aimed at sending the first American into space, only to find challenges at every turn. Half the numbers she's supposed to double-check are blacked out, supposedly because she doesn't have security clearance, by her supervisor, Paul Stafford (Jim Parsons), who's outraged by the notion that she might know more about anything than he and his men, and the run-walk she has to take to the one "colored" bathroom on campus forces her to be away from her desk for extended periods when she's supposed to be churning out figures.

Their white supervisors display a realistic range of reactions to the women, from Stafford's catty stiff-arming of Johnson to the casual neglect of Stafford's boss, Al Harrison (Kevin Costner), who only cares about getting the best possible results, regardless of who delivers them, but is too preoccupied to notice the roadblocks Stafford keeps throwing in Johnson's way. In a satisfying exchange inside a ladies' restroom, Dorothy's icily obstructionist boss, Vivian (Kirsten Dunst), says that she has "nothing against y'all," to which Dorothy drily responds: "I know. I know you probably believe that."

The women's dogged refusal to cede their places on a team that keeps trying to reject them is a moving display of heroism, and a constant source of dramatic tension. Johnson gets a few opportunities to blast at the ignorance and prejudice she faces, most notably in a scene toward the end when she stands ramrod straight in a roomful of oblivious white men and speaks her truth, but the real triumph of Henson's performance is her articulation of Johnson's pent-up frustration in all its pained dignity. Black women simply couldn't function in that time and place if they voiced their anger at every insult, and

Henson makes clear the effort required to maintain Johnson's self-control, from her determined trot on those long treks to the bathroom, clutching her work to her chest, to the way she pauses to tamp down her anger before speaking or tightens her lips when observing some new outrage.

The treatment of the women's personal lives is far weaker. The actors who play Johnson's young children are so wooden that Henson might as well be acting against a green screen when she appears with them. The dialogue is more baldly expository in these scenes too, like when Johnson tells her three girls that their dad is "with the angels," so "I have to be Mommy *and* Daddy." Mahershala Ali is sadly underutilized as Johnson's suitor, whose presence in her life consists of three scenes: the one where they meet at a church barbecue and he insults her by implying that women can't do science; the one where he apologizes and they slow dance; and the one where he proposes while her family serves as a picture-perfect backdrop.

Scenes like those give the women's lives a sense of pat predictability and triumphal inevitability that sells their achievements short, as does the one where Katherine finally tells Harrison why she's taking those long "breaks" during the day and he reacts by marching over to the "colored" bathroom to knock down the sign and declare all of NASA's bathrooms color-free from that day forward. If only change came that quickly and easily.

This will rent as well as **MOONLIGHT, RACE, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, SNOWDEN** and **THE BIRTH OF A NATION.**



4/11 2 LION DRAMA \$20 MILL BO
700 SCREENS **PG-13** 118 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Dev Patel (SLUM DOG MILLIONAIRE, THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL, THE LAST AIRBENDER)
Nicole Kidman (EYES WIDE SHUT, QUEEN OF THE DESERT, STRANGER LAND, THE INVASION, TRESPASS)

Emerging from sleep on a decommissioned passenger train somewhere between Madhya Pradesh and Kolkata, five-year-old Saroo (Sunny Pawar), separated from his brother, Guddu (Abhishek Bharate), rightly panics, the locomotive's whistle enveloping his screams. Twenty years later, emerging from the sea off the coast of Australia, the young man he's become (played by Dev Patel) is the picture of calm, sleek and stoic in a jet-black wetsuit despite the crash of the waves. Garth Davis's *Lion* depicts much of the journey between these two moments, and then turns to Saroo's quest to retrace his steps, but it's their juxtaposition that signals the film's central purpose, which is to construct a character poised between two places, two selves. A staunch melodrama, imperfect but undeniably moving, *Lion* is riven by images of one man's two worlds, and propelled by his need to suture them together.

On the strength of Pawar's winsome, puckish performance, exhibiting his might by lifting a chair, then a bike, before striking his chest with his fist, the film's first act sets the fearful particulars of Saroo's story—street urchins, human traffickers, a positively Dickensian state orphanage—against the boy's keen intelligence, ably navigating between oppressiveness and triumphalism. The boy is trapped aboard the train until it reaches its destination, 1,500 kilometers away from his home, and his nighttime adventure with Guddu segues into a nightmare of lost children and bureaucratic neglect, yet Davis approaches his subject tenderly; when Saroo mimes slurping soup to a man in a restaurant window, the warmth of their connection offers a merciful glimpse, however fleeting, of kindness in cruel circumstances.



As adapted by Luke Davies from Saroo Brierly's memoir *A Long Way Home*, *Lion's* deft handling of the child's externalized emotional states, muting the familiar excesses of similar sagas, nonetheless seems too restrained, even chilly, when the film flashes forward to Saroo's adulthood. Adopted by a devoted Australian couple, John and Sue Brierly (David Wenham and Nicole Kidman), Saroo comes to embrace both his new parents' heritage and, after a fashion, their quiet reserve: When he decides to search for his biological brother and mother (Priyanka Bose), he's so protective of the Brierlys' feelings that the suspense of the film's early, India-set scenes soon dissipates, as if wrapped in the wet-suited Saroo's preternatural poise. In contrast, his dissolute adopted brother, Mantosh (Divian Ladwa), erupts in startling rages and fits, underlining the film's abrupt loss of momentum; against the organic force of young Saroo's displacement, the reliance on such fireworks to stoke the family's simmering trauma is clumsy, if not exactly cheap.

By the time *Lion* swings back in the direction of more commanding sentiments, culminating in Sue's affectingly frank description of an adoptive mother's pain, the film appears smaller, more formulaic, than the sum of its parts, though Saroo's return to India is certainly rousing. Despite underusing both Kidman and Rooney Mara, as Saroo's girlfriend, Davis's direction at least gestures at a fuller understanding of transnational identities. *Lion* crafts, through a series of fitful glimpses, a sense of the correspondences between its two settings, and not simply the juxtapositions, and as a spot-lit bridge in Melbourne becomes a predawn analogue in Saroo's birthplace, or as Tasmanian dunes melt into Indian hills, it's hard not to credit the attempt, if only partly successful, to see Saroo as a man in two places at once.

"We weren't blank pages, were we?" Saroo says of Mantosh and himself, and the film, preferring a palette of ochres and mahoganies to the bombastic color of Danny Boyle's [Slumdog Millionaire](#), is admirably attuned to the nuance of both/and, rather than the ease of either/or. *Lion's* faults of structure and pacing might limit its power, but in stretches it still roars.

This will rent as well as did **THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, MOONLIGHT, SHUT IN, and THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS.**

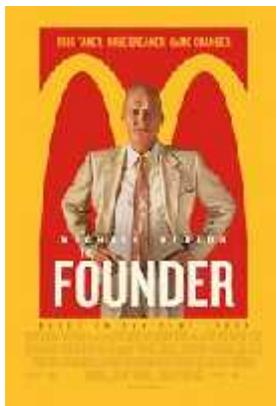


4/11 1 **MONSTER TRUCKS** FAMILY
\$36 MILL BO 2657 SCREENS PG/105 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Scuttlebutt has it that *Monster Trucks* was conceived by the four-year-old son of former Paramount president Adam Goodman. Certainly the film's premise bears this out: disgruntled high school senior Tripp (Lucas Till) may just realize his dream of leaving his Podunk town behind after befriendng Creech, a gas-guzzling extraterrestrial that suggests Toothless the dragon with Cthulhu tentacles. The screenplay, though, is by Derek Connolly, the adult male who conceived of Bryce Dallas Howard running from rampaging dinosaurs in high heels. As in *Jurassic World*, traits of the most exaggerated variety hang from characters like baubles: Barry Pepper's Sheriff Rick is introduced—in a show ostensibly meant to explain Tripp's contempt for him—wiping away the fingerprints that Tripp's mother, Cindy (Amy Ryan), leaves behind on his cop car after she leans in for a kiss. Would that the film's characterizations were as obsessively compulsive as Rick's behavior. In a scene featuring Milton Bradley's electronic game Simon, the filmmakers charmingly wink at the story's self-evident debt to old-school Spielberg. But that sense of nostalgia is ultimately a reflection of how little the film asks of its audience. If *Monster Trucks* ever feels thorny, it's unintentional so. This is a film that pushes its female characters to the sidelines as if they had cooties, cartoonishly admonishing Big Oil while hypocritically fetishizing the gas-guzzling appetite of a cute and cuddly machine-creature hybrid.



This will rent as well as **THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE, TROLLS, STORKS, PETE'S DRAGON and THE BFG.**



4/18 2 THE FOUNDER DRAMA
\$15 MILL BO 1867 SCREENS **PG-13** 115 MINUTES
DVD /BLU RAY

Michael Keaton (BIRD, MR. MOM, BATMAN, CLEAN AND SOBER, WHITE NOISE, MULTIPLICITY, SPEECHLESS)

As the film opens in 1954, Kroc is a balding, Dale Carnegie-worshipping small-time operator still searching for the magic gizmo or idea that will make him rich. He finds it in a family-owned hamburger stand in San Bernadino, California, where brothers Mac (John Carroll Lynch) and Dick McDonald (Nick Offerman) have essentially invented the fast-food industry. Kroc convinces the reluctant brothers to let him franchise their business, though the differences in their values signals trouble from the start: Kroc is enamored of the brothers' wholesome-sounding name, streamlined menu, and "Spee-dee" system of assembling and serving food, but he's blind to the importance of the high-quality ingredients they see as one of their main draws.

Though nominally in charge, the brothers quickly lose their power as Kroc builds a business empire of his own around the McDonald's brand, ignoring Mac and Dick's orders whenever he finds them inconvenient. When Kroc proposes that McDonald's can save money by making milkshakes with water and a powdered mix instead of ice cream and milk, the brothers are horrified. Dick barks at Kroc, "We are not interested in a milkshake that contains no milk!" At which point Kroc sends the mix to every McDonald's franchise.

The Founder leaves open important questions, like whether Kroc was even responsible for the towering success of the chain he stole from the brothers and then claimed to have founded. Were his relentless salesmanship, his gift for branding, and the methods he developed of controlling and standardizing his franchises responsible for the chain's triumph? Or was Kroc's financial manager, Harry J. Sonneborn (B.J. Novak), the real brains behind the business? According to the film, Kroc was barely breaking even until Sonneborn convinced him that he should be in the real estate business, not the burger business, shifting his focus to owning the land the franchises are built on.



If we're not sure how he got there, though, Keaton leaves no question as to how Kroc reacted to his gargantuan success. The actor narrows his eyes and clips his speech to show Kroc growing more confident as he grows rich, shedding what little consideration or humility he once had as his ego swells along with his bank account. In one chilling scene, he erupts at Mac McDonald, telling him he's too nice to succeed in business. Business, he says, leaning into his speakerphone with venomous intensity, is "dog eat dog, rat eat rat. If my competitor was drowning, I'd go over and put a hose right in his mouth." It's a powerful performance marooned in a wishy-washy story.

The story of a former laughingstock turned business mogul who used patriotic hokum and outright lies to create a myth around himself and his business is prototypically American, and the McDonald brothers' losing battle could be seen as a stirring early bugle call to the now-widespread campaign against the empty calories and corporate homogenization that have become synonymous with fast food.

This will rent as well as **MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, DON'T THINK TWICE, FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS, SNOWDEN** and **WAR DOGS**.



4/18 2 SLEEPLESS THRILLER

\$23 MILL BO 2236 SCREENS R 95 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Jamie Foxx (HORRIBLE BOSSES 2, RAY, DJANGO UNCHAINED, THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN 2, DREAMGIRLS)

Jamie Foxx stars as Vincent Downs, a hard-nosed narcotics detective who knocks off a trafficker with the help of his partner Sean (T.I.) before picking up his estranged son Cortez (**Markell Watson**) for basketball practice. Big mistake — the kid is captured in broad daylight, Downs stabbed, and the plot set in motion. Apparently Vegas has a limited coke supply, even for an amount we are told is peanuts, and soon local kingpin Rob Novack (**Scot McNairy**) calls upon his father's old pal, casino boss Stanley Rubbino (**Dermot Mulroney**) to fill an order. The quickest way possible is to kidnap Downs' kid, forcing him to deliver the coke in exchange for his son — but if only it were that easy. When the pieces snap together, the film falls under its own weight as Downs tries to have it all (like everyone in the film) by saving his kid, taking down the mob, and cleaning up his own department. You can instantly imagine how that ends up.

Enter Jennifer Bryant (**Michelle Monaghan**) an internal affairs detective whose lost meth lab bust was, indeed, a bust — and she's got the scars to prove it. She partners with Doug Dennison (**David Harbour**), a fellow cop who tries to get her to do things by the book, advising her that she just can't remove evidence at will. The drama largely unfolds in the confines of the fictional Luxus casino on the Vegas strip, sandwiched between Trump International and Planet Hollywood. Despite having the usual amenities — dance clubs, a spa, and restaurants — it lacks a sophisticated security system. It's no wonder Stanley runs such a loose organization.



This will rent as well as **ALLIED, DEEPWATER HORIZON, PERFECT WEAPON, BEN HUR, and SNOWDEN.**



4/18 1 SPLIT THRILLER

\$118 MILL BO 2983 SCREENS PG-13 117 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

James McAvoy (X-MEN: APOCALYPSE, VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN, TRANCE, WELCOME TO THE PUNCH)

The opening abduction scene in *Split*, in which Kevin Wendell Crumb (James McAvoy) kidnaps three teenage girls in a parking lot, displays a mastery of filmmaking economy and grace: M. Night Shyamalan uses only a handful of camera setups and almost no dialogue—just a well-placed thump or two. It tells more with what it doesn't show, obscured by a raised car trunk or in a rearview mirror, than what it does. Such sophistication is typical to Shyamalan's work; if his visual language were written, there would be no adverbs, and the sentences would be concise yet dance with poetry.

Of course, Shyamalan is also a writer, and therein lies his trouble: He's a master of form and a jack of content. Detractors, particularly of less popular films like *The Village* and *The Happening*, have more beef with the silly scripts and self-serious tone than the editing or cinematography. I thought he could win over naysayers by directing scripts he didn't write, but his choices in other people's material proved as questionable as his own. His dreariest films, *The Last Airbender* and *After Earth*, were for-hire. *Split*, though, is the most Shyamalanian movie in almost a decade, for better and worse. It's personal and outlandish, with questionable themes, riveting plotting, somber storytelling, a supernatural twist, elegant construction, and fine performances.

Jessica Sula and Haley Lu Richardson are good in that taken-for-granted horror-movie-victim way: They convincingly feel extreme emotions of fear, confusion, and exhaustion. But Anya Taylor-Joy does something more intensely controlled; her character keeps her wits, though just barely, looking for and to create opportunities for escape. The real draw, though, is McAvoy, who has the sort of chewy role actors kill for: Kevin has dissociative identity disorder—23 personalities, with a 24th in the works. We see McAvoy play about eight of these distinct characters, including an older woman, a pompous academic, an extroverted fashion designer, a tense perv, and—the funniest and strangest—a nine-year-old boy named Hedwig. Nothing in *Split* is as creepy as Hedwig/Kevin's eager yet contorted face during a hip-hop dance.

A literal cult of personalities develops inside Kevin's head, calling themselves The Horde, controlling the host body and believing that a Beast is coming to feed on privileged young women. This gets at the film's central theme: that trauma can break you, but it can also make you, giving you the skills needed to survive under duress and thus an advantage over sheltered suburbanites. In the end, the last girl standing is literally saved by her scars. There might be something discomfitingly romantic about this outcome, as though we should cultivate harm in order to improve ourselves. But maybe it just falls under the rubric of "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

THIS will rent as big as **ARRIVAL, HACKSAW RIDGE, NOCTURNAL ANIMALS** and **THE ACCOUNTANT**.





4/25 1 THE BYE BYE MAN HORROR
\$31 MILL BO 2687 SCREENS PG-13 96 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Douglas Smith (MISS SLOANE, TERMINATOR GENYSIS, HARD DRIVE)

The horror genre has a long tradition of torturing its young protagonists, punishing them for indulging their curiosities about the impending freedoms of adulthood. Forays into the realm of the unsupervised are often fueled by booze, sex, and drugs, with characters cutting loose and breaking rules before their inevitable slaughter by some ghoulie lurking just off screen. The young people in director Stacy Title's *The Bye Bye Man*, however, are notable for mostly having their shit together, at least on the surface.

Elliot (Douglas Smith), his girlfriend Sasha (Cressida Bonas), and his childhood best friend, John (Lucien Laviscount), are college students in Wisconsin who decide to rent a suspiciously large house together off campus in an effort to simulate the adult lives they already feel prepared for. Saddled with a wife and daughter, Elliot's older brother, Virgil (Michael Trucco), attends the trio's housewarming party and warns Elliot about the dangers of growing up too quickly. "I missed out on all this," he says, gesturing expansively to include all of the young, attractive, boozed-up guests, implying that his little brother should enjoy his freedom before settling down, even though Elliot insists all he wants is to start a family. Then both of them watch Sasha and John dancing together, perhaps salaciously, while Virgil quips, "Good thing you're not the jealous type," planting the seeds of the film's ultimate assertion that maybe these characters aren't as well-adjusted as they imagine themselves to be.

Enter the Bye Bye Man (Doug Jones), a haunting that gets inside the heads of his victims and refuses to relinquish control, his power increasing with every utterance—and every thought—of his name. The hopeless refrain of his victims is "Don't say it, don't think it," even as they realize the impossibility of that task once the haunting has taken hold in their psyche. The Bye Bye Man forces his victims to imagine horrors beyond their wildest dreams and drives them to commit terrible acts against themselves and others, and the only way to stop him is to kill everyone who knows his name.

Stacy Title's *The Bye Bye Man* ends up succeeding most deftly as an advertisement for on-campus housing.

The film's opening sequence is a harrowing flashback to the most recent mass murder inspired by the necessity of eliminating the Bye Bye Man once and for all, but the titular horror is resurrected when Elliot sees the seemingly innocuous name carved into the drawer of a nightstand in the newly rented house (a piece of furniture previously owned by the mass murderer in the flashback, it turns out). Elliot repeats the name out loud to his friends during a séance following the housewarming party, which begins as a ritual cleansing of the house at Sasha's request—she's heard a few spooky noises and doesn't want to take any chances—but becomes much more sinister once the Bye Bye Man enters the fray. What follows is the rapid disintegration of the film's central relationships: Elliot begins to suspect John and Sasha of having a secret love affair, suspicions inspired by false images and sounds produced by the Bye Bye Man, and all three of the house's new residents are quickly undone by the Bye Bye Man's influence on their thoughts and actions.

This will rent as well as **OUIJA: ORIGIN OF TRUTH, LIGHTS OUT, THE CONJURING 2, NERVE, THE SHALLOWS and 10 CLOVERFIELD LANE.**





4/25 1 UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS SCI/FI

\$33 MILL BO 2987 SCREENS R 91 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Kate Beckinsale (ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING, TOTAL RECALL, CONTRABAND)

Cutting a clear path away from 2012's [Underworld: Awakening](#), which saw Selene given an all-powerful hybrid daughter named Eve, the opening minutes recap events from the first couple of movies, mostly ignoring what came later. We learn that Selene sent Eve away for her own protection, but really it feels like the franchise trying to get away from the one interesting development it has ever had. The problem is that what replaces it, an internal Vampire feud ala **Game of Thrones**, isn't nearly as compelling.

Selene, whose blood holds certain magical properties just like Eve and her royal colleague David (Theo James, who reluctantly returned to the series), is an outcast hunted by vampire and Lycan alike. Only now the Lycans are more organized than ever thanks to an unstoppable new leader named Marius (Tobias Menzies), who has them on the verge of wiping out the vampires forever. Marius' strength will look very familiar to long-time fans of these movies, and it'll probably give a clue where things are headed. Self-preservation, along with a desire to keep everyone away from her daughter, brings Selene back into the fold to train the next generation of Death Dealers, but she gets swept up in a blood feud that threatens to destroy them all from within. The greatest threat is the seductive High Council member, Semira (Lara Pulver), who desires greater power. Don't they all?



The vampire politics is probably the most boring yet prevalent aspect of these movies. Every single film has it, and you just wish they would get on with the fighting, which is always a strength. Taking over as director this time is Anna Foerster (an [Outlander](#) vet, just like Menzies) who continues the icy blue atmosphere and high body count of the previous chapters. If only they had attempted to do more with the Lycans, who barely ever turn into werewolves. Instead they look like a bunch of construction workers in flannel jackets firing machine guns at skinny Brits dressed like runway models. The action choreography is still gorgeous, with Beckinsale's Selene gliding through the battlefield with wondrous ease. Beckinsale's continued commitment to this role is one of the things that makes [Underworld](#) tough to hate. She could be doing much better things but it's clear she loves these movies, and invites her fans to love them, too. Others such as Charles Dance, Menzies, Pulver, Bradley James, and James Faulkner (again, all Brits!) lend a Shakespearean gravity to silly dialogue about blood, blood, and more blood.

Underworld: Blood Wars ends with a major character's apparent demise, and a perfect chance to close the books on these movies once and for all. But at least one more movie is teased at the same time, so this probably isn't the last we've seen of Selene. While **Underworld's** blood may have grown thin, as long as Beckinsale sticks around there will be one reason to see the Vampire/Lycan war continue. This will rent as well as **SHALLOWS, OUIJA, ARRIVAL, DON'T BREATHE, and LIGHTS OUT.**