



4/3 FATHER FIGURES COMEDY \$19 MILL BO
2902 SCREENS R 113 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
COMBO WITH DIGITAL CODE

**Owen Wilson (INHERENT VICE, BOTTLE ROCKETS, LITTLE FOCKERS, HALL PASS, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM, YOU ME AND DUPREE)
Ed Helms (HANGOVER, VACATION, WE'RE THE MILLERS, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN)**

Daddy wasn't there to take them to the fair or change their underwear. Brothers Peter and Kyle Reynolds (**Ed Helms, Owen Wilson**), have long believed their father to have died of cancer, never knowing him. He's become somewhat of a mythical figure to Peter, who's dedicated his professional life to him, becoming a proctologist just like his old man.

Or at least, that's what his mother, Helen (**Glenn Close**), told her sons. As it turns out, their father is alive, believed by Peter to be an actor who carries the same facial



features as the man in his photo. Of course, it's not that simple, and this leads the brothers down a road to find who is partially responsible for bringing them into this universe.

This will rent as well as **NEIGHBORS 2, HOME AGAIN, HOUSE, GOING IN STYLE** and **HOW TO BE A LATIN LOVER**.



4/3 INSIDIOUS: THE LAST KEY HORROR
\$69 MILL BO 2871 SCREENS PG-13 103 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY BLU RAY WITH DIGITAL COPY

Leigh Whannell (KEEP WATCHING, THE BYE BYE MAN, COOTIES, INSIDIOUS: CHAPTER 2)

Like *Insidious: Chapter 3*, *The Last Key* is also a prequel, going back as far as 1953, in New Mexico, when the series's resident psychic, Elise (Lin Shaye), is a little girl living in a big house with an enormous basement, all the better for the filmmakers to stash secrets upon secrets. The house is on the grounds of a prison, allowing Elise to commune with men on the electric chair and assorted other local spirits. Back in the present—2010, just before the case in the first film—Elise is called to investigate paranormal activity at that childhood home, where an evil spirit murdered her mother (Tessa Ferrer) and from which she eventually ran away. Her inner demons are manifest as literal, external demons, whom she confronts while also confronting her memories, particularly the physical abuse from her cartoonishly sinister, prison-guard father (Josh Stewart), who tried to beat her gift out of her.

Shaye approaches her role with her usual gravity and dignity, though she lacks a star's screen-dominating power, coming off as a supporting character who just happens to be in almost every scene. Elise tries to right old wrongs and help people or spirits she once let down. Among them are her little brother, Christian (played by Bruce Davison as an adult), whom she left behind when she ran away, now old and gray and resentful. Elise is also accompanied by her usual Guy Fridays, Tucker (Angus Sampson) and Specs (Leigh Whannell, who also wrote this film's screenplay), who provide copious, oft-needed comic relief, though by the end of the film it's not that funny anymore: Christian has two daughters (Caitlin Gerard and Spencer Locke) who become potential romantic partners for the two sidekicks, but the excessive attention the awkward adult men pay to these young women—who seem to be teenagers—feels pervy and gross where it's intended to be charming and cute.



But *The Last Key* often doesn't go where you'd think. Midway through it becomes in part a kidnapping thriller, like *Room* told from the point of view of the people who found the victims. Eventually, it becomes clear that there's a point to these plot developments, that they circle back to the film's deeper themes and mythology, and that it's also not as laughable as you assumed that Elise's childhood home has barely changed in 50 years—same furniture, appliances, wallpaper, children's toys—as though it had been abandoned following a Chernobyl-like event. At first, characters such as the kidnapper and the mean dad seem to be reminders that there's plenty of real-world evil to negate the need for supernatural films like this one. But in the end, Robitel and Whannell explain away these evils as just a couple of cases of demonic possession, invalidating human agency and individual responsibility for otherwise unfathomable cruelty. And that's a moral cop-out.



This will rent as well as **FRIEND REQUEST, GEOSTORM, MOTHER, ATOMIC BLONDE, GIRLS TRIP** and **DARK TOWER**.



4/10 ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD

DRAMA \$26 MILL BO 2123 SCREENS R

132 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

DVD AND BLU RAY WITH DIGITAL CODE

Mark Wahlberg (DEEP WATER HORIZON, DADDY'S HOME 2, TED 2, LONE SURVIVOR, THE FIGHTER, DATE NIGHT)

The role of J. Paul Getty, as portrayed in Ridley Scott's *All the Money in the World*, is meant to be larger than life, larger than the film itself. The man should anchor our interest in the production, giving its quasi-nonfictional account of John Paul Getty III's 1973 kidnapping in Rome its raison d'être.

Christopher Plummer offers a respectably competent performance in the part, but you will still wonder what the film was like before Kevin Spacey was removed from it. As released, *All the Money in the World* is by and large a conspicuously manufactured thriller that moves between manipulative psych-outs. Officials find a burned body that might be that of Getty's teenage grandson—but it's not! Investigators figure out where Paul is being held—but he's not there anymore! And so on for more than two hours.

Plummer's Getty is warm to a point but more concerned with his fortune, power, and dynasty than with the people in his midst; when first informed of Paul's abduction, he dismisses the messenger, because the markets are open, and he has ticker tapes to examine. He wanders Roman ruins and declares himself Hadrian reincarnated. This may be an accurate depiction of the real-life Getty, but it comes across in the film as a caricature of chilly wealth.



Mark Wahlberg, indicating varying levels of seriousness by whether his eyeglasses are on or off, plays Chase, an ex spy who works for Getty by negotiating oil deals with Saudi royals and other Mideast kahunas, brought on to find and retrieve Paul without spending hardly any of Getty's money. As Gail, Paul's mother and Chase's de facto partner, Michelle Williams is convincingly furious and terrified as her character negotiates with kidnapers as well as her former father-in-law, who refuses to give up a cent to free his own flesh and blood. She could have dominated a fascinating film of her own, but instead she's relegated to sharing just a third of it, and she's overshadowed to the point of practically disappearing.



Part of that shadow is cast by Paul (Charlie Plummer, no relation to Christopher) and his relationship with the lead kidnapper, Cinquanta (Romain Duris), who at one point tells him with an indeterminate accent that he doesn't understand Americans, because apparently they're not all consumed by their families as Europeans are. Cinquanta and his band of criminals, lolling in the Italian countryside, form an interesting parallel to Getty; they're a bunch of small-time hustlers, like him looking to make a buck anyway they can, even if it's investing in a kidnapping. In the film's world, no one seems to come by money honestly, but at least the crooks have each other.

All the Money in the World ends with several scenes that reject Getty's money-first, family-last worldview. Chase gives Getty a finger-wagging speech about how money isn't everything; Paul is returned alive, after a lengthy foot chase (which, incidentally, didn't happen in real life) through narrow, medieval Italian streets; and Gail inherits Getty's money and art, which she can give away

and found museums with. But all the happy endings in the world wouldn't make this tasteless exercise any more palatable.

This will rent as well as **KINGSMEN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE, WIND RIVER, KIDNAP, THE ZOO KEEPERS WIFE.**



4/10 THE GREATEST SHOWMAN MUSICAL
\$146 MILL BO 3254 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX
DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO

Hugh Jackman (MAMMA MIA !, LOGAN, X-MEN: THE APOCALYPSE, SWORDFISH, PRISONERS, THE WOLVERINE)

Zac Efron (BAYWATCH, NEIGHBORS 2, DIRTY GRANDPA, PARKLAND, NEW YEAR'S EVE, 17 AGAIN)

In the latter half of the 19th century, Phineas Taylor Barnum (Hugh Jackman), whose early traveling circus paved the way for his emergence as one of the world's first and foremost circus owners, thrived as a politician, a writer, and, some might say, a charlatan. But director Michael

Gracey's slick, relentlessly bombastic musical *The Greatest Showman* would have you believe that he lived solely for the pleasure of entertaining. Barnum's many contradictions and personae are just too much for the film to process. Here, every character exists only to bring his dream to life, and almost every musical number is an exaltation of his ingenuity, the sole exception being "Rewrite the Stars," a love song between Zac Efron and Zendaya's characters that, ironically, is the film's most technically impressive, emotionally gratifying sequence.



In condensing Barnum's life into a generic rags-to-riches story, as well as taking great liberties with the timeline of many real events, *The Greatest Showman* mythologizes Barnum as a kind-hearted soul who celebrates and humanizes his various "curiosities," specifically little person General Tom Thumb (Sam Humphrey) and bearded lady Lettie Lutz (Keala Settle), while ignoring the blatantly exploitative nature of the business practices which helped make these individuals famous. The film never presents itself as a historical biopic so its fudging of dates and facts isn't inherently problematic. Yet the filmmakers perpetually reframe Barnum's ruthless, self-aggrandizing tactics as minor flaws that those closest to him overlook because of an unflappable desire to see him achieve his dreams.



In the film's second musical number, "A Million Dreams," Barnum sings to his wife, Charity (Michelle Williams), "I think of what the world could be/A vision of the one I see," to which Charity, who's already given up a life of luxury to marry him, responds in complete deference: "You may be right, you may be wrong/But say that you'll bring me along." These lines aren't only a perfect summation of Charity's lack of agency, but also that of Barnum's band of "oddities," who remain ever grateful to him for

bringing them into the public spotlight, where they're greeted with immediate respect and acceptance rather than seen as the "freaks" that Barnum actually marketed them as.

The P.T. Barnum of *The Greatest Showman* is a capitalist Übermensch disguised as a man of and for the people, a swindler whose relentless self-promotion is masked not only by the absurd degree that nearly everyone fawns over his greatness but also by the songs that praise his egalitarian legacy. Even the pretentious theater critic who scorns Barnum early in the film comes around by the end, telling him that his work is a celebration of life. This revisionist hagiography plays like an Ayn Randian tribute to good old-fashioned ingenuity and hard work, where Barnum is the John Galt single-handedly holding the nascent showbiz world upon his shoulders and everyone from his wife to his employees exists either to support him or to get out of his way. Although the film appears to be constructed as a showpiece for Jackman's song-and-dance skills, its spectacle is overshadowed by its archaic and misguided notions of American exceptionalism.

This will rent as well as **DESPICABLE ME 3, CARS 3, NUT JOB 2, PIRATES: DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES, and CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS.**



4/10 MOLLY'S GAME DRAMA
\$31 MILL BO 2348 SCREENS R 140 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO combo has digital copy

Jessica Chastain (THE ZOOKEEPERS WIFE, CRIMSON PEAK, THE MARTIAN, INTERSTELLAR)
Kevin Costner (FIELD OF DREAMS, THE BODYGUARD, DRAFT DAY, 3 DAYS TO KILL, THE COMPANY MAN)

Aaron Sorkin deep dives into self-parody from the opening moments of *Molly's Game*, with underground poker organizer Molly Bloom (Jessica Chastain) introducing herself by way of a resumé recitation, recounting her achievements in high school and as an Olympic-class skier before managing to turn her recovery from scoliosis surgery into a testament to her talent. The notion of life itself being subject to meritocratic evaluation has long been a running theme of Sorkin's work, which often barrages viewers with a list of bona fides in an effort to stress the impressiveness of an individual. But that setup works better when applied to White House staffers, web innovators, and other figures whose actions have social consequences, less so when stacking the deck, so to speak, in favor of a backroom game-runner.

It's to the advantage of *Molly's Game* that Chastain slips effortlessly into Sorkin's walk-and-talk rhythms and brings more spark to his writing than it's enjoyed in years. Molly, nurtured with a childhood of intense study and sports practice, possesses a ruthless focus that lends her a taut body language during poker games, all programmed charm and strict business talk, a sense of impatience with the foibles of others. She regularly dismantles her clients' excuses and their sexual advances with a measured tone that betrays only exasperation when she has to shut someone down more than once.



If Sorkin's prose style is most successful at enumerating the petty, anal aspects of his plots, it proves deadly when blatantly airing out themes. Intercut scenes of Molly defending herself from an F.B.I. investigation feature superstar lawyer Charlie Jaffey (Idris Elba), who agrees to represent her despite his contempt for her profession because he finds moral value in her refusal to compromise the professional and private lives of her players by selling lurid details to enrich herself. In a series of disturbing rants, Charlie insists that authorities should focus on "real" criminals instead of Molly, as well as warns his self-pitying client, who's willing to go to jail to avoid surrendering any sensitive information on her players, that women's jails are places for "drug dealers who get raped by prison guards," not the likes of some sweet and (mostly) innocent figure like her. Later, when Charlie expresses doubts about subjecting his own daughter to the same kind of rigorous parenting that she received, Molly offers up the ridiculous story about a woman she knew who worked as an escort solely to get a Chanel bag as proof that, if anything, Charlie should be even stricter with his child.



This will rent as well as **THE DARKEST HOUR, LBJ, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, LAST FLAG FLYING and DETROIT.**



4/10 PHANTOM THREAD DRAMA
\$17 MILL BO 1936 SCREENS R 130 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX DIGITAL
COPY WITH THE COMBO

Daniel Day-Lewis (MY LEFT FOOT, LINCOLN, THERE WILL BE BLOOD, THE BOXER, GANGS OF NEW YORK, THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS)

Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread* devotes a significant amount of time to acclimating us to the House of Woodcock, ostensibly run by Reynolds Woodcock (Daniel Day-Lewis), a renowned dressmaker in 1950s-era London. Anderson drinks in the stylish townhouse where much of the film takes place, framing a spiral staircase in worshipfully low angles as Reynolds's maids, seamstresses, and models ascend it each morning to commence in the ritual of their work. These svelte montages, accompanied by Jonny Greenwood's hypnotic score, viscerally communicate the profound fulfillment that an artist derives from knowing that everything is in the right place at the right time.

Few films are this alive to the equilibrium that many artists require in order to create, mainly those lucky enough to be spoiled. Artists work in subjective realms, and often require lives that are ritualized so as to allow their minds to bloom. Such a life serves more than work, as artists are often control freaks riven with anxiety and social awkwardness that must be put to rest by the calming waves of routine. Watching *Phantom Thread*, one might think of the relationship between Alfred and Alma Hitchcock and their many secretaries and actresses, as documented by Donald Spoto's *The Dark Side of Genius*.



Anderson introduces Reynolds to us as he undergoes his daily dressing regiment, lingering on the character's process with a reverence that's both anthropological and masturbatory. Reynolds pulls his colorful socks over his legs and snips ear and nose hair, erecting the formidable exterior that's seen by sycophants and associates alike. Breakfast is a prized portion of the day, allowing Reynolds to sketch and collect his thoughts, while serving as a primary stage for his passive aggression, which Day-Lewis physicalizes with a fey and reedy accent that hums with a quivering sing-song intensity. A lover on her way out of the House of Woodcock pleads for Reynolds to notice her, and he responds by scolding the woman for her preference for sweets. When Reynolds later loses control of his emotional thermometer, however, he takes a voracious bite out of a Danish. Such details ground the audience in Reynolds's oscillations of mood and aspirations toward self-control, allowing us to think we know him, though he remains vibrantly recessive. Such a delicate balance between explicitness and vagueness is central to Anderson's filmography and pivotal to its roiling psychological undertow.



The couple's first date is a remarkable series of nesting duels that recalls Lancaster's interrogations of Freddie in *The Master*. Anderson's films have grown divisive, in part, for their understanding of relationships as being inescapably rooted in emotional and political power, with courtship suggesting a merging of acquisition and pageantry. Reynolds and Alma engage in coded riddles, and one senses that Alma speaks Reynolds's language more than he expects, spurring an uncomfortable sense of discovery that disrupts his anal-retentive notion of safety. *Phantom Thread* is emotionally unmooring because we feel protective over Reynolds and Alma simultaneously; his creative realm is so passionately defined that we become attached to it, yet we know that it drains women in Alma's vulnerable position.

Reynolds is the unquestioned vessel of power in this relationship. He's the great man seducing the ingénue, though Alma's conscious of this stereotypical arrangement and seeks

to subvert it. Anderson fashions one of his subtlest, most astonishing set pieces out of Reynolds's measuring of Alma for a dress: The camera glides along the measuring tape, enjoying her body less than his ability to seize control of the moment by embracing his art. In this moment, Reynolds is every artist who dreams of the women who fame would net him, yet when he's alone with a woman, he retreats into his head. This sequence is a sex scene in which Reynolds makes love to himself in front of Alma, luxuriating in his talent and ability to assume her into his tapestry of perfection, in which beauty's packaged in a process of transcendental and repressive consumption that's enjoyed by men as well as women.

Phantom Thread partially concerns how men mold women to suit their fantasies, ironing out inconvenient strands of personality to arrive at figures who embody living dolls, though it flips that idea on its side to show a woman who does her own molding. We're in the gothic territory of Henry James and Hitchcock, with a 21-century acknowledgement of female power. Alma's initiation into the House of Woodcock suggests Rebecca's journey into Manderley, with Reynolds's sister, Cyril (Lesley Manville), fulfilling the forbidding and menacing functions of a Mrs. Danvers figure. The configuration of actors affirms this impression, as Krieps is a gifted discovery who finds herself working opposite of icons, as Joan Fontaine did in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. Yet Anderson uses *Rebecca* as a red herring, as *Phantom Thread*'s surprises often center on its deviations from such a template. Cyril's a more nuanced creation than Danvers, serving as Reynolds's manager, caregiver, and twin founts of common sense and sporadic decency. She's his figurative wife.

This will rent as well as **DARKEST HOUR, LADY BIRD, MARSHALL, STRONGER, THE GLASS CASTLE, THE BIG SICK, JACKIE**



4/10 PROUD MARY ACTION
 \$24 MILL BO 2167 SCREENS **R** 89 MINUTES
 DVD/ BLU RAY WITH DIGITAL BLU RAY

Taraji P. Henson (HIDDEN FIGURES, THINK LIKE A MAN TOO, LARRY CROWNE, DATE NIGHT)

For a few minutes, Babak Najafi's *Proud Mary* suggests a sexy and earthy modernization of the blaxploitation thriller. As the opening credits roll, hitwoman Mary (Taraji P. Henson) showers and suits up for work, in black leather, while the Temptations's "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone" plays on the soundtrack. This brief moment of erotic reverie capitalizes on Henson's agency and magnetism, proving that she can stand alongside the likes of Richard Roundtree and Pam Grier without breaking a sweat. And like those

icons, she's *most* fascinating in repose. But *Proud Mary* can't compete with the likes of Gordon Park's *Shaft* and Jack Hill's *Coffy*, as it's a so-so action melodrama with an insulting whiff of generic blaxploitation stylistics.



The time is ripe for the resurgence of blaxploitation, as the racist, classist conditions that inspired the genre remain uncorrected. Loose and sleazy, the blaxploitation film is about an oxymoronic mood of empowered hopelessness, in which people of



color beat the Man at his own rigged and exploitive game. These films have many offshoots, but almost all have vigilantes at their center: black equivalents to the reactionary white avengers of Michael Winner's *Death Wish* and Jack Siegel's *Dirty Harry*. Blaxploitation is less about plot than the opportunity to revel in the

personalities of the actors, the visceral grit of the streets, and the romanticism of the soundtracks, a few of which remain legendary.

This will rent as well as **ROMAN J. ISRAEL ESQ., THE FOREIGNER, AMERICAN ASSASSIN, BLOOD MONEY, and HITMAN'S BODY GUARD.**



4/17 THE COMMUTER ACTION \$41 MILL BO
2784 SCREENS **PG-13** 105 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY **BLU RAY WITH DIGITAL COPY**

Liam Neeson (TAKEN, TED 2, A WALK AMONG THE TOMBSTONES, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, LOVE ACTUALLY, BATMAN BEGINS)

For *The Commuter*, director Jaume Collet-Serra shrewdly casts longtime collaborator Liam Neeson, who recently announced (again) that he's retiring from action movies, as a middle-class man struggling through a sudden layoff. In what's surely no coincidence, the justification that Neeson cited for his retirement to reporters at last year's Toronto International Film Festival—"I'm sixty-fucking-five"—has found its way into *The Commuter's* dialogue almost verbatim. "I'm 60 years of age," pleads

Michael MacCauley (Neeson) when given the axe by his boss at the Manhattan insurance firm where he's worked as a salesman for more than a decade, implying that he's not yet old enough to weather his remaining years without financial stability. Where the real Neeson appears to be resolute in his decision, MacCauley is a bundle of nerves as he's booted from the deceptive comfort of a high-rise office building to the grimy swarms of a New York gripped by recession-era anxiety.

An uncommonly perceptive genre filmmaker as gifted with minutia as he is with spectacle, Collet-Serra holds MacCauley's moment of existential dread in close-up just long enough to allow us to process the creases and wrinkles on Neeson's face, which alone put the film's defining dilemma into clear focus. MacCauley is a guy who's paid his dues enough to deserve a stress-free release from



40-hour-a-week drudgery but who's found himself in a time that rewards only con men. And he's not an isolated case. In its bravura credit sequence, which fleetly crosscuts through 10 years of MacCauley's morning routine until a sense of despair sets in, *The Commuter* implicitly links its main character's life circumstances with those of his fellow passengers on the Metro-North train he boards every day to and from the city, a locomotive bursting with wage slaves from the outer boroughs—a manifestation, quite simply, of the put-upon American middle class.

The film's plot involves the intrusion of unfamiliar parties aboard the train—namely, a mysterious woman named Joanna (Vera Farmiga), her elite henchmen, and a few persons carrying suspicious cargo. When Joanna, putting on a flirtatious front, solicits MacCauley's participation in a social experiment that will allegedly involve a cash prize, she elicits his disbelief, but when the hefty sum of money is found stashed away in a bathroom, only a brief giddiness precedes MacCauley's realization that he's found himself in the wrong company. The malicious game he's stumbled into requires that he zero in on the train's non-regulars and interrogate them by whatever means necessary until he's found a passenger with a valuable item in his or her bag, at which point he must terminate them—all before a specified stop, or else his wife and son will be killed. In effect, he's forced to go on the offensive against fellow travelers who exist in much the same state of vulnerability as himself, a scenario whose allegorical dimension—one-percenters stoking anxiety and antagonism in the lower classes for their own gain—is strongly apparent.

From this lucid and politically sturdy foundation, Collet-Serra begins flexing his muscles as a storyteller and a stylist, dialing up the screenplay's Agatha Christie-esque sense of intrigue while experimenting with myriad point-of-view effects and thoroughly developing the atmosphere of his constrained location. With only momentary exceptions—a police search that temporarily leaves our hero's whereabouts unknown, a cutaway to a depopulated train platform that interrupts a screeching climactic set piece—the audience is never separated from MacCauley's limited perspective, which is further compromised and complicated by perpetually shifting late-afternoon light, cabins that jolt in and out of alignment with the curve of train tracks, and the unspoken social boundaries of the train. Collet-Serra devises a number of tricky technical maneuvers to approximate his protagonist's growing immersion and paranoia: speed-ramped tracking shots that snake through the train's aisles and whip-pan from window to window, CGI-aided camera moves that glide through hole-punched tickets as though attached to homing missiles, and hallucinatory zooms across the train's entire length that seem to be feverishly materializing MacCauley's mental map.

Meanwhile, the taunts come fast and furious. First there are those of the train itself, which is slyly peppered with advertisements that mock MacCauley's predicament—"If you see something, say something"—and is staffed by attendants who either are actively unhelpful (Killian Scott's spineless slacker)



or know MacCauley too well to not be apprehensive about his peculiar behavior (Colin McFarlane's wise conductor, a role that feels terrifically lived-in). Then there's Joanne's persistent calling from a remote spot. She keeps reminding her victim of the stakes of the agreement and twice even orchestrates a civilian killing just to prove that she's omniscient and isn't kidding around. The rate at which Farmiga's character goes from amiable weirdo to amoral supervillain isn't wholly convincing, nor is a good portion of the plot's scaffolding (Joanne's coterie of rogue employees, for one, is a real head-scratcher), but Collet-Serra keeps the action so grounded in MacCauley's frenetic toil that, in the moment, any lapses in logic that occur around him end up just feeding the woozy, humid, paranoid atmosphere.

This easily will rent as well as **ONLY THE BRAVE, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, AMERICAN MADE, DADDY'S HOME 2, JIGSAW, and KINGSMEN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE.**



4/17 PADDINGTON 2 FAMILY
\$44 MILL BO 2978 SCREENS PG 104 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX DIGITAL
COPY WITH COMBO

VOICES OF Hugh Grant, Ben Winshaw

Before its release three years ago, *Paddington* might not have seemed like a promising proposition. A live-action adaptation of Michael Bond's series of children's books, it suggested another cash-grab cannibalization of a beloved book property, the British answer to such dreadful early-aughts Dr. Seuss adaptations as *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and *The Cat in the Hat*, only with a computer-generated bear in the place of Mike Meyers wearing a creepy cat suit. But thanks to director Paul King's oddball vision, the film turned out to be one of the most charming, stylish, distinctive, and genuinely funny children's movies in recent memory—a film that honored Bond's original stories while infusing them with a madcap sensibility all its own.

Now it turns out that the film was merely a prelude to the gloriously daffy absurdism of *Paddington 2*, a wilder, weirder, funnier, more heartfelt and eye-popping, and, above all, more fully realized representation of King's eccentric sensibility. Fusing the pastry-shop aesthetic of Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* with Chaplinesque slapstick and a whimsical, fable-like approach to narrative, King plops us into a world out of time—one full of carnivals, pop-up books, junk shops, steam engines, and calypso bands that magically appear out of nowhere to sing songs about window washing.

Set a few years after the events of the first film, *Paddington 2* sees the red-hatted, blue-raincoated Paddington (voiced by Ben Whishaw) settled into his life with the Brown family. He's also an integral member of the local community. For his Aunt Lucy's (Imelda Staunton) 100th birthday, the bear resolves to send her the perfect gift: an antique pop-up book of famous London sights. But before he can save up enough to buy it, the book is stolen by Phoenix Buchanan (Hugh Grant), an aging actor now reduced to appearing in dog food commercials. Worse, Paddington is accused and convicted of the theft, after which he's sent to prison, living alongside intimidating inmates like Knuckles—or "Nuckel's" as it's misspelled on his tattooed fists—McGinty (Brendan Gleeson). Meanwhile, the Browns desperately scramble to solve the crime, catch the real thief, and clear Paddington's name.



Will rent as well as **NUT JOB 2, DESPICABLE ME 3, COCO, FERDINAND and CARS 3.**



4/24 DEN OF THIEVES THRILLER
\$46 MILL BO 2845 SCREENS R 140 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO COMBO WITH DIGITAL COPY

Gerard Butler (LONDON HAS FALLEN, THE BOUNTY HUNTER, THE HURT LOCKER, 300, SHATTERED, LAW ABIDING CITIZEN)

The film first intersects its cops and thieves when gruff wildcard Nick Flanagan (Gerard Butler), self-proclaimed leader of a group of rogue cops known as the Regulators, threatens Donnie (O'Shea Jackson Jr.), the driver for a group of thieves, trying to force him into revealing information about future crimes. After spending a lengthy stretch of time expounding the reasons for Donnie's involvement with bank robbers, the film all but abandons this thread and shifts focus toward Merriman (Pablo

Schreiber), the icy, dick-swinging Iraq War veteran who heads the group of thieves, and the mind games he plays with Nick, who's now on their tail at every turn.

From a chest-puffing confrontation at a sushi joint and a bro-down at a gun range, to Merriman showing up at Nick's home to display his unwillingness to back down, Christian Gudegast's film is overly eager to position these two hot shots as two sides of the same coin, a la



Robert De Niro and Al Pacino's characters in *Heat*. But no moral shading is injected into these characters, who are defined almost entirely by their macho bluster. Nick is a corrupt cop who cheats on his wife, but we never get a sense of whatever code guides his actions, just as we never understand whatever drove Merriman into his life of crime and as such might explain his cool, collected demeanor.



By the time this epic sequence spills out into the traffic of an L.A. street, *Den of Thieves* almost deserves comparison to *Heat*, at least on the level of craft.

This will rent as well as **LADY BIRD, ONLY THE BRAVE, DADDY'S HOME 2, THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE, and WIND RIVER.**



4/24 FOREVER MY GIRL MUSICAL DRAMA
\$17 MILL BO 2134 SCREENS PG/BLU RAY

Alex Roe (HOT SUMMER NIGHTS, RINGS, THE 5TH WAVE)

Bethany Ashton Wolf's *Forever My Girl* opens with a young musician, Liam Page (Alex Roe), leaving his fiancée, Josie (Jessica Rothe), at the altar to pursue fame and fortune in the wake of his first single starting to get regular radio play. Cut to eight years later and Liam is the biggest name in country music, performing to packed houses, having sex with groupies, and being catered to by an eager yet underappreciated staff. But he still carries a piece of his past with him: a beaten-up old flip phone that contains an eight-year-old voicemail from Josie. It's a message that he professes to have listened to every day since it was left but to which he never bothered to respond.

Although Liam hasn't set foot in his hometown or talked to a single friend or family member in nearly a decade, *Forever My Girl* would have its audience believe that he not only regrets his rash decision to up and leave, but also broods over it between gigs and hooking up with random fans. The film abounds in such confounding behavior, which often stems less from anything resembling psychological realism than from the story's constant need to hit predestined beats leading up to a predictably wholesome finale.

The arrogant, self-obsessed Liam becomes caring and selfless from the moment he's back in his old stomping grounds, a transformation that's explained away by his discovery that Josie had his daughter, Billy (Abby Ryder Fortson), who he didn't know about because he never returned Josie's phone call all those years ago. Still, if Liam's metamorphosis is abrupt, it's also somewhat reasonable given how rooted it is in paternal instinct.

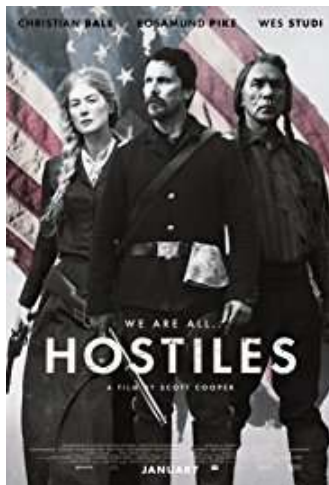


But Josie's drastic emotional leap from punching Liam when she first saw him in town to fawning over him after he has two play dates with the precocious Billy defies even the film's already shaky internal logic. When Josie agreed to let Liam spend time with their daughter, she wisely warned him that nothing romantic would ever happen between them again. Yet, with minimal effort on Liam's part, Josie is almost immediately swept off her feet, going from outright rejecting Liam one day to asking him for the full "Liam Page experience" the next. And so he whisks her away on a helicopter to a red-carpet event.

Were this the only leap of faith that Josie executes, she could be forgiven for simply wanting to make amends with the father of her child and take a long shot on an old flame. But when Liam messes up again, leaving both Josie and Billy behind without notice, only to return to plead his case once more, her forgiveness reveals deeply troubling dependency issues that lead her to not hold Liam accountable for his own actions simply because he's "the one."

That *Forever My Girl* sees this reconciliation as a sign of Josie's strong faith in people rather than a potentially harmful character flaw goes to show just how naïve the film's notions of love and fate really are. In the end, the film is less reminiscent of a country song than of Radiohead's "True Love Waits": "I'll drown my beliefs/To have your babies...Just don't leave/Don't leave." And you have to wonder if Ashton Wolf actually thinks this is what true love is like.

This will rent as well as **LET THERE BE LIGHT, ALL SAINTS, TULIP FEVER, and THE HERO.**



4/24 HOSTILES ACTION

\$31 MILL BO 2243 SCREENS R 134 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY DIGITAL COPY WITH THE BLU RAY

Christian Bale (THE FIGHTER, THE BIG SHORT, 3:10 TO YUMA, AMERICAN HUSTLE, THE PRESTIGE, THE DARK KNIGHT)

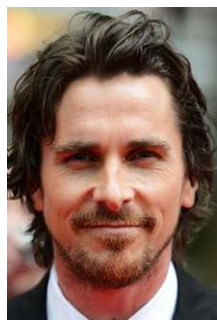
It's 1892 and Captain Joseph J. Blocker (Christian Bale) is a celebrated army hardass known for his brutal killing and capturing of Native American warriors throughout the West. At a prison in New Mexico, Blocker is ordered to transport an incarcerated Cheyenne chief, Yellow Hawk (Wes Studi), to his rightful home in Montana, so that he may succumb to his illness in peace and dignity. Blocker and Yellow Hawk were once rivals, having slaughtered many of one another's allies, and now find themselves in an awkward position of collaboration as they make a dangerous journey. This is the theme of many American westerns, though Cooper approaches the material with belabored solemnity.

Rio Bravo, *Stagecoach*, and *Unforgiven* illustrate how a microcosm of society actually functions. *Hostiles* only accords Blocker prominence, and he's played by Bale with the same clenched mannerisms that have defined his acting for 20 years. Bale's caged ferocity can still be unnerving, particularly when Blocker confronts a pacifist (Bill Camp), but he's still an actor who's desperately in need of a role that doesn't allow him to fetishize disconnection. Studi is a magnificent presence, as always, but he's stuck in the role of the noble Native American who, by befriending a white soldier, implicitly lets European ancestors off the hook for their legacy of atrocity.



Blocker and Yellow Hawk's bonding might have been moving if Cooper had dramatized it, but the arc of this relationship isn't on screen. At the beginning of the film, Blocker is so averse to helping Yellow Hawk that he's willing to risk a court martial. After a few skirmishes with the Comanche, Blocker and Yellow Hawk exchange respectful glances, as if they don't already know of their respective formidability on the battlefield. Remarkably, Yellow Hawk evinces no bitterness about his situation as a prisoner, along with his family, of whites who invaded his land, as we're meant to identify with Blocker's resentment of Native Americans who were presumably fending off intrusion. Cooper's aware of the thorniness of this situation, as he wishes to mount a traditional cowboys-versus-Indians film that can be acceptable in the 21st century. A modern film can't, and shouldn't, celebrate whites killing Native Americans, and so it must feature other tribes on the whites' side who "approve."

Cooper exhausts himself trying to render *Hostiles* politically correct, though the film would be more convincing and vital if he'd indulged his genre-fueled fantasies without so much equivocation. Fantasies are more revealing when they're indulged without irony. It's now fashionable to criticize John Ford's films for their imperialist lack of empathy—a complaint that misses the point of the astonishing energy of the director's formalism, which offers a revealing portrait of cultural moors without apology. *Ulzana's Raid* and *Unforgiven* are disquieting for their refusal to solve social problems for us, as they dramatize the kinetic and ambiguous cruelty of American warfare, which is an extension of politics. There are several scenes in *Hostiles* in which white soldiers elaborately apologize to Native Americans for stealing their land, and, while poignant, they feel like a sop to contemporary priorities.



This will rent as well as **MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, ONLY THE BRAVE, KINGSMEN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE, STRONGER, WIND RIVER, BEGUILLED, and ACT OF VIOLENCE.**



4/24 MAZE RUNNER: THE DEATH CURE

SCI/FI/ACTION

\$58 MILL BO 2768 SCREENS PG-13 142 MINUTES

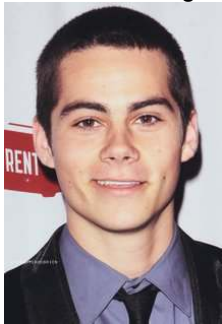
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO

Dylan O'Brien (AMERICAN ASSASSIN, DEEPWATER HORIZON, MAZE RUNNER, THE INTERNSHIP)

Like its predecessors, *The Death Cure* charges out of the gate on its preordained path. The opening sequence, in which the ever-fraught Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) and his crew put into motion a well-executed plan to free a group of Immunes from a curiously outdated train, is like most things in this series just a setup for another setup. (In this case, the sequence anticipates a later rescue mission that culminates in an effectively unexpected gag involving a bus's "Out of Service" light.) As Minho (Ki Hong Lee) isn't on the train, Thomas charges recklessly toward the Last City, where WCKD experiments on Immunes inside a steely tower located behind a wall that, per the dictates of Dystopia 101, keeps the haves away from the have nots.

That sort of class division isn't of any real concern to *The Death Cure*, which is three parts action and one part robotically delivered platitudes. Even the obligatory Big Bad's spiel that Janson (an unembarrassed Aidan Gillen) delivers near the film's end doesn't illuminate whatever insidious logic went into deciding who got to live on which side of the wall. At one point, Thomas and Newt (Thomas Brodie-Sangster) marvel at the Last City's steely infrastructure, which is so different from anything they've ever seen before. Their astonishment is understandable, yet there's no curiosity in their eyes. As the film doesn't give a sense of how this world—where people appear to dress only in suits and walk from jobs unknown to homes unseen—fundamentally sustains itself, it's impossible for Thomas's ostensible desire to build a future in opposition to the Last City's ideals to resonate with moral purpose.



But *The Death Cure* isn't even concerned with seriously grappling with the belief that WCKD's experiments might be necessary by virtue of potentially being life-giving. The film is quick to get to the Last City just so it can rub would-be messiah Thomas up against two old friends turned rivals turned allies again, Aris (Jacob Lofland) and Theresa (Kaya Scodelario), for the express purpose of yoking doubt to an exhausting string of climaxes. These scenes should be emotionally fraught, but even those familiar with the series will still struggle to get a sense of these characters' emotional pasts.

This will rent as well as **JUSTICE LEAGUE, AMERICAN MADE, ONLY THE BRAVE and ATOMIC BLONDE.**



4/24 THE POST THRILLER \$76 MILL BO
2987 SCREENS PG-13 115 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX DIGITAL COPY WITH THE
COMBO

Meryl Streep (SUFFRAGETTE, JULIE & JULIA, SHE-DEVIL, SOPHIE'S CHOICE, SILKWOOD, THE DEER HUNTER)

Tom Hanks (SULLY, BIG, YOU'VE GOT MAIL, CAPTAIN PHILLIPS, THE TERMINAL, MONEY PIT, THE GREEN MILE)

No American film since David Fincher's *Zodiac* has exhibited such a love for the way information travels than *The Post*. Steven Spielberg's film is an ode to an era when newspapers—with their crotchety reporters and editors, connected and well-heeled owners, democratic values, and broadsheet features—were a literal part of the social fabric, lining parlor couches and billowing through windy city streets. This enthusiasm for the printed page extends to the work behind it: Whenever a big rotary phone sets to ringing, Janusz Kaminski's camera hurtles toward it, waiting for the news it will bring. *The Post* rarely hesitates to capture the urgency of the moment, situating the newspaper business at one of its pivotal moments: a showdown with the Nixon administration after Daniel Ellsberg (Matthew Rhys) leaks the Pentagon Papers to the country's major newspapers.



At the same time, Spielberg's historical thriller is an admirably nuanced portrait of an industry that is, despite its claims to constitutional righteousness, a business built on money and connections to those in power. (This is very much in keeping with the spirit of *Lincoln*, the first in the director's recent trilogy of Capraesque explorations of American values.) Quite a bit of *The Post* explores these tangles, largely through the perspective of Katharine Graham (Meryl Streep), a scion of *The Washington Post's* longtime owners, the Meyer family, who became the paper's publisher after the 1963 suicide of her husband, Philip. Graham's paper, edited by the firebrand Ben Bradlee (Tom Hanks), is respected but modest, and her push to expand the paper's influence by making it a public company comes to a head the very week that Ellsberg has a shoebox full of classified documents detailing decades of presidential deceptions about Vietnam War policy placed on the desk of one of *The Washington Post's* assignment reporters.

The Post is almost queasily at home in the corridors and garden parties of power, even as it attempts to portray Graham's struggles as the lone woman in boardrooms full of men in dark suits whispering to one another. The film goes to slightly embarrassing lengths to underline the heroism of Graham's reputation-making decision to publish the Pentagon Papers, and the filmmakers trot out their other blatantly extraneous female characters (Graham's daughter, Lally, and Bradlee's wife, Tony, respectively played by Allison Brie and Sarah Paulson) to testify to her bravery. If Spielberg struggles to create a palpable tension from Graham's travails as a woman struggling to achieve the respect that her position should afford her, it has little to do with Streep's performance, all stiff cheekbones, barely



stifled anxiety, and delightful, at times incredibly suspenseful fluttering diction. What plagues the film is its fevered approach to all of the script's myriad moral dilemmas, which are missing a critical sense of scale and proportionality.

Spielberg's affection for shoe-leather journalism and the printed word is infectious, and it's designed to be: This is a work whose most compelling puzzle consists of a roomful of reporters trying to piece together thousands of pages of documents that have been submitted to them out of order. Even when the director takes it too far—unceasingly pushing his camera through hallways and into ringing phones, or tilting up to the ceiling and spinning around a morally conflicted Graham—his curiosity is never less than winning, and his direction has rarely felt so energetic, giddy with scenes of overlapping dialogue and deftly orchestrated, impromptu conference calls.



4/24 12 STRONG ACTION
\$41 MILL BO 2987 SCREENS R 130 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX COMBO
WITH THE DIGITAL CODE

Chris Hemsworth (THOR: RAGNORAK, GHOSTBUSTERS, RED DAWN, SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN, CABIN IN THE WOODS)

In late 2001, the United States launched its military operations in Afghanistan with a covert mission to seize the key northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif. Flash forward 16 years and that event now serves as the basis for the starry-eyed *12 Strong*. Meanwhile, America is still fighting the same damn war. But you'd hardly know that from watching this rah-rah recruitment film for the U.S. Army, which endeavors to look away from all the horrors associated from the American occupation of Afghanistan in order to return us to those halcyon days just after 9/11, when everything seemed so simple: The U.S. was good, al-Qaeda was bad, and the invasion of an impoverished country most Americans couldn't even locate on a map was a purely just and righteous act.

And so, *12 Strong* begins with a montage of terror attacks set to gloomy drone music, which attempts to soothe the audience's potential pangs of conscience by reminding us that Osama bin-Laden started this thing. We then meet Mitch Nelson (Chris Hemsworth), a rugged, all-American Special Forces captain on leave from the military, moving into a new house with his wife (Elsa Pataky) and daughter (Marie Wagenman). After he witnesses the 9/11 attacks on TV, Mitch storms over to the local Army base and demands to be reinstated with his Green Berets unit, known as ODA 595. And soon enough, after a bit of bureaucratic tussling, the 12-man team is parachuting into Afghanistan, where they will lead local Northern Alliance forces to seize Mazar-i-Sharif from the Taliban, which would become the U.S.'s first major victory of the war.



It's worth noting that in a film chock-full of death, the murder of this one girl is the only truly memorable moment of violence. Depicted in tight close-ups, with a grisly fascination that borders on pornographic, the scene deviates sharply from the rote, video-game-like violence of the film's battle sequences, in which masses of faceless Taliban fighters drop to the ground like flies as tiny traces of CGI blood spurts into the air before quickly vanishing. Fuglsig particularly revels in the destruction caused by bombing raids, which he often captures in sweeping aerial shots that give us a bird's-eye view of the awesome might of the American empire. That the men who die in these battles might not be purely "evil," that they too might have families, friends, and lovers, is a nuance that *12 Strong* doesn't care to discern. The enemy here is just that, existing merely as foils for our American heroes.



As Fuglsig doesn't allow any complicated thoughts about war, colonization, and mortality to hover around his characters, *12 Strong* inevitably proceeds as a jaunty imperial adventure through the wilds of northern Afghanistan as Mitch and his men sleep in caves, ride horses through mountains, mock locals (before bonding with them, of course), and, in the film's money shot, charge their steeds into glorious battle like latter-day Lawrences of Arabia. Only Northern Alliance General Abdul Rashid Dostum (Navid Negahban) touches on some of the gloomier aspects of our military's designs on his country, making the obligatory observation that this land has long been "the graveyard of empires." But Fuglsig isn't interested in probing such matters. For *12 Strong*, Afghanistan isn't so much the graveyard of the U.S. empire as its playground.

This will rent as well as **ONLY THE BRAVE, AMERICAN MADE, THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE, THE FOREIGNER and AMERICAN ASSASSIN.**