

**8/2 3 THE BRONZE COMEDY**  
\$1 MILL BO 1127 SCREENS **R** 100 MINUTES  
DVD/BLU RAY

**Melissa Rauch (TV—THE BIG BANG THEORY, TRUE BLOOD—FILM—ARE YOU HERE)**  
**Gary Cole (TV—THE GOOD WIFE, VEEP, FAMILY GUY, ARCHER)**

Within minutes, Hope Ann Gregory's (Melissa Rauch) putrid egoism is effectively established, as the former sports hero is seen fingering herself while watching footage of her heroic Olympic performance, in which she won a bronze medal in gymnastics while enduring a torn ACL. Wearing her old warmup suit and surrounded by endless memorabilia, she represents an image of humanity that's the exact antithesis of, well, hope.

Humor often hinges on subverting audience expectations, and even gross-out farces have the potential to surprise. The story, which follows the Kerri Strug-like Hope as she desperately clings to fame while living in Amherst, Ohio with her nebbish father (Gary Cole), offers a typical coming-of-age narrative, and its humor is beholden to an Apatow-esque mixture of sophomoric raunch and rom-com clichés. Hope, too, suggests a gender-flipped version of *Eastbound and Down's* Kenny Powers.

The prevailing attitude behind Bryan Buckley's film can be boiled down to a simplistic idea: the cruder, the better.



This will rent like **MCARTHUR USA, EDDIE THE EAGLE, RACE, CREED, and MY ALL AMERICAN.**



**8/2 1 KEANU COMEDY**  
\$23 MILL BO 2654 SCREENS **R** 100 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Keegan-Michael Key (TV—ARCHER, BOB'S BURGERS, WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY, HOUSE OF LIES)**

After opening with an action-movie flourish, the film drops a kitten on Rell's (Peele) doorstep. For no reason, really. It's just irrepressibly cute and Rell takes it to heart instantly, pulling himself up from the funk of a breakup and reigniting his artistic endeavors as he poses the kitten he quickly names Keanu in a variety of famous film tableau for a calendar. He's unaware that the cat actually belongs to a powerful drug lord, but when Rell and his bestie, Clarence (Key), come back from their bro date to find the kitten's been kidnapped by a dealer named Cheddar (Method Man), they immediately roll into the underworld in hopes of finding him, even though neither looks like they could win a fight against *Malcolm in the Middle*-era Bryan Cranston, much less the film's pair of *Breaking Bad*-inspired silent hitmen.

Key and Peele aren't mining territory they haven't already explored at length on their Comedy Central sketch show, nor do they do a whole lot to elaborate on it. *Keanu's* basic joke is the satiric spectacle of two nerds who, by cashing in their faces (to borrow a pointed Stevie Wonder lyric), successfully sham their way through a farce of exaggerated black masculinity. They contort their mouths to force the n-word out and sag their pleated khakis as far as their belts will allow (roughly two inches), their body language suggesting every muscle group is about to give into the former of the fight-or-flight response.



The physical spectacle of their subterfuge gives Key and Peele plenty of opportunity to showcase their chops. (The look on Key's face after Clarence attempts to flip backward against a wall is indelible.) But the social implications of their charade never delve beyond skin-deep. Imagine the scene in *Silver Streak* when Gene Wilder has to put shoe polish all over his face to evade authorities, with Richard Pryor coaching him how to be black, stretched out to feature length. Only here Key and Peele are effectively playing Gene Wilder playing Richard Pryor. *Keanu* is declawed by design, but it's hard not to wonder what the cat could've dragged in.

This will rent as well as **GOOSEBUMPS, MINIONS, MAX, HOME, and ZOOTOPIA.**



**8/2 2 THE LOBSTER COMEDY**  
**\$4 MILL BO 857 SCREENS R 119 MINUTES**  
**DVD/BLU RAY**

**Colin Farrell (SAVING MR. BANKS, WINTER'S TALE, HORRIBLE BOSSES, IN BRUGES, TOTAL RECALL)**  
**Rachel Weisz (YOUTH, OZ THE GREAT AND POWERFUL, THE BOURNE LEGACY, 360, THE LOVELY BONES)**

The title derives from main character David's (Colin Farrell) choice of animal when asked what he'd like to turn into if, after 45 days at a particular hotel, he fails to find a mate. From that nutty premise, Lanthimos and co-writer Efthymis Filippou, for a while at least, hit upon some genuinely provocative truths. These characters take the need for human companionship as a given, and some of them go to desperate lengths to find their match—like a limping man (Ben Whishaw) who fakes a nosebleed problem simply to make it with a particular woman with a similar “defining characteristic.” This focus on merely superficial similarities to try to force a romantic connection especially resonates in our digital age, with the increased emphasis on creating online personas and making instant impressions.

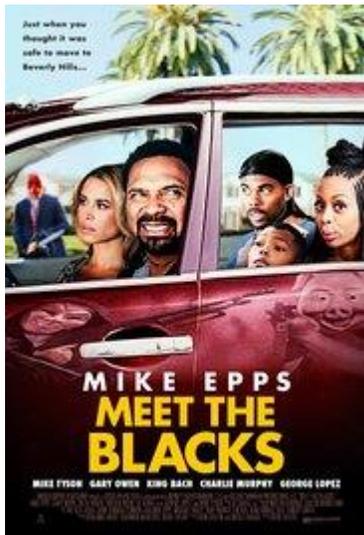
Even more than that, *The Lobster* fundamentally questions the need for nuclear coupledness in the first place—a challenging notion that's brought into sharper focus in the film's second half, after David escapes from the hotel and joins a group of “loners” in a nearby forest, all of whom are made targets of hotel residents in periodic hunts. The group's ice-cold leader (Léa Seydoux), however, militantly frowns upon romantic connections of *any* sort—which is bad news for David, as he meets an unnamed woman (Rachel Weisz) who immediately takes a liking to him.

Essentially, *The Lobster* becomes a more conventional tale of forbidden love, but one given the demented Lanthimos touch—evident not only in the extremely deadpan manner in which these people address each other, but in the whole new system of gestures the two lovers are forced to create in order to communicate with each other (at least until the Loner Leader tries to have her way with them). In its own skewed way, this also feels accurate to human nature, with the courtship process often dependent as much on reading subtextual clues as on making outright public declarations.

And yet, as intelligent, often hilarious, and occasionally insightful as it is, *The Lobster* also shows a filmmaker's style—the unnervingly distanced compositions, the deliberately flattened line deliveries, the shocking bursts of violence—hardening into shtick.

*The Lobster* may be about characters yearning to move beyond ideological extremes into uncharted emotional and physical terrain, but beyond a few unexpected sparks of life thrown out by the actors, the film itself remains remarkably pinched, both emotionally and intellectually. Any correspondence to the real world is strictly of the viewer's own inference, because the ultra-controlling Lanthimos isn't about to lay his cards on the table in at least even a sliver of an attempt to directly confront his audience with his supposedly oracular human insights. Perhaps, in the end, it isn't only the characters in *The Lobster* who refuse to look beyond their own preconceived notions.

Renters of **HAIL CAESAR!**, **JOY**, **TUMBLEDOWN**, **LADY IN THE VAN**, **ST VINCENT**, and **BIG STONE GAP**.



**8/2 3 MEET THE BLACKS COMEDY**  
\$10 MILL BO 1125 SCREENS R 94 MINUTES  
DVD/BLU RAY

**Mike Epps (FIFTY SHADES OF BLACK, STEALING CARS, HANGOVER III, JUMPING THE BROOM, NEXT DAY AIR, SOUL MEN)**

When the Black family inherits a million bucks, they leave Detroit and everyone their debts and issues behind for a much better life in Beverly Hills. However, what they do not understand is that it is the annual purge night in the city, wherever all crime is legal for twelve hours. Whereas they will not comprehend the purge, all their former enemies in Detroit know all too well. When one, especially, comes searching for Dad's fortune claiming it's truly his, daddy suddenly has got to face all the individuals from his past who have a significant ax to grind. They are available to purge him. However, daddy has no plans to offer up his cash or his new position in life. He and his family attempt to keep and fight. Daddy is forced to face all his recent nemeses from Detroit who have come back to track him down, and it's quite a colorful cluster together with his baby mama, weed dealer, and pastor to call some. However, due to Dad's quick thinking, them with success make it through the night. And although daddy learns that his relative already spent most of the fortune, they're brought nearer along as a family for it. But then, the doorbell rings- it is the house agent searching for the primary payment on the house. The Black quickly clean up and head for Camp Crystal Lake.

This will rent like **THE PERFECT MAN**, **JUMPING THE BROOM**, **HELP**, **BAGGAGE CLAIM**, **FIFTY SHADES OF BLACK**, **RACE**, **DIRTY GRANDPA**, **KRAMBUS**, **RIDE ALONG 2** and **BURNT** did.



## 8/2 **1** MOTHER'S DAY COMEDY

\$33 MILL BO 2876 SCREENS **PG-13** 148 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE RED/BOX

**Jennifer Aniston (HORRIBLE BOSSES 2, CAKE, WE'RE THE MILLERS, WANDERLUST)**

**Julia Roberts (PRETTY WOMAN, CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR, RUNAWAY BRIDE, NOTTING HILL, EVERYONE SAYS I LOVE YOU)**

In the week leading up to Mother's Day, divorced mother of two Sandy (Jennifer Aniston) is blindsided by her ex-husband (Timothy Olyphant), who informs her he's married his much younger squeeze (Shay Mitchell). Sisters Jesse (Kate Hudson) and Gabi (Sarah Chalke) are hiding their families from their bigoted, homophobic parents (Margot Martindale and Robert Pine). Why? Because Jesse's married to an Indian-American doctor and Gabi is married to a woman.

Bigoted, homophobic parents who wear t-shirts emblazoned with the phrase "Hardcore American," drink beer called "American Light," and casually drop the slur "towelhead" with their thick Texas drawl are always hilarious in a breezy dramedy. This is the most curious string in the movie, painfully unfunny and lacking any nuance. At one point the sisters' mom and mother-in-law wind up on a Skype call. Mom is drinking a trusty ol' American Light. The Indian mother-in-law? An India pale ale. It's all cringe-worthy.

Elsewhere in Atlanta, widower Bradley (Jason Sudeikis) and his two daughters prep for their first Mother's Day without their wife/mother, while young mother Kristin (Britt Robertson) has reservations about marrying her baby daddy Zack (Jack Whitehall).

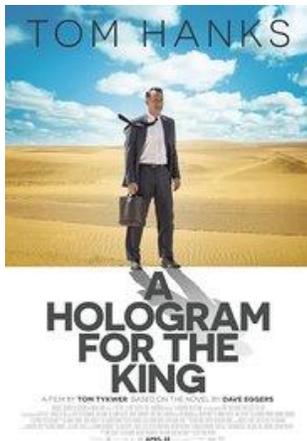
Bradley has to buy tampons for his blossoming daughter. Guess what? The cashier needs a price check... so embarrassing. His daughter also wants to drive mom's old car when she gets her license, something he's vehemently against it at the beginning of the film. No need to wonder how that scenario plays itself out by the end.

Kristin's cold feet derive from being given up for adoption as a baby and she says (out loud to an acquaintance), "I have abandonment issues." And, wait a minute, successful Home Shopping Network pitchwoman Miranda (Julia Roberts, reunited with *Pretty Woman* co-star Hector Elizondo as her agent) just happens to be in town. At first, Miranda may seem superfluous and not connected in any way to the motherhood theme, but... hmmm.

Aniston and Olyphant's relationship is the closest to feeling real, occasionally showing the logistic and emotional challenges of co-parenting. Though the biggest actual conflicts are Aniston overreacting to the new stepmom's cleavage and a child's minor medical emergency that conveniently puts everything in perspective.

This will rent as well as **NEIGHBORS, SISTERS, PITCH PERFECT 2, HOT PURSUIT, ALOHA,** and **PAUL BLART 2.**





**8/9 2 A HOLOGRAM FOR THE KING COMEDY**

**\$5 MILL BO 527 SCREENS R 98 MINUTES  
DVD/BLU RAY**

**Tom Hanks (SPLASH, TURNER AND HOOTCH, THE MONEY PIT, BIG)**

The author's Alan Clay has devoted a life to selling American-made wares and industrial good, but the book has him peddling a more abstract product (information technology) in a foreign land (Saudi Arabia). Struggling to finance his daughter's college education, Alan is burdened by failed marriages and poor professional decisions, and all of his existential angst takes on a physical manifestation, in the form of a massive growth on the back of Alan's neck. The globule between Alan's shoulders might as well be the weight of the world as he attempts to sell a holographic video conferencing system, for use in a proposed economic development zone far out in the desert, to the King of Saudi Arabia. Alan has claimed an obscure connection to the king (he once met the man's nephew) in order to finish the deal and restore his livelihood.

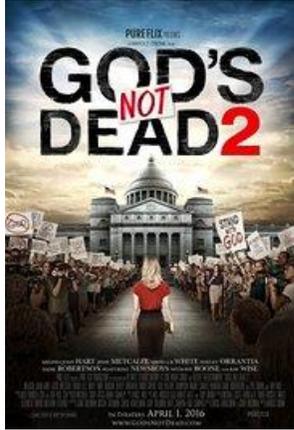
The film opens with a dream that plays like a bad commercial: To the tune of the Talking Heads's "Once in a Lifetime," Alan mocks the state of the American dream, watching his house and car disappear in puffs of purple smoke as he rides an endless rollercoaster. Though the film's Alan Clay (Tom Hanks) remains a failure, he also remains a chipper salesman, leading his cadre of IT lackeys through the relentless obfuscation of the Saudi bureaucracy with a slightly demented plastered smile and can-do spirit.

Alan's manic behavior is part and parcel with Tykwer's approach to the material. Rather than heightening the sensation of being a stranger in a strange land, the filmmaker emphasizes the routine of Alan's sojourn. In aggressively cut sequences, Alan greets a hotel concierge, empties piles of sand from his shoes, and retreats to a bottle of hooch illicitly obtained from a horny and free-spirited Dane (Sidse Babett Knudsen). After nights spent writing drunken emails to his daughter (Tracey Fairway), Alan oversleeps and hires an English-speaking driver, Hakeem (Dhaffer L'Abidine), to take him from the city out into an undeveloped future city. At every turn, potentially striking images (a drive through a pilgrimage to Mecca, a large black banquet tent in the desert) seem flat and mundane.

There's a bacchanalian party at the Finnish embassy, a trip to Hakeem's family home, and a series of flashbacks to Alan's divorce proceedings and his failed efforts to keep Schwinn manufacturing bicycles in America. These lurches made some sense in Eggers's novel, as the author presented a constellation of people that Alan has disappointed, but neither Tykwer nor Hanks prove to be very invested in exploring the middle-class American psyche through Alan's failings as a businessman and a father. Instead, every moment of levity in Eggers's book becomes an opportunity for a goofy flight of whimsy.

This will rent as well as **WHISKEY FOX TANGO, ZOOLANDER 2, DIRTY GRANDPA, SISTERS, BURNT** and **VACATION**.





**8/16 2 GOD'S NOT DEAD 2 COMEDY/DRAMA**  
\$23 MILL BO 2278 SCREENS PG 120 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Melissa Joan Hart (TV—MELISSA & JOEY, THE MYSTERIES OF LAURA, ROBOT CHICKEN)**  
**Jesse Metcalfe (TV—DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES, 2 BROKE GIRLS, DALLAS)**

Sequel to the faith-based hit feels less heavy-handed but still treats Christian belief as an argument to be won, and non-believers as villains to be crushed

The American Christian filmmaking industry currently runs on parallel tracks. Its success in the multiplex is represented by mainstream fare such as “Heaven is for Real” and “Miracles from Heaven,” yet it was jump-started by rough-hewn, cheaply made, independent releases such as “Fireproof,” and turned into a head-turning business concern by the box-office fire of “God’s Not Dead” and “War Room.”

Beyond the differences in production values and competency in execution, the two product streams represent a crucial contrast in tone. The films designed for a mass audience are quieter, more personal and less aggressive. They resist easy answers and, while assertively Christian, do not proselytize. The films made and seen primarily by Christian audiences, however, are much more likely to embrace the coded, often politically charged language of conservative Evangelicals. This is the world of the “God’s Not Dead” franchise.

That 2014 release reworked, to pointed effect, an urban legend centered on a Christian college student triumphing in a debate over the existence of God with an atheist philosophy professor. A decades-old story circulated around the internet, and, before that, in sermons and religious comic tracts from legendary publisher Jack T. Chick, its variations refresh themselves over time, yet have no basis in fact.



The sequel, though, attaches itself to a very real American political phenomenon, the upsurge in the number of states considering or passing religious liberty bills into law. Arkansas high school teacher Grace Wesley (Melissa Joan Hart, “Melissa & Joey”), in the course of a lesson about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, explains to students the Christian underpinnings of King’s philosophy of non-violence, and faces the loss of her job for doing so. Appropriate from a pedagogic standpoint, in a real classroom this statement of historical fact wouldn’t raise an eyebrow. Here, it becomes a referendum on the existence of God, and the public use of the name “Jesus.”

She engages the services of defense lawyer Tom Endler (Jesse Metcalfe, “Desperate Housewives”), while the prosecution (heavily implied to be from the American Civil Liberties Union) arrives in the form of character actor Ray Wise (“Twin Peaks”), a man whose face can turn demonic with the barest of smiles.

In a seemingly unrelated subplot — stay past the closing credits for an explanation — returning character Reverend Dave (producer David A. R. White, “Moms’ Night Out”) is subpoenaed and ordered to turn over copies of his recent sermons to local authorities. Naturally, he refuses, and since the film refuses to disclose any reasons for the subpoena, the audience is encouraged to assume that the widespread persecution of all Christians is at hand. In Arkansas.

A wild, barking dog of a movie, the first “God’s Not Dead” played both defense and offense, creating straw-man arguments, villainous non-believers, and the satisfying destruction of both. Returning director Harold Cronk, and screenwriting team Chuck Konzelman and Cary Solomon (“Do You Believe?”) have, this time around, chosen not to mess with success. Bolstered by more polished production values and a higher caliber cast of actors (Hart is an effectively sympathetic presence), the dialogue feels less like preaching

and more like true conversation between actual human beings. The outcome may be as predictable as before, but its courtroom drama features at least as much tension as a reasonably well-made episode of television.

However, in spite of Cronk's more assured filmmaking, "God's Not Dead 2" remains, first and foremost, loyal to an unstated message that will trouble all but its target audience: that conservative Christianity should not be merely one voice in American cultural discourse, but that it should enjoy uncontested dominion.

This will rent as well as **WAR ROOM, GOD'S NOT DEAD, TUMBLEDOWN, SHAUN THE SHEEP MOVIE,** and **THE LONGEST RIDE.**



**8/16 2 RATCHET & CLANK FAMILY**  
\$9 MILL BO 1492 SCREENS PG 94 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Tellingly, one of *Ratchet & Clank's* central messages revolves around a wide variety of colorful aliens who suggest that Ratchet slow down, whether it's his unlikely ally, Clank (David Kaye), a defective, miniature warbot on the lam from his manufacturer, or Ratchet's gruff yet fair mentor, Grim (John Goodman). Instead, Ratchet constantly leaps into reckless action, egged on by the puerile needs of his ranger companions, who are more comfortable shooting things than getting briefed on them. The result is that viewers never learn much about Cora (Bella Thorne) or Brax (Vincent Tong), except that they're very disinterested in anything their tech-support ally, Elaris (Rosario Dawson), tries to contribute. Children's films don't always have the most well-rounded characters, but even by those standards, the rangers are profoundly shallow.

*Ratchet & Clank* knows when it's being cliché, as evidenced by the way the filmmakers literally cue in the inevitable "bad guy speech" from Chairman Drek (Paul Giamatti), or signal the start of a training montage. Like Ratchet, who asks a dissatisfied and critical customer, "Why replace something when you can make it better?," the writers are obsessed not with avoiding conventions, but trying to fix them—and make the mistake of thinking that winking to the audience is an improvement. Stunt casting, as in the choice to have Victor Von Ion be recognizably voiced by Sylvester Stallone, doesn't make that relentless robotic killer any less one-note, just as all the colorful CG in the world fails to make the villainous, reptilian Blarg anything less than lurid Minion-like knockoffs. What little character development remains is almost entirely undercut by acts of abrupt slapstick, like a malfunctioning chair during an otherwise serious heart to heart between Grim and Ratchet. That constant overstimulation at least pays off when it comes to the action scenes, largely because the inventive arsenal of the video games leaves little room for other distractions. Whereas bad jokes are often repeated in the film, each weapon is more or less used only once, to dramatic effect: buzzsaws, ice beams, novelty punching gloves, the weather-disrupting Tornado Launcher and Thunder Clap, a Sheepinator (which temporarily transmogrifies its victims), and the aptly named Ryno (Rip You a New One). These weapons are all in good fun and deliver fully loaded and inventive action sequences, even though the rest of *Ratchet & Clank* remains half-cocked.



Will rent like **KUNG FU PANDA 3, ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: ROAD CHIP, HOME, THE PEANUTS MOVIE,** and **THE GOOD DINOSAUR.**



**8/16 1 THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE FAMILY**  
 \$91 MILL BO 3498 SCREENS PG 97 MINUTES  
 DVD/COMBO

**VOICES OF: Jason Sudeikis, Josh Gad, Danny McBride.**

*The Angry Birds Movie* is about as generous as a free app where all the good stuff requires in-game purchases. But then there's the subtext. While never overstated in the movie itself, it's hard not to pick up on how Red's righteous wrath starts out as a liability in his social circumstances. The film's entire trajectory bends toward re-contextualizing anger from being a major character flaw into the quality necessary in a leadership role. Especially in times of crisis, especially when foreigners (who may as well be different life forms in the eyes of some) are threatening to skip borders and steal everything they can get their hands on. Yes, it's highly likely that the film was well into development, if not production, long before anyone took Donald Trump seriously as a presidential candidate, but even accidental serendipity can reveal basic and ugly truths about our cultural id.



This will be huge to the folks that rented **HOME, MINIONS, ZOOTOPIA, KUNG FU PANDA 3, ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: ROAD CHIP, and HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2.**



**8/23 1 THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR ACTION**  
 \$49 MILL BO 2986 SCREENS PG-13 134 MINUTES  
 DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Chris Hemsworth (RUSH, THOR: THE DARK WORLD, SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN, THE CABIN IN THE WOODS, THE AVENGERS)**

**Jessica Chastain (CRIMSON PEAK, THE MARTIAN, INTERSTELLAR, ZERO DARK THIRTY)**

Like the increasingly dire superhero genre, Cedric Nicolas-Troyan's *The Huntsman: Winter's War* is indicative of a misconception that to take something originally meant for young people seriously is to treat it severely. To be sure, the pantheon of classic, unsanitized fairy tales doesn't lack for bloodshed, but this flagrantly superfluous sequel ignores the moral component of such stories in favor of decidedly blockbuster-scale violence. The carnage is all the more grisly when considered in the context of the film's narrative, which exists largely to cross Snow White with that most lucrative of contemporary fairy tales: Disney's *Frozen*. Kids will no doubt be excited to see a real-life Elsa in Freya (Emily Blunt), the ostensibly good sister of Queen Ravenna (Charlize Theron), but they may not be ready for the sight of the woman's newborn baby burned to a cinder in the first five minutes of the film, or for Freya's grief to manifest in the mass abduction and conscription of children into a brainwashed, merciless army.

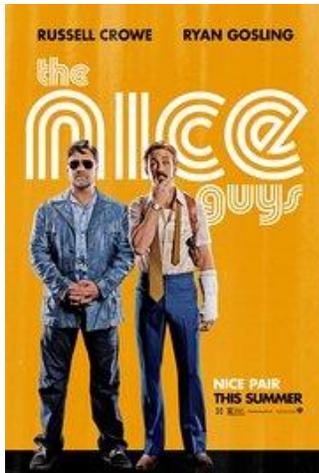
The extremity of this opening yields such horror that the remainder of *Winter's War* can never gel its nominally lighter fantasy with its grimmer moments. For example, an early montage of seized children being forced to train for battle is set to rousing orchestral music, which creates a jarring sense of triumph and valor to images of stolen children being brutally stripped of their innocence. This gives way to a time jump to reveal star draftees Eric (Chris Hemsworth) and Sara (Jessica Chastain) in adulthood, where they've become Freya's top huntsmen, as well as violators of her ban of love. A perfunctory dose of romance leads to an equally expected moment of horror, only for the action to leap forward to the aftermath of [Snow White and the Huntsman](#) in time for a comic adventure to begin.

The overriding despair of *Winter's War's* imagery calls into question who, exactly, the film is for. Granted, a PG-13 rating is probably enough warning to parents with young children about the age-appropriateness of the film's action, but even those with older kids might blanch at the level of violence, as well as the highly sexualized material. Not only does the film skirt the edge of outright nudity, the dialogue often gives way to a series of barely veiled come-ons. A sample line, uttered by Sara to her estranged beau: "I bet that story wet the eyes of many a young lass. Maybe not just the eyes." The whole film is nothing but window-dressing, an excuse to put up some expensive visual effects to attract people before the summer-blockbuster rush. Even a handful of plot twists have already been spoiled by the film's own trailer, which prominently divulged information that's saved for the film's final minutes.

The one unimpeachably positive attribute of *Winter's War* is the consistency with which it reinforces Hemsworth's star power. Blunt and Theron, whose Ravenna returns in the final act to get revenge on those who overthrew her in [Snow White and the Huntsmen](#), chew scenery by respectively playing up frigidity and manic vanity, but it's Hemsworth who stands out for the classical charm he brings to his character. Eric is a two-dimensional representation of the young, masculine ideal, at once gorgeous, strong, sensitive, and pure, but Hemsworth plays him with a dash of Errol Flynn. Eric's coy winks at Bromwyn's flirtations and slightly giddy attempts to win back Sara's trust have a looseness to them that never suggests that the actor considered the project a lark. Instead, he actually has some fun, at times enough that the needlessly serious movie around him almost becomes entertaining.

This will rent as well as **10 CLEARFIELD LANE, LONDON HAS FALLEN, THE 5<sup>TH</sup> WAVE, GODS OF EGYPT, THE REVENANT, and DADDY'S HOME.**





8/23 **1** **THE NICE GUYS** ACTION/COMEDY  
\$42 MILL BO 2856 SCREENS **R** 136 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Russell Crowe (GLADIATOR, MYSTERY ALASKA, BODY OF LIES, THE INSIDER, L. A. CONFIDENTIAL)**  
**Ryan Gosling (BLUE VALENTINE, DRIVE, REMEMBER THE TITANS, CRAZY STUPID LOVE)**

*The Nice Guys* takes place in 1977 Los Angeles, and Black uses the setting to pull from the first wave of New Hollywood sunshine noirs, many of which start with depictions of relatively commonplace crimes before spiraling outward to observe vast conspiracies involving the mercenary control of a city of excess and glamor. Black's film follows in that tradition, and it casts L.A. in such cynical terms that even its heroes come off as venal and selfish: Private eye Holland March (Ryan Gosling) bilks paranoid and addled old people out of money to pursue ridiculous cases, while Jackson Healy (Russell Crowe) runs a service where he beats up hebephiles less to keep children safe than for his own sense of righteousness—and a small sum, of course.

The two initially join together to track down a young woman named Amelia (Margaret Qualley), but soon they discover that she may be tied to pornography, and more specifically to the recent death of adult actress Misty Mountains (Murielle Telio). As the film increasingly incorporates the porn industry into the framework of a conspiracy theory involving the auto industry at the height of its political power and the first stage of its downfall, it naturally recalls the Coen brothers' [The Big Lebowski](#), though it presents a larger, more entwined satirical target in the manner in which it counterintuitively expands to become a critique of the auto industry at the height of its clandestine power and ruthless self-protection.



Numerous twists clarify the seemingly tenuous connection between cheap sleaze and industrial oligarchy, but the true delight of a Shane Black script is, of course, the dialogue. *The Nice Guys* doesn't want for great exchanges, and even disposable conversations brim with acidic wit, like March's response to a shocked young girl's exclamation that he took the Lord's name in vain: "No I didn't, Janet. I actually found it very useful." Healy doesn't speak as quickly as March, but he always holds his own in battles of wit, and Crowe's sluggish delivery works surprisingly well to modulate the antic verbal pace of Black's writing, giving contours to a style that occasionally rushes.

But if Black's scripts largely call attention to their own cleverness, they nonetheless foreground character-driven humor in a way that other films of this kind seldom do. Instead of just writing funny lines for his actors to speak, Black thinks about what sense of humor each character might have, and he even layers in jokes to the point that he can build callbacks that get laughs and both advance and complicate his plots. He even elicits emotional payoffs from his jokes, as when a seemingly throwaway gag about March having no sense of smell prefigures the revelation that his useless nose prevented him from detecting a gas leak in his home, to ruinous consequences.

But the film, by and large, belongs to Gosling, who overcompensates for his steady decline into self-parodic actorly catatonia with a hyper-expressive performance. Gosling prioritizes physicality, calling attention to the way he stumbles around when drunk or reacts to the sight of a murder with a small but unmissable eyebrow twitch of panic. An early scene of March being confronted by Healy while in a bathroom stall showcases a deft bit of body comedy. In it, March attempts to keep a gun trained on Healy while covering his privates, then frantically putting out the lit cigarette he drops into his pants, all the while struggling to keep the stall door open and to maintain a shred of dignity. There's a lot to like about *The Nice Guys*, but it's Gosling's boundless energy that will most invite repeat viewings. A fun film that will rent as well as **GET HARD, NEIGHBORS, 10 CLEARFIELD LANE, DEADPOOL, DADDY'S HOME, and TED 2.**



**8/30 1 THE JUNGLE BOOK FAMILY**  
\$349 MILL BO 4144 SCREENS PG 106 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO

**VOICES OF Ben Kingsley, Christopher Walken, Bill Murray.**

Disney's canonized narrative is unchanged: When “man-cub” Mowgli (Neel Sethi) finds his blissful life in the jungle threatened by vengeful tiger Shere Khan (Idris Elba), surrogate guardians Bagheera the panther (Ben Kingsley) and “papa bear” Baloo (Bill Murray) vow to protect him, not only from Khan, but also the power-hungry ape King Louie (Christopher Walken) and a giant python named Kaa (Scarlett Johansson). When Favreau chooses to deviate from this economical framework, he's sometimes able to restore a bit of the knottier storytelling from Kipling's original text, as with the inclusion of the “water truce,” a pact of non-violence that helps bring the film's predators and prey together in a sensible, if a little too convenient, way.

There's something especially telling about the way this new *Jungle Book* liberally borrows not only from its own mythology, but also from [The Lion King](#). Not only are the frequent cutaways to Mowgli's old wolf pack—left kowtowing to Shere Khan's controlling regime—reminiscent of the evil Scar's dominion over the exiled Simba's lion pride, but a sequence here in which Mowgli narrowly avoids Khan by making his way through a muddy stampede seems an explicit attempt to mine nostalgia from the Disney faithful.

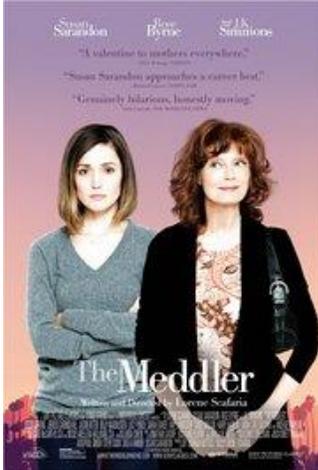
The song breaks are a similarly cynical ploy. On paper, Murray and Walken singing “The Bare Necessities” and “I Wan'na Be Like You,” respectively, sounds intriguing. In execution, though, both sequences arrive like an unwanted Word from Our Sponsor interrupting Favreau's feature presentation of *Apocalyto: Mowgli's Run*.



Murray and Walken's dotting-old-man vocals might work with the seat-of-the-pants Dixieland with which Louis Prima and Phil Harris were supplied, but put up against John Debney's blandly symphonic soundtrack cues, any weird nuances in their performances just come off as amateurisms.

What works about this *Jungle Book*—the tactfully imbedded moral lessons, the humor, and a lushly animated child's fantasy of the jungle—are uniformly an inheritance of its lineage. Whereas some have designated the “be with your own kind” talk thrown around in Disney's original [Jungle Book](#) as a coded message of segregation, in truth it was always more of a rejection of Mowgli's sense of entitlement to the jungle. In any case, it was a vastly more interesting direction than the Messianic-jungle-savior one that Favreau's Mowgli is thrust into in this film's climax.

This will rent as well as **KUNG FU PANDA 3, ZOOTOPIA, MINIONS, NORM OF THE NORTH, THE PEANUTS MOVIE** and **GOOSEBUMPS**.



**8/30 3 THE MEDDLER DRAMA**  
**\$5 MILL BO 983 SCREENS PG-13 100 MINUTES**  
**BLU-RAY**

**Susan Sarandon (THELMA AND LOUISE, BULL DURHAM, WALL STREET: MONEY NEVER SLEEPS, ATLANTIC CITY, THE GREATEST)**

**J. K. Simmons (TV—CLOSER, HULK AND THE AGENTS OF SMASH, GROWING UP FISHER---FILM—WHIPLASH)**

In Lorene Scafaria's *The Meddler*, the recently widowed and adrift Marnie (Susan Sarandon) tries to fill the hole in her life, first by launching an extreme invasion of her daughter's privacy, and then by offering random acts of generosity to near-strangers, who subsequently become her friends. Perhaps to embody Marnie's penchant for running from her own problems, Sarandon pumps the character full of raw, aimless energy, never walking when she can trot along briskly and talking fast in a broad, supposed-to-be-Brooklyn accent. The actress's frenetic need to keep busy betrays the loneliness and rootlessness underlying Marnie's impulsive acts, but even Sarandon's innate warmth and the sympathy she generates for her character can't make some of Marnie's stunts come across as anything other than unintentional cruelty.

As Marnie bigfoots her way through long-suffering daughter Lori's (Rose Byrne) life, her inappropriate behavior is generally laughed off, treated as funny or endearing. She elicits gratitude or admiration from almost everyone she encounters and never inspires any real anger in Lori, even when she exhibits a genuinely disturbing level of intrusiveness. In a scene toward the end of the film, Marnie heads upstairs hand in hand with a little girl she babysits, charming the child with her stories, like a latter-day Auntie Mame. But when the film treats one of Marnie's seriously misguided blunders—like inviting a guy Lori is hooking up with to dinner, even though her daughter is clearly trying to get rid of him, and then encouraging his stalkerish plan to propose to Lori—as if it were simply the kookily endearing actions of a loving but overinvolved mom, the film feels as emotionally tone-deaf as its subject.



A handful of fine actors are stuck revving their engines in one-note supporting roles. Byrne mostly just rolls her eyes, while J.K. Simmons radiates twinkly eyed machismo as the silver fox who woos Marnie. Freddy, a helpful Apple store employee Marnie starts driving to night school after learning that he has no way to get to class, is played by Jerrod Carmichael, a gifted comedian who has little to do despite the fact that he plays not only straight-arrow Freddy, but his miscreant twin brother. And Michael McKean basically just looks sheepish and dances awkwardly as the father of a friend of Lori's who develops an unrequited crush on Marnie. Their scenes scoot by quickly and then fade from memory, just one more underdeveloped part of an unconvincing character study that plays like a painfully unfunny sitcom.