

12/1 3 AMY DOCUMENTARY
\$9 MILL BO 926 SCREENS R 128 MINUTES

Amy Winehouse

Not long after the release of *Frank*, her 2003 debut studio album, Amy Winehouse gave an interview to a Dutch radio station wherein she brazenly admitted rage toward a producer who added pre-recorded strings to one of her songs. She wanted to have her entire backing band play live on the tracks, which is part of what gives *Frank* and *Back to Black* their distinct sound. The audio from that interview is featured in *Amy*, Asif Kapadia's documentary portrait of the late singer, and it serves to both underline Winehouse's winningly unpolished demeanor and what

Kapadia does wrong in depicting the intensely talented songstress as a victim of a voracious public and the admittedly pretty vile corporate interests of modern media.

Kapadia utilizes only archival footage, and limits all modern touches to audio interviews with friends, family, and colleagues, including her parents, former husband Blake Fielder, producer Salaam Remi, and longtime manager Nick Shymansky. Through careful, involving editing, Kapadia's assemblage presents an intimate view of a brilliant performer, a naturally engaging and immediately recognizable musical presence, who was destroyed by the men in her life. Mitch Winehouse, Amy's father, is seen as unerringly greedy and self-obsessed, piggy-backing off of his daughter's rehab stint to secure a reality TV show deal; Fielder comes off even worse, both in his past behavior and in his self-romanticizing interview recorded especially for the film. The documentary, then, is a moving, enraging, and deeply believable case study, showing Winehouse as obsessed with male attention and father figures, often in the personages of corrupt, manipulative men, echoing her feelings of abandonment following Mitchell's divorce from her mother and general disinterest in her until she got some money in her pocket.

It mostly succeeds in conveying a galvanizing sense of what made Winehouse so immediately engaging. Beyond clips of Winehouse practicing, recording, and performing, Kapadia prominently features footage of the singer that highlight her bracing seductiveness and sense of humor, whether chatting up talk-show hosts and friends or barely tolerating bland journalists. For the most part, the documentary succeeds in conveying a galvanizing sense of what made Winehouse so immediately engaging, how her need for attention powered her stardom as well as her drug habits. When Kapadia confronts Winehouse's post-"Rehab" depression and substance abuse, however, the filmmakers gets distastefully moralistic, turning *Amy* into a high-and-mighty indictment of obsessive fandom and the cult of celebrity. He adds no particular stylistic or ideological curl to his familiar judgment of these admittedly alarming issues, and, subsequently, turns Winehouse's story into just another cautionary tale of a singer and songwriter who burned up under the spotlight. He doesn't even seem to be aware of the rather blatant fact that without the bevy of photos, clips, filmed performances, and audio interviews that her publicity required, *Amy* wouldn't have been made, at least not the way he wanted to make it. And if the filmmaker is aware of this fact, it's not conveyed in any palpable way.

What he imparts, mainly, is outrage and sadness over how the world at large flippantly reacted to Winehouse's increasingly disturbing behavior and myriad addictions. It's hard to argue against, especially in hindsight, but this is where Kapadia quite literally adds the strings to Winehouse's story. His choice of non-diegetic music highlights the horror and melancholy of Winehouse's downward spiral, as if it weren't plainly clear how deeply sad and arguably avoidable all of this was. He goes a step further in placing the largely autobiographical lyrics to Winehouse's songs on screen, suggesting that her art was a cry for help, or, at the very least, an open admission that she was aware of her problems. Kapadia's underlying argument here is that art should be taken literally and very seriously, and that the heavy compromises that business and publicity demand from artists is what ultimately dilutes art and occasionally kills artists. The perhaps unintended consequences of all of this is that *Amy* becomes as much an empathetic, absorbing view of a major artist and seemingly pretty wonderful person as it is a harangue about the inherent evils of capitalism, focusing primarily on the role of money in



the life of someone who grew bored of wealth nearly as soon as she obtained it.

Will rent like **END OF THE TOUR**, **ST. VINCENT**, **DANNY COLLINS**, **ROCK OF AGES**, **WHIPLASH** and **BEGIN AGAIN**.



12/1 3 MISSISSIPPI GRIND DRAMA
\$ MILL BO 87 SCREENS R 108 MINUTES

Ryan Reynolds (SAFE HOUSE, CROODS, TED, GREEN LANTERN, THE CHANGE-UP)

Ben Mendelsohn (GUNS FOR HIRE, SLOW WEST, LOST RIVER, STARRED UP)

Mississippi Grind introduces Gerry, a real estate agent played by Ben Mendelsohn, as he drives his car through Dubuque, Iowa. He listens to a motivational recording offering tips on how to overcome the signs of anxiety, looking wary and defeated. The audio pitchman segues to his next signifier: "Number 13: Sneaking a nose touch." Immediately, Gerry's life, as a down-on-his-luck gambler fumbling toward insolvency, comes into relief, as does the gambling movie's road-tested ability to reveal the fundamental insecurity of a certain breed of male psychology.

Pathetically alive to signs of hope or luck, Gerry runs across two early on in Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's feature. The first is a rainbow, stretching across the entire horizon. (Its colors continue to refract in the film's alluringly shot series of neon-lit dive bars and gambling halls.) The second is Curtis (Ryan Reynolds), the rakish livewire who finds a seat across from Gerry across a Dubuque poker table. Curtis enthusiastically relates a stream of stories with the specious philosophy and questionable veracity of one of Kerouac's dreamers, but Gerry wagers that this charmer, who also marveled at that rainbow, might be his ticket to glory. After a good night at the races, the pair decide to tour the gambling holes of the Mississippi, all the way to New Orleans. Gerry's looking to escape secret, massive debts. Curtis professes an upbeat, amorphous, at times inchoate longing for experience.

Mississippi Grind is founded on a nicely threaded synthesis of familiar formulas—part buddy comedy, addiction narrative, road-tripper, and documentary-style portrait of socioeconomic malaise. Despite the film's relentless familiarity (with its class concerns, dingy poker tables, and notable attention to lounge singers, much of the film is a clear homage to Robert Altman's great *California Split*) and aggressively scripted dialogue, Boden and Fleck convey an engagingly low-key atmosphere, pervasive with wayward souls haunted by poor choices. As Gerry and Curtis rove southward, the cast expands to include love interests (Sienna Miller, Analeigh Tipton) and self-appointed legends (James Toback, as the boss of a secret New Orleans poker haunt), and they all affect a potent disillusion. *Mississippi Grind* leaves each of them behind to consider how and whether its protagonists can maintain their own illusions.



The film is at its best when its leads are in conversation. In montages and a few nightclub scenes, Boden and Fleck attempt to articulate the social tapestry of cities like St. Louis and Memphis, but the story is too peripatetic for these fleeting stabs at authenticity. Of greater concern is how the writer-directors can't decide when and how to leave their characters: *Mississippi Grind's* final 20 minutes feel like a series of wildly divergent possible endings for Gerry and Curtis, rather than the linear and logical progression of events they're portrayed to be. The film means to leave us with lots of questions, but it's already provided too many answers.

If **MAGIC MIKE XXL**, **DOPE**, **TRUE STORY**, **SOUTHPAW** and **KINGSMEN:THE SECRET SERVICE** rented well, you will be very happy with this title as well.



12/8 1 ANT-MAN SCI/FI COMEDY
\$181 MILL BO 3821 SCREENS PG-13 117 MINUTES

Paul Rudd (THIS IS THE END, ANCHOR MAN 2, I LOVE YOU MAN, OUR IDIOT BROTHER)
Michael Douglas (FATAL ATTRACTION, WALL STREET, THE WAR OF THE ROSES, STAR CHAMBER)

Ant-Man's scale-warping premise offers a rare chance for Marvel Studios to break out of the visual homogeneity of its features, which regularly suppress authorial identity in favor of a bland house style. That style dominates the Peyton Reed film's first half, in which muted colors and functional shot/reverse-shot patterns put all focus onto a stretch of exposition so interminable it almost becomes funny. Characters are introduced via spectacles of pain, from Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) mourning the fresh wound of his wife's death in a 1989-set cold open to newly released burglar Scott Lang (Paul Rudd) dealing with the hardship of reintegrating into society and attempting to see his young daughter (Abby Ryder Fortson) over the objections of his ex (Judy Greer). Factor in the lugubrious explanations of corporate intrigue and the danger of emergent technology and it's easy to forget this is the story of a man shrinking down to ant size.

Compounding the leaden pace are the shoehorned references that connect the film to the continuity of the Marvel universe, marking a new low for a studio more concerned with setting out half-hidden Easter eggs than visual or thematic individualism. Half-assed mentions of the Avengers, as well as a few cameo appearances sprinkled both within the feature and in its credits stingers, exude less shame than a crowd-pandering politico. Worse still is how a screenplay credited to Wright, Joe Cornish, Adam McKay, and Rudd can be so unfunny. The usual Marvel smarm infuses every scene, but the film's most pervasive joke is a moldy bit about someone declaring, definitively and uncompromisingly, that they will not accept something, at which point a smash cut shows that thing having come to pass. This is the "take my wife, please" of sight gags, and it's used so often in the film that it seems to mark every other transition. Scott's ability to shrink and grow at will finds its greatest expression in deftly executed fights in which he disappears, throws a punch that sends a bewildered henchman flying, then reappears full-size to grab onto a person with better leverage. Visual jokes abound, like Ant-Man's sprinting up a gun barrel or summoning armies of ants to perform microscopic tasks, all filmed on an epic scale.



Marvel films tend to peter out as they build to their overstuffed climaxes, but *Ant-Man* subverts this structure, positioning a raid on a secure military industrial facility as the precursor to the true showdown between Ant-Man and Yellowjacket, which occurs in a child's bedroom made gargantuan when the two fighters shrink down and battle on a Thomas the Tank Engine train set. The constant vacillations between their vicious fight and a macro view of their destruction, of child toys lightly clattering to the ground, foreground the absurdity of this and any other comic-book movie, owning the ridiculousness not as an impediment to the genre's legitimization, but a crucial aspect of its appeal. This sequence and others like it are by far the most clever, visually adventurous, belligerently fun moments to ever happen in a Marvel movie.

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This will be a good a money maker as was **THE AVENGERS, SAN ANDREAS, FURIOUS 7, GET HARD, MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, and AMERICAN SNIPER.**



12/8 3 KNOCK KNOCK COMEDY
\$2 MILL BO 482 SCREENS R 99 MINUTES

Keanu Reeves (JOHN WICK, THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL, 47 RONIN, STREET KINGS, SPEED)
Lorenza Izzo (SEX ED, THE STRANGER, THE GREEN INFERNO, AFTERSHOCK)

Reeves is Evan, an architect who, as he's introduced, is about to have sex with his artist wife, Karen (Ignacia Allamand), when his children burst in to wish him a happy Father's Day. Awww. Karen and the kids soon depart for the beach. Enter Bel (Ana de Armas) and Genesis (Lorenza Izzo, aka Mrs. Roth), dripping wet from a dark and stormy night. Roth and his co-screenwriters tease out the flirtation more patiently than Traynor did. The women flatter Evan, pretending he's younger than he is and taking advantage of his nostalgia for his past as a DJ. He puts up a bit more resistance to his visitors' sexual overtures than Cassel's character did, and there are amusingly preposterous explanations for why they can't leave just yet.

But he gives in, letting the Uber cab he's ordered drive off while the three of them have sex. (Roth somehow makes this absurd menage a trois even more decadent by shooting some of it through fogged shower glass.) Starting the next morning, the women reveal their inner ids, making a mess of Evan's kitchen and defacing Karen's artwork. This is the punishment for homewreckers, it seems. The economical, satisfyingly nothing without Izzo and addition to having the plot requires — play off timing and palpable tie Evan up and make pretend gameshow, music. Reeves, (and jokes at the great sport.



nasty scenario would be De Armas, who — in staggering good looks the each other with ace comic menace. At one point, they him the contestant on a torturing him with loud enduring constant abuse expense of his hair, is a

Even with limited theatrical, this one will still rent as well as **THE GIFT, RESULTS, 5 FLIGHTS UP, WHILE WE'RE YOUNG, WOMAN IN GOLD, and SERENA.**



12/8 1 MINIONS FAMILY ANIMATION
\$326 MILL BO 4329 SCREENS PG 91 MINUTES

VOICES: Sandra Bullock, John Hamm, Michael Keaton

The Minions are, of course, the Nuprin-hued, be-goggled little pill bugs who toil away with irrepressible good humor under their evil overlords. *Minions* starts by cataloguing their long and disaster-prone path toward achieving that goal of perfect servility, and the endless string of larger-than-life villains undone by their clumsiness, from a T. Rex sent barrel-rolling straight into a lava pit to Napoleon meeting the short end of a cannon. So far so good, an idiot's guide to history with some of the most entertainingly idiotic animated characters in recent memory, and the promise of a feature-length history-class version of the Louvre sequence in *Looney Tunes: Back in Action*.

Having been expatriated to the Antarctic, the despairing Minions make one last effort to find their designated supervillain. Three of them—Kevin, Stuart, and Bob, all virtually indistinguishable aside from the fact that the teddy-carrying Bob seems to be a few years younger or dumber than his companions—venture out into the world, circa 1965. (The music supervisor responsible for assembling the no-expense-spared soundtrack, packed with the Beatles, the Who, the Turtles, and the Monkees, seems to be the one in the movie's driver's seat throughout.)

Because duh, '60s, the Minions end up in swinging London at the beck and call of Jean-Shrimpton-bouffant-sporting Scarlet Overkill (Sandra Bullock). Her mission: to steal Queen Elizabeth's crown. The movie's mission: to utterly domesticate the Minions and shoehorn them into a clumsy heist plot. To creator and voiceover whiz Pierre Coffin's credit, the movie never fully hands the reins over to the guest stars, who also include Jon Hamm as Scarlet's Q-esque gadget-building husband and Jennifer Saunders as a younger but still not-young Elizabeth. And unlike its antecedents, the spinoff at least steers its tone clear of unearned pathos or, worse, viable life lessons.



Oh yeah, this will rent as much as **HOME, UP, THE SPONGEBOB MOVIE, BIG HERO 6, DOLPHIN TALE 2**, and **PLANES 2**.



12/8 2 TRANSPORTER REFUELED ACTION
\$17 MILL BO 2134 SCREEN PG-13 96 MINUTES

**Ed Skrein (TV—GAME OF THRONES, THE TUNNEL—
FILM—TIGER HOUSE)**
**Ray Stevenson (BLACK SAILS, INSURGENT, THOR, G.I.
JOE: RETALIATION)**

The premise is still the same. The title character makes his living as a “transporter” of “goods” for various nefarious folks. He lives by a set of strict rules (which always end up being violated), he never lets things get persona (ditto) and he tries to stay out of the “big picture” trouble that always seems to follow him wherever his latest assignment or mission takes him.

The Transporter Refueled is the long-delayed fourth entry in a previously lucrative franchise and, unexpectedly, it’s the one that turns the male hero into something of a sidekick to a group of female heroines. First introduced on the French Riviera in 1995 in the clutches of thuggish Russian human trafficker Yuri (Yuri Kolokolnikov), Anna (Lona Chabanol) is then seen, 15 years later, as the leader of a band of fellow former prostitutes, all of them now trying to take revenge on the pimp who wronged them long ago.

Somewhere amid this empowerment, and at the center of a few imaginative jolts of mayhem (filing cabinets incorporated into a bout of hand-to-hand combat, an airport-runway sequence that climaxes with a chase through Nice Côte d’Azur Airport), lies the titular crime-fighter: Frank Martin. Taking over the glowering, suit-wearing, and ass-kicking duties from Jason Statham, Ed Skrein proves a serviceable replacement, especially as the straight man to his comic relief: his father, Frank Senior (Ray Stevenson).



This installment will still be a strong renter just as **TAKEN 3, RUN ALL NIGHT, TRUE STORY, INHERENT VICE, A MOST VIOLENT YEAR** and **GOOD KILL**.



12/15 1 FANTASTIC FOUR ACTION/SCI FI
\$54 MILL BO 4007 SCREENS

Michael B. Jordan (TV—FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, PARENTHOOD---FILM—FRUITVALE STATION, RED TAILS, CHRONICLE)
Miles Teller (INSURGENT, DIVERGENT, WHIPLASH, THAT AWKWARD MOMENT)

“Is this the way you want the rest of your life to be?” Dr. Franklin Storm (Reg E. Cathey) is walking his son Johnny (Michael B. Jordan) from the police station, where he’s landed after crashing his Toyota during a street race. Dad makes demands and Johnny sulks, as he must, being an angry teenager in the midst of a superhero’s origin story. The Human Torch to Be, Johnny in his moments on screen is all simmering rage.

Just why he’s mad is less than clear. Unfortunately, this makes his story like everyone else’s in *Fantastic Four*, a jumble of predictable but also incoherent plot turns, dreadful dialogue, and unfortunate visual choices (too many reaction shots, silly special effects). Franklin assembles Johnny and his fellow heroes to be—Reed (Miles Teller), Ben (Jamie Bell), and Johnny’s adoptive sister Sue (Kate Mara)—to build a portal to another dimension. They make their machine, they make some mistakes, they’re granted super powers, and they have to decide how to use them. (Per the comic book, they’re aided by another young mastermind, Victor [Toby Kebbell], whose last name—Von Doom—pretty much guarantees his choices.) The movie tracks the kids’ changing relationships with each other and also, with the world around them: they don’t trust adults, they do, and then they don’t.

For “adults”, you might substitute any authority figures, the sorts that are corrupt and greedy or inept, the sorts that populate comic book universes as these reflect the experiences of their readers. So, apart from Franklin, who means well but has limited appreciation of the kids’ angsts and outrages, the adults here tend to be corporate and military types, men with money who lord over their beholden creative geniuses al manner of power and demands. While the kids resist, they also lack a certain grounding intelligence—call it common sense—and so they run into trouble. Hence, their mutations into Mr. Fantastic, the Invisible Woman, the Thing, the Human Torch, and, well, Dr. Von Doom, sensational traumas that first divide them and then unite them.

The uniting is necessary, of course, being the jumping off point for the franchise to be. But it is awkward here, poorly motivated (it’s the way the comics go) and not a little boring. What the movie doesn’t do is try to make sense of its own premises, the kids’ various states before they come together, their experiences being geniuses, maybe, or what their houses look like, or some other detail beyond the rudimentary notes that one is geeky, another is poor, one is a girl, another is black. All that said, the movie’s glaring omission is any mention of Johnny’s blackness. Think about it: this is a boy (actually, you don’t see him as a boy, only a teenager delivered onto the screen, apparently mad by definition) who will become the Human Torch. He’s in a movie directed by Josh Trank, Jordan’s director for *Chronicle*, a smarter, better made move about the traumatizing effects of superpowers). And he’s showing up now, when race and racism, institutional violence and resistance to same are increasingly available on screens, thanks to Ferguson and technologies that advance communication and visibility, an idea plainly related to the comic book and the movie, too.

While Jordan’s open letter is aptly heroic, you might wonder why he’s the only one taking on this burden. Where is everyone else who worked on or might see *Fantastic Four*? When Franklin, in an effort to protect his team from the injudicious, avaricious powers that be—most effectively incarnated by Tim Blake Nelson, whose eyes sinking into his skull over a series of scenes is easily the most alarming special effect here—he urges the kids to try to fix what his generation has



ruined (they're suitably skeptical before they're not, before they throw in with each other and with Franklin's dream of unity). And he pleads their case for them, as an adult with a conscience and a sense of scale. "They're a bunch of scared kids," he says. They are and they're not.

This will rent nicely, just like **MAD MAX: FURY ROAD**, **THE AVENGERS**, **AMAZING SPIDER MAN 3**, **POLTERGEIST**, **IT FOLLOWS**, and **GET HARD**.



12/15 1 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROUGE NATION ACTION

\$194 MILL BO 4163 SCREENS PG-13 131 MINUTES

Tom Cruise (COCKTAIL, RAIN MAN, RISKY BUSINESS, COLLATERAL, OBLIVION, MAGNOLIA)

Jeremy Renner (THE HURT LOCKER, AMERICAN HUSTLE, THE BOURNE LEGACY, THOR, THE TOWN)

The latest installment, subtitled *Rogue Nation*, is no exception. It takes the events of *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* and goes even further down the bureaucratic rabbit hole. This time around, the CIA wants Ethan Hunt (Cruise) and his Mission Impossible Force buddies off the case for good. Their head (Alec Baldwin) issues the order. Luckily, Hunt still has friends in the agency, including William Brandt (Jeremy Renner) and Benji Dunn (Simon Pegg) and they begin some backdoor negotiations to help his cause.

In the meantime, Hunt believes that a group of rogue ex-agents (thus the title) have entered into a pact with terrorist Solomon Lane (Sean Harris), calling themselves "The Syndicate". They hope to bring about a new world order through random acts of violence. Hunt thwarts a chemical missile exchange, then does the same with an attempted assassination. With the help of his pals, including former tech guide Luther Stickell (Ving Rhames) and a possible Syndicate turncoat/double agent, Ilsa Faust (Rebecca Ferguson), Hunt tracks the traitors, getting close to the truth about the shuttering of MIF once and for all.

As thrillers go, *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation* has it all. It begins with the trailer highlight, Cruise hanging off the side of an ascending aircraft, moves effortlessly to a Hitchcockian homage to *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, dives deep into a water mission that will have you holding your breath right along with Hunt, and finds our hero riding motorcycles through Morocco, speed and danger never a factor. Add to this a story with a surprise payoff, a list of capable actors doing damn good work, and a global terrorism theme that plays perfectly in today's uneasy times, and you've got the best action movie of the year not named *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Again, this is not as good as Bird's brilliant balancing act, *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol*. *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation* is missing some of the pleasurable interpersonal dynamics that made that movie truly sizzle. Instead, McQuarrie (who also penned the screenplay) creates a singular strategy with all leads pointing toward the goal. Hunt wants to stop the Syndicate and prove his point to the Washington power pinheads. The entirety of the movie is about doing just that. The stunts spill out of this need. In the past, they often felt pasted on, not inorganic so much as oddly ancillary. Exciting, but without purpose.

This is the very definition of entertaining, drama and laughs sandwiched in between nail-biting scenes. McQuarrie keeps the pace even, avoiding the shaky cam concept of action to make sure we understand the logistics and pragmatics of what's going on. Sure, it would have been nice to see certain stunts "played out" so to speak, but that just means we find what's there so engaging we are looking for more. Similarly, when certain characters disappear for long stretches, we hope for their return as well, mostly for the same reason. We want more.

That's what Cruise excels at: giving the people what they want, and then making sure they get more of the same. What makes this even more unique is that, because of the differing



stylistic and directorial approaches, the *Mission: Impossible* films never become redundant. They may not be across the board excellent (Sorry, John Woo), but they cater to the audience that Cruise can rely on the charge his commercial clout. One day he might win an Oscar. Someday, those rumors about his leaving Scientology might actually be true. Until then, Tom Cruise, the 53-year-old action hero, will continue to do what he does best, and if the results are anything like *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation*, we will all be glad he did.

This will be a huge renter like **FURIOUS 7**, **GET HARD**, **MAD MAX: FURY ROAD**, **AMERICAN SNIPER**, **JURASSIC WORLD** and **KINGSMEN: THE SECRET SERVICE**.



12/15 1 TED 2 COMEDY

\$86 MILL BO 3598 SCREENS R 115 MINUTES

Mark Wahlberg (LONE SURVIVOR, 2 GUNS, DATE NIGHT, THE FIGHTER, CONTRABAND)
Amanda Seyfried (THE END OF LOVE, LOVELACE, GONE, WHILE WE'RE YOUNG)

The defining moment of *Ted 2* comes about two-thirds of the way in, when our heroes and their ladies decide to visit an improv club. The idea? Get drunk and shout “sad” suggestions to the performers onstage. Before this sequence, this sequel to Seth MacFarlane’s surprise hit of two years ago offers much of the same old scatology. There’s an intriguing subtext about tolerance and inequality, but it often gets overshadowed by dick jokes and (literal) semen gags.

But then our talking bear (voiced by MacFarlane), his wife Tami-Lynn (Jessica Barth), best friend and “thunder buddy for life”, John Bennett (Mark Wahlberg) and the lawyer they have hired, Samantha Jackson (Amanda Seyfried) head over to the comedy club and, suddenly, *Ted 2* takes a turn toward something it hasn’t been since this Boston-accented toy came to life: it becomes subversive. John Waters subversive. So much enjoyable bad taste subversive.

Most of *Ted 2* is just familiar fun. When it moves outside its comfort zone, mocking everything from courtroom dramas to John Hughes films, it’s refreshingly vulgar. It’s like a collection of cultural riffs set to a teenage boy’s hormone-driven imagination. If you liked the first movie, you’ll like this one as well. If you expected more from the man (and staff) who’ve milked *Family Guy* for every last ratings point, then you’re the fool. The Civil Rights angle is a ruse, a way of getting the focus off John and Ted’s past and into a weird argument about property vs. personhood that never quite has the impact the filmmakers intend.



You see, Ted marries Tami-Lynn and are looking to have a baby. When the State of Massachusetts gets wind of this idea, they decide to come down hard on the anthropomorphic kid’s plaything and declare it “property”. Hoping to find some help, our hero grabs John (who is moping around, licking his wounds over the divorce from his wife Lori—Mila Kunis is MIA here) and looks for a lawyer. They find Sam, a pot smoking neophyte, who instantly syncs up with Ted’s buddy’s sad sack routine. They fight the State for Ted’s rights, face several setbacks, and conclude the confusion with a bunch of celebrity cameos and shout outs to other, better films.

Most of the elements here work. Ted and Tami-Lynn have a relationship you can identify with, their marital problems familiar to anyone who is under-employed and overtaxed. Seyfried is equally game, allowing MacFarlane and his cast riff on her unusual good looks (there are several sensation asides about her eyes) and her proclivity toward toking (it’s for medical reasons; she gets migraines). Even Flash Gordon himself, Sam J. Jones, finds yet another way to make his aging ‘80s icon status fresh and new cast members include Morgan Freeman (as a high profile Civil Rights lawyer) and *Mad Men*’s John Slattery (as counsel for the State) incorporate themselves quite nicely.

A comedy is only as successful as its jokes, and in this regard, *Ted 2* is terrific. It's uproariously funny with just enough sprinkling of social satire to stretch this already thin premise into a satisfying sequel. While it's hard to imagine a *Ted 3* arriving anytime soon, don't be surprised if it does eventually get the greenlight. This smut-mouthed sensation has already made two films work. As long as they keep the fur flying, so to speak, Ted will always be hilarious.

This will be as huge a renter as **GET HARD, TED, FURIOUS 7, INSURGENT, PAUL BLART 2, PITCH PERFECT 2.**



12/15 3 TIME OUT OF MIND DRAMA
\$1 MILL BO 67 SCREENS R 120 MINUTES

Richard Gere (AMERICAN GIGOLO, PRETTY WOMAN, AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMEN, RUNAWAY BRIDE, INTERNAL AFFAIRS)

Ben Vereen (TV—WEBSTER, GREY'S ANATOMY, HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER)

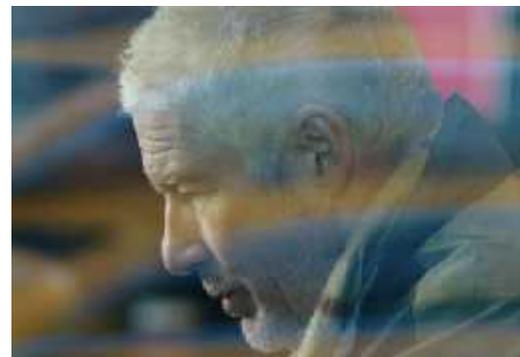
Oren Moverman's *Time Out of Mind* wants to boost our awareness of the homeless and make us think about the way that homelessness can erode a person's sense of worth and make him feel invisible. Throughout, we simply walk a few miles in the shoes of George (Richard Gere), a New Yorker who's

just lost the last of a series of tenuous perches. The film isn't preachy, but its indie-movie artiness sometimes get in the way of its noble mission, making us think more about the techniques being used than the effects they're meant to create.

When he shot *On the Bowery* in 1956, Lionel Rogosin achieved a remarkable sense of realism in part by casting homeless people—including the lead actor, Ray Salyer—as thinly fictionalized versions of themselves. Moverman and Gere, who brought this project to the director, are doing something more conventional here, casting well-known actors as homeless people. The audience's relationship with these performers may encourage identification with and empathy for the characters they play, but it also creates some distance from those characters, at least initially. When we spot Ben Vereen as the compulsively chatty homeless man who attaches himself to George, or Kyra Sedgewick as one of George's "lady friends," or, most of all, Gere himself as George, we have to do a little mental gymnastics, accepting a celebrity as someone who's overlooked or literally unseen by the busy hordes passing by. The actors are all good enough to overcome that handicap with time (Gere does a particularly fine job, radiating a quiet intensity befitting a man who feels things deeply, but has trouble thinking clearly and is prone to lapses he calls "losing time"), but every time we see another famous face, we have to go through that mental recalibration.

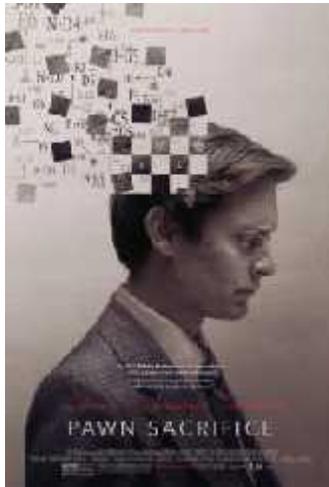
Gere is usually shot by a stationary camera that's quite far from the action, and he's often framed by a door or window that places a piece of dirty or reflection-heavy glass between us and him. That technique, which Moverman has said that he and cinematographer Bobby Bukowski took from Saul Leiter's photographs and conceptualized as "a series of postcards," ensures that we always see George in the context of the bustling city at the same time that he's almost always profoundly alone. But sometimes, as in a shot of George bathed by a beam of white light in Grand Central Station while people rush by in all directions, this technique draws so much attention to itself that it distances us from George rather than drawing us closer, making him seem less like a real person than a model posing for a tableau.

The soundtrack brings the city alive, using ambient sound that includes frequent snippets of the overhead conversations New Yorkers are constantly privy to. The



scenes in the shelter system, most shot in Bellevue, feel accurate too, with the bright fluorescent lights, the constant coughing and occasional eruptions of anger in the background, the early wake-up calls, and the shower George luxuriates in—until the next man in line barks at him to hurry up. In the end, the filmmakers succeed far more often than they fail, conveying a sense of the existential crisis George faces after losing everything—friends, family, job, home—that once grounded and defined him, in his own eyes as well as those of the people around him.

This will rent as well as **DOPE**, **SOUTHPAW**, **THE AGE OF ADELINE**, **THE D TRAIN**, **WHILE WE WERE YOUNG**, and **STILL ALICE**.



12/22 3 PAWN SACRIFICE DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 812 SCREENS PG-13 115 MINUTES

Tobey Maguire (SPIDER MAN, WONDER BOY, THE CIDER HOUSE RULES, DECONSTRUCTING HARRY, THE ICE SOTRM)

Live Schreiber (TV—RAY DONOVAN—FILM—FADING GIGOLO, A PERFECT MAN, TAKING WOODSTOCK, LES DANIELS' THE BUTLER)

Pawn Sacrifice views Bobby Fischer (Tobey Maguire) as the perfect manifestation of the fear, delusions, and geopolitics of the Cold War. Though born to Jewish parents and actively supported by the American government in his professional efforts, he would become a notorious anti-Semite, blaming international Jewry, the KGB, and the FBI for his failures. The film's thesis, that Fischer's sweeping paranoia was the product of the era's fearmongering and the kind of absolute myopia necessitated by chess, is perhaps too elegant and simplistic to be fully convincing, but director Edward Zwick's decision to present Fischer's life as a political thriller remains perversely engrossing.

Zwick strikes the right balance between showing the world from Fischer's increasingly warped perspective and undermining his outrageous claims by emphasizing his alienation from everyone around him. He's shown as a child surrounded by his mother's communist friends whispering in Russian while their house is monitored by the FBI. Later, during "The Match of the Century" in Reykjavik that pitted Fischer against reigning World Champion Boris Spassky (Liev Schreiber as the rational foil), Richard Nixon calls Fischer to voice his concern. The championship coincided almost exactly with Watergate, and Fischer's fear of government intervention in the match becomes a metaphor for the widespread political entropy that swept through America at the time. The chess virtuoso's suspicion of tapped phones is implicitly linked with his associations with McCarthyism, J. Edgar Hoover, and Tricky Dick, and as such the film makes Fischer's behavior understandable, if not justifiable.

It's best appreciated as a tragicomic profile of a man whose extraordinary talent was undermined by the political reality in which he was enmeshed.

Though Maguire's Fischer is a kind of anti-Rocky Balboa in nature, he shares Rocky's diminutive physical stature when compared to Schreiber's stoic and statuesque Spassky, who suggests here the Ivan Drago of chess. Though Fischer was quite tall and physically imposing in real life, Maguire always seems smaller than those around him, which noticeably contrasts with Schreiber's Spassky emerging from the ocean like a Russian Adonis and moving through the film with a sophisticated contempt for those around him. Spassky is Fischer's obscure object of desire, the target of his obsessive longing and confused passion, and the camera stands in for Fischer's gaze as it caresses his body and lingers on his impassive face. The libidinal aspect of Fischer's obsession with Spassky is underlined by Fischer's utterly bland encounter with a young prostitute who takes his virginity, but is unable to hold his interest, which immediately reverts to his elusive Russian opponent.

Their opposing depictions are meant to emphasize the rivalry between Fischer and Spassky as part of an intellectual arms race between America and the Soviet Union. Instead, it exudes the jingoistic vibe that characterized so much of the Cold War. Russians are otherized throughout, either as an intentional replication of contemporary American attitudes, Fischer's own distorted perspective, or just the sort of cliché you expect to find in Cold War-set thrillers. This and Zwick's decision to turn *Pawn Sacrifice* into a conventional sports drama in the middle stretch, lush with slow-motion shots of chess pieces being moved and crowds erupting in jubilation, blunts the film's emotional power, distracting from its political and psychological insights.

Ultimately, the film is best appreciated as a tragicomedy, a profile of a man whose extraordinary talent was undermined by his absurd beliefs and the farcical political reality in which he was enmeshed. The latter is underscored by Michael Stuhlbarg's performance as Fischer's manager, an anxious FBI affiliate who caters to all of Fischer's worst impulses and demands his aid in helping America defeat communism. *Pawn Sacrifice* is no smear job, but a fairly nuanced portrait of the tension between chaos and genius in Fischer's mind that fostered creation and destruction in equal measure. Like a pawn moving in slow motion with violent precision through a world of growing chaos, the film captures the inseparability of Fischer's talent and madness in what he termed his search for truth through chess.

This will rent as well as **THE IMITATION GAME**, **SOUTHPAW**, **LITTLE BOY**, **BLACK OR WHITE**, **ST. VINCENT**, and **THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING**.





12/29 2 HITMAN AGENT 47 ACTION
\$24 MILL BO 2312 SCREENS R 96 MINUTES

Rupert Friend (TV—HOMELAND—FILM—THE ZERO THEOREM, JOLENE, VIRGIN TERRITORY)
Hannah Ware (TV---BOSS, BETRAYAL)

The story is clear during a quiet moment of the film, when Katia (Hannah Ware) asks her protector, super-hitman Agent 47 (Rupert Friend), whether he still has the capacity for anything resembling human feeling. But Agent 47, as the expository opening-credits sequence breathlessly explains, is the product of a scientific experiment to create superior assassins, free of anything resembling empathy to impede them from carrying out their deadly missions. In the film's dramatic scheme, he represents everything Katia—herself imbued by her scientist father, Litvenko (Ciarán Hinds), with superior anticipatory abilities—is fighting against: the denial of her humanity. But, as more than one character portentously intones throughout the film, it's an open question whether she can escape her scientifically induced inhuman destiny. Those are certainly heady themes for any science-fiction film to tackle, even one as action-oriented as this one.

The shoot-outs with our hero taking out armies of henchmen with two guns, one in each hand the glossy German and Singaporean metropolitan and industrial backdrops captured handsomely by cinematographer Óttar Guðnason.

This will rent as well as **TAKEN 3**, **RUN ALL NIGHT**, **GUNMAN**, **SOUTHPAW**, and **KINGMEN: THE SECRET SERVICE**.



12/29 1 THE MAZE RUNNER: SCORCH TRIALS
SCI FI/ACTION
\$73 MILL BO 3792 SCREENS PG-13 132 MINUTES

Dylan O'Brien (TV—TEEN WOLF—FILM—MAZE RUNNER, THE INTERNSHIP, HIGH ROAD)
Kaya Scodelario (TIGER HOUSE, MAZE RUNNER, SPIKE ISLAND, NOW IS GOOD)

Almost immediately after waking up inside a militarized shelter, Thomas and company doubt their savior Janson's (Aidan Gillen) good intentions and orchestrate their getaway into the Scorch, a dangerous dominion that evokes New York City buried beneath the Sahara. From there, the film locks itself into a lather-rinse-repeat rhythm, shuffling the characters from one tense encounter to the next—with hopped-up zombies, bitchin' lightning, and devious rebel factions—without ever allowing them time to process the implications of how their bodies are being exploited as commodities.

Mercy killings and memories of Mom are just pit stops on the long and grungy road toward the Right Arm, an ostensible safe zone that suggests where the characters from *Sons of Anarchy* and *Falling Skies* go to heaven. A rave sequence nearly achieves poignancy, for hinting at the desperation with which drug use disguises the pain of life, only to ultimately be revealed as the setup for replacing Thomas's love interest. Every set piece brings to mind an Epcot Center attraction built from borrowed parts, and on a

CW show's budget, geared only toward reinforcing the young audience's belief that adults just don't understand them.

This will rent as well as **TOMORROWLAND**, **THE GALLOWES**, **POLTERGEIST**, **THE LAZARUS EFFECT**, **JUPITER ASCENDING**, and **PROJECT ALMANAC**.



12/29 2 THE PERFECT GUY THRILLER
\$55 MILL BO 2184 SCREENS PG-13 100 MINUTES

Michael Ealy (TV—CALIFORNICATION, COMMON LAW – FILM--ABOUT LAST NIGHT, LAST VEGAS, THINK LIKE A MAN)

Sanaa Lathan (TV—THE CLEVELAND SHOW, NIP AND TUCK, FAMILY GUY, THE BEST MAN HOLIDAY, CONTAGION)

The Perfect Guy is a thriller as in a scene in which Carter (Michael Ealy), the unhinged ex-boyfriend of a Bay Area lobbyist, Leah (Sanaa Lathan), chases the woman's neighbor (Tess Harper) in order to shut her up. The neighbor happens upon Carter while he's tampering with Leah's security system and soon finds herself clutched from behind and thrown down a flight of stairs, dead before she reaches the bottom. Rosenthal shoots the murder from the bottom of the steps, allowing full view of her body as it tumbles. And, indeed, the circumstance is comparable: a white woman falling to her death, fearful of a black male's aggression. These parallels would be a stretch were Rosenthal not forcefully insistent that contemporary relations between race, gender, and class be placed on the chopping block throughout.

Ethnicity is constantly at the fore of *The Perfect Guy* without ever being explicitly addressed by any characters. Starring three African-American actors, the film encodes racial implications; for example, Leah has a white BFF, reversing racial-casting norms. At the start of the film, Leah's dating Dave (Morris Chestnut), but there's a problem: He doesn't want kids. She's pushing 40 and needs more of a long-term commitment from her partner. The inciting exposition seems rather banal; a subsequent meet-cute with Carter inside a coffee shop turns into a weekend with her folks, where Carter enters the "boyfriend hall of fame" by taking her pops to a baseball game. But Rosenthal steadily livens things up by having two white men, on differing occasions, prey upon Leah. The second time, Carter snaps and viciously assaults the offender, prompting Leah's newfound fear that her charming, well-to-do beau is potentially a psychopath.



Once the basic thriller shtick is in place, Rosenthal reveals that he's been punking us, since what seemed to be simply thoughtless backdrops, like the bourgie, all-white-patron coffee shop or the all-white firms where Leah and Carter work, are actually meaningful articulations of ethnic difference. Leah's job is prestigious (she's an important member of her firm), but no one else in the office *looks* like her. When she leaves late one night, carefully trekking through an abandoned garage, one realizes it isn't simply her isolation as a woman that makes her vulnerable, but more specifically as a black woman. Thus, the setting is a literal instance of her frailty, but also a metaphor for her workplace, where she's doubly alone as a woman of color in a position of prominence.

This one should rent as well as **THE GIFT**, **THINK LIKE A MAN**, **TRUE STORY**, **FOCUS**, **THE LOFT**, **THE BEST OF ME** and **THE DROP**.



12/29 2 A WALK IN THE WOODS DRAMA
\$28 MILL BO 2158 SCREENS R 104 MINUTES

Robert Redford (THE STING, BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID, THE WAY WE WERE, SNEAKERS, BREAKFAST AT TIFFANYS)

Nick Nolte (DOWN AND OUT IN BEVERLY HILLS, WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN, 48 HOURS, NORTH DALLAS FORTY)

“Everyone thinks we’re going to go out on the trail and quit after a week, like most people.” Bill Bryson (Robert Redford) sounds a bit defiant here, but he’s also trying to get a feel for Stephen (Nick Nolte), to see whether he means to take up the challenge of “everyone’s” expectations. Stephen says

exactly the right thing: “We’re not most people.”

So they might think. But even as Stephen and Bill reassure each other that they’ll walk the Appalachian Trail, thereby demonstrating that their youth isn’t so lost as it seems, that their bodies maintain some resemblance to their memories, you see otherwise. Their mutual delusion is charming and annoying in the way that such delusions are charming and annoying in movies with cute soundtracks and episodic plot structures. You won’t be surprised to hear that *A Walk in the Woods* features a snowstorm and a rainstorm, a run-in with an angry husband, and a couple of diner scenes. You also know that the former college classmates, world travelers, and drinking buddies who have long since lost touch will fight and make up and fight again, and also come to heartfelt realizations about the world and one another and themselves.

This all makes them a lot like “most people”, or at least a lot like most people in movies like this one. These would be movies where people walk in the wilderness or where old men are grumpy. As it bridges this spectrum, *A Walk in the Woods* is a test of limits.

When Bill proposes his adventure, following their attendance at a friend’s funeral, Catherine (Emma Thompson) sees it for what it might be, an effort to stave off dying. She takes to Google, finding horror stories of hikers killed by accidents, bad health, and bears, leaving them as print-outs for her husband who does, it appears, use a computer to do his travel writing (that is, his career). Catherine’s role is much as you expect: she argues, she frets, she hugs warmly and turns misty-eyed, and she relents—even after she sees Stephen, who looks and wheezes as if he’s twice as old as her 78-year-old husband.

Near-romantic encounters for each man—Bill with a sweetly flirtatious hotel keeper (Mary Steenburgen) and Stephen with a more overtly provocative woman he meets in a Laundromat (Susan McPhail) (“She’s got a beautiful body,” he explains to Bill, “But it’s buried under 200 pounds of fat”) suggest the men seek confirmation of their manly man-ness in the usual road-trip-movie fashion..

This will do as well as **I’LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, THE LONGEST RIDE, BLACK OR WHITE, THE GAMBLER,** and **TRUE STORY.**

