



12/4 THE HAPPYTIME MURDERS COMEDY
\$22 MILL BO 2172 SCREENS R 91 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL CODE WITH THE COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Melissa McCarthy (TV—SAMANTHA WHO?, MIKE & MOLLY, THE GILMORE GIRLS –FILM--THE BOSS, TAMMY, THE HANGOVER III, IDENTITY THIEF, GHOSTBUSTERS: ANSWER THE CALL)

In what I'd describe as a "filthy Muppet movie," the comedy takes place in the seedy underbelly of present-day Los Angeles. Puppets and humans coexist, but there's a general bigotry between the two groups. When a series of brutal murders erupt across town, former police partners Connie Edwards (Melissa McCarthy) and Phil Phillips (Bill Barretta) must reunite to solve the crimes. The two clash and butt heads as one is made of flesh and the other felt, but they eventually work together to crack the case. Everything about this movie sounds funny (even the title inspires snickers) and it should've (and could've) been a slam dunk. Unfortunately, it's not.

McCarthy, whose comedic talent is wasted yet again, brings considerable enjoyment to the project as its brightest element. She plays her detective role completely deadpan, and you'll never know that she's acting with a puppet rather than a human co-star. Barretta gives a fitting voice performance that complements his gritty and grizzled character, and Maya Rudolph and Elizabeth Banks turn up in memorable supporting roles.



The cutting edge premise is mostly squandered in favor of cheap gags and scenes featuring crude sexual content that seem to exist solely as a method to push buttons. This could've been a lot funnier (and a lot more socially relevant) if writer Todd Berger had chosen instead to focus on character development over cussing and lazy one-liners about drug abuse or barbs about masculine-looking women. It's not exactly smart entertainment so as far as bawdy puppet movies go, this one ranks well below "Team America: World Police."

"The Happytime Murders" may be demented in its off-color wisecracks, but this is not a terrible movie — although it will prove to be an acquired taste for most. (Parents, this film is in no way affiliated with traditional muppets, so use some common sense and leave the kids at home for this one).

This will rent as well as **DADDY'S HOME 2, LIFE OF THE PARTY, BAD MOMS, GIRLS TRIP, and BLOCKERS.**



12/4 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: FALLOUT ACTION
\$225 MILL BO 4361 SCREENS PG-13 147 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL CODE IS WITH THE COMBO

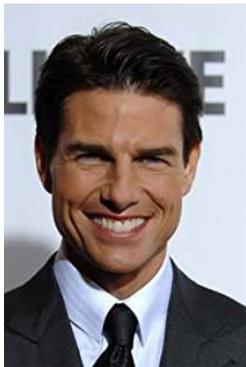
Tom Cruise (RISKY BUSINESS, THE OUTSIDERS, THE COLOR OF MONEY, TROPIC THUNDER, COLLATERAL, JERRY MCGUIRE, A FEW GOOD MEN)

There isn't much left to say about "Mission Impossible: Fallout." While overall it rates an A+ when it comes to rousing action. The practical stunts are hair-raising, and it's far and away the best film in the franchise. You likely do not need any convincing to go see this blockbuster, but I will encourage you to

head to the theaters immediately to watch this on the biggest screen possible.

It's frantic and fun, setting the bar high for mainstream action films. Featuring what are arguably some of the best action sequences in modern cinema history, the movie is also dazzling to look at with its grand scale cinematography. When the clock starts ticking, there's a thrilling sense of real danger — especially when Tom Cruise himself is dangling from a helicopter. It's a visual stunner that isn't burdened with flashy CGI effects, which in itself is refreshing.

Cruise, who famously does most of his own stunts, shows that he's never too old to be a credible action hero. His Ethan Hunt is flawed, but that only serves to make him more relatable to the rest of us. He's one of America's last true movie stars, and he outdoes himself here. The likable supporting players (Simon Pegg, Rebecca Ferguson, Ving Rhames) are sadly still playing second fiddle, with the exception of Henry Cavill as a tagalong CIA suit.



A perfect film it's not, but it's awfully easy to overlook the problems because this movie is all about one thing: the thrilling action scenes. There are so many that are so well done it becomes impossible to choose a favorite, although I could watch the motorcycle chase through the streets of Paris and the bloody bathroom fistfight scenes once a week and never tire of the artistry in the stunt work.

And that's what audiences will flock to see. The plot doesn't really play a significant factor in the creative (if mostly unbelievable) story, and its twists grow from "wow, that's cool" to ridiculous eye-rolling whoppers. No true lover of action films will care, because my review of this movie could easily be nothing more than two words: "buckle up."

This will be as huge a renter as was **SKYSCRAPER, OCEAN'S 8, DEAD POOL 2, PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING, MAZE RUNNER: THE DEATH CURE, and RAMPAGE.**



12/4 OPERATION FINALE THRILLER
\$21 MILL BO 2396 SCREENS **PG-13** 122 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Ben Kingsley (RULES OF ENGAGEMENT, SNEAKERS, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB, EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS)

“The trouble with Eichmann,” wrote philosopher Hannah Arendt, “was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.” The trial of Adolf Eichmann was the basis for a shift in a post-war understanding of obedience and authority and guided Arendt toward her famed “banality of evil” theory. Yet *Operation Finale*, a dramatization of

the exiled Nazi war criminal’s capture, lets regrettably little of her insight seep into its DNA, as the film is interested only in presenting Eichmann (Ben Kingsley) as a boogeyman drawn from our collective movie memories. While *Operation Finale* provides the type of entertainment expected from a handsomely mounted historical caper, it strains to rise to the level of importance its subject necessitates. It’s neither a cathartic indulging of righteous vengeance nor a pensive interrogation about the merits of retributive violence. Rather, Matthew Orton’s screenplay sets up a drama about extraction and extradition, treating the mission to smuggle Eichmann out of Argentina like a heist film.

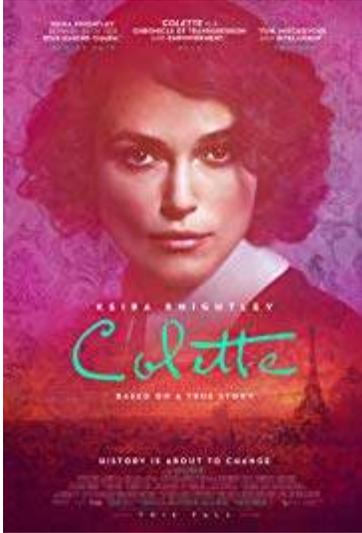


Director Chris Weitz is an uncommonly genre-fluid craftsman, and he steers *Operation Finale* capably. If the filmmakers never get bogged down in the minutiae of the scheme concocted by the Mossad and Shin Bet agents on Eichmann’s trail, it’s because they’re doggedly focused, and captivatingly so, on the result rather than the process. But the excitement trails off and ushers in a dulled dramatic punch when the mission led by secret agent Peter Malkin (Oscar Isaac) runs into an extralegal hiccup: getting Eichmann to acknowledge his role in the Holocaust and agree to stand trial for his actions.



Kingsley disquietingly conveys “banality” in moments of understated calmness. But the film never manages to reconcile the enormity of the Holocaust with how ordinary a bureaucrat Eichmann was. After the man’s capture, most of *Operation Finale*’s back half hinges on the tension between Malkin and Eichmann as the former gently goads the latter into providing consent for his own trial in Israel. Eichmann and Malkin’s conversations are gripping, and the greatest testament to the former’s pernicious evil lies in his ability to gradually ensnare Malkin into a cat-and-mouse game and get the agent to argue on the Nazi’s playing field of extreme moral relativism.

This will rent as well as **TRAFFICK, TRUTH OR DARE, WIND RIVER, THE WALL, and KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE.**



12/11 COLETTE DRAMA
\$4 MILL BO 593 SCREENS R 111 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO 28
DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Keira Knightley (EVEREST, COLLATERAL BEAUTY, LAST NIGHT, NEVER LET ME GO, LOVE ACTUALLY)

French novelist and feminist icon Colette, nee Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, has been ripe for a biographical film for some time. She was an institution at the time of her death in 1954, and her life was filled with enough glamor, struggle, and scandal to more than warrant the fever-pitched drama that's the mainstay of the celebrity biopic. Wash Westmoreland's *Colette* indulges in such theatricality while delivering an acutely told story of the eponymous writer that relishes the messy details and ambivalences of her

life.

Following Colette's (Keira Knightley) formative years, from the mid-1890s until 1910, the film tracks her development from a penniless country girl to her rise to literary fame. Westmoreland opens on a visit from Colette's soon-to-be husband, Henry-Gauthier Villars (Dominic West), a corpulent literary entrepreneur and walking phallus who, of course, goes by Willy, his nom-de-plume. He's a pompous lecher, but his Gallic-ness charms Colette. Soon, they move to Paris, spending their nights at decadent parties and sleeping with—and fighting over—various women. And throughout these scenes, Westmoreland's eye for the bawdy and the sumptuous is unmistakable.



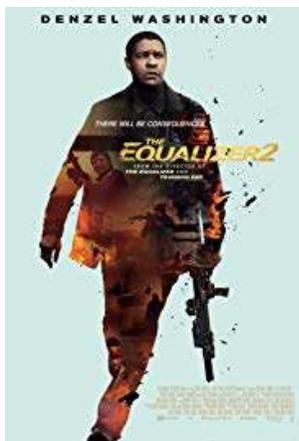
Despite some hesitation about her new surroundings, Colette comes to fit in, nurturing a taste for the sensuous that in a modern light appears revolutionary for its self-sufficiency. By day, she works in Willy's struggling literary "factory," eventually producing the sexually frank, scandalous, and wildly successful *Claudine* novels, published under Willy's name and extracted from her via home imprisonment by her husband, launching the two to literary stardom and setting the stage for Colette's fight for recognition.

In order to navigate the social scene of fin-de-siècle Paris, Colette has to constantly stifle her emotions. Often it seems as if she's unsure of what she's feeling, and Knightley acutely charts her character's emotional undercurrents. Her performance accentuates the hesitations, anger, and boredom bubbling just under the surface as Colette attempts to maintain her veneer of contentment. When Willy rejects her first draft of *Claudine at School*, she remarks, with a mix of resignation and barely concealed (and enraged) dismay: "I don't need to leave my mark on the world." Knightley delivers an explosive final monologue that's par for the course in the genre, but it's when she brings forth Colette's simmering conflicts of desire that her character resonates. In such moments, we can see the full breadth of Colette's many personae: a simplicity-loving country girl, a socialite with an attraction for glamor, a writer fabricating fantasy, and a heroine living her truth.



It's the film's concerted emphasis on Colette's ambivalent nature and desires that reveals her to be an artist just ahead of her time, fighting against—yet seduced by—her present. *Colette* is much too focused on its heroine's idiosyncrasies and personal struggles to cast her as a renegade out to shake up the status quo, but it feels good to cheer for her when she inevitably does.

This will rent as well as **LEAVE NO TRACE, HEARTS BEAT LOUD, RIDER, TRAFFICK, and DISOBEDIENCE.**



12/11 EQUALIZER 2 ACTION
\$99 MILL BO 2398 SCREENS R 121 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO

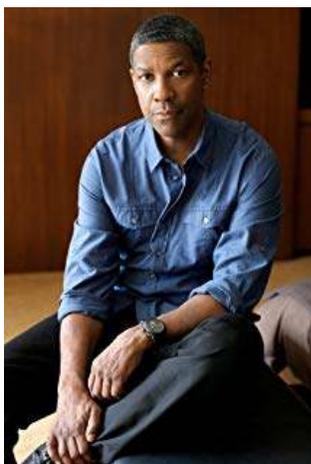
Denzel Washington (PHILADELPHIA, THE PELICAN BRIEF, TRAINING DAY, THE BONE COLLECTOR, MAN ON FIRE, UNSTOPPABLE, SAFE HOUSE)

Although it is technically a follow-up to the 2014 film *The Equalizer*, which itself had been a reboot of a popular TV show on CBS in the mid-to-late 1980s, this one doesn't really require having seen that film in order to understand what's going on. Outside of the main character with a murky past in covert operations with the CIA in order to explain his training as a highly skilled assassin and spy, there's not much depth to the character at all, though Washington offers plenty of nuance to dive into from an acting standpoint to make it seem like a much deeper movie than it truly is. For a man who made his debut his in feature films in 1981 with a comedy called *Carbon Copy*, he has made another film worthy of that title, as this sequel lifts all of the things audiences enjoyed from the first film, while also continuing on with some of the overhead involved, in what ends up being the very first time in his nearly forty-year career that he's made a follow-up to one of his films.



All of these kinds of films tap into our fears that the world is unfair, with the powerful continuing to prey upon the meek, often without justice, and we all desire that someone would do something about it. Wish fulfillment is the name of the game with this property, and McCall represents the vigilante archetype, only with a lot more penchant for exactly bone-crushing and eye-gouging violence to sate our desire to see those who make others suffer get their just desserts.

It contains enough action to qualify in that genre, but *The Equalizer 2* does contain a bit more moments of drama this time out, to the point where those seeking lots of punch in their punch-fests may begin to grow impatient. Between McCall taking on some Turkish thugs committing a kidnapping in the opening sequence, assisting a Holocaust survivor trying to track down the long-lost painting belonging to his sister, and paternally helping a wayward teenager with a talent for art get his life on a better track than running with gangs.



I'm not averse to brutal action, as long as I feel it is earned, as I truly love Denzel in *Man on Fire*, a film even more violent than *The Equalizer 2* in many regards. However, there are a few times in this film that I felt like Antoine Fuqua may be going a bit overboard in his arm-snapping and bloodletting bits of retribution, perhaps even reveling in the punishments inflicted on his targets. These scenes also extend far beyond satiety, even for those who revel along with them, especially given how redundant some of these are from not only the first film, but sometimes repeating beats within the very same scenes. Even for a film in which everyone is expecting a high kill count, it's the overkill count that threatens to make the film feel exploitative, despite its more noble ambitions thematically.

If you enjoyed the first one enough to watch it a second time, you're likely the kind of audience that would also appreciate its follow-up, as it delivers the goods you're expecting and have enjoyed, except with new characters and situations to delve into. If you've already had your fill of seeing Denzel Washington do this sort of thing, or you are averse to heaps of strong violent acts, you may find *The Equalizer* has been too firmly set to someone else's frequency.

This will rent as well as **BAD SAMARITAN, RAMPAGE, RED SPARROW, PROUD MARY, THE COMMUTER, and AMERICAN MADE.**



12/11 THE NUN HORROR

\$117 MILL BO 3876 SCREENS R 96 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX DIGITAL CODE
WITH THE COMBO

Demien Bichir (TV—THE BRIDGE, WEEDS—FILM--ALIEN: COVENANT, THE HATEFUL EIGHT, LOWRIDERS, SAVAGES)

“A priest with a haunted past and a novice on the threshold of her final vows are sent by the Vatican to investigate the death of a young nun in Romania and confront a malevolent force in the form of a demonic nun.”

Now if that doesn't set the tone of the film, i'm not sure what does. The notorious 'Nun' from the Conjuring series is back with it's own feature film and is freakier than ever...

Horror is hot right now and Hollywood is on a solid roll of dishing out the spooky and mysterious and doesn't seem to be slowing down anytime soon.

Corin Hardy takes the helm in 'The Nun' creating a visual scare-fare that is sure to please audiences of both the series and genre a-like. Although the film is not the greatest out of the Conjuring-Verse, it is still a solid entry and definitely a wild and fun ride. James Wan still sits as a producer, making sure his conjuring child is in good hands.



The inclusion of Taissa Farmiga (Vera's daughter) was a great touch, connecting characters and also adding an extra little dash of creepiness to Lorraine Warren's 'visions' of the two. Jonas Bloquet was a standout within the film, bringing just the right amount of light humour to get you uncomfortably giggling while you wait for what was around the corner...

While 'The Nun' is well worth a watch for any horror lover or fan of the 'Conjuring' series. It doesn't attempt to do anything different with the genre, and it really doesn't need to. It is packed full of back crawling creepiness and scares that are sure to make you spill the popcorn in darkened theatre.

Oh yeah, this will be as big a renter as **FIRST PURGE, A QUIET PLACE, ANNIHILATION, INSIDIOUS: THE LAST KEY, and JIGSAW.**



12/11 PEPPERMINT ACTION
\$38 MILL BO 2980 SCREENS R 101 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX DIGITAL
COPY WITH THE COMBO

**Jennifer Garner (TV---ALIAS---FILM---LOVE SIMON,
MIRACLES FROM HEAVEN, DRAFT DAY, DALLAS
BUYER'S CLUB, VALENTINE'S DAY, JUNO)**

“Peppermint” is one of those revenge movies that fails to stand out from the crowd. It’s not great nor is it bad, it just manages to exist. If you’re a fan of violent payback films, this one likely won’t disappoint. It may leave a rotten taste in some viewers’ mouths with its icky feeling of racism and general unpleasantness, but it’s at least as entertaining as other

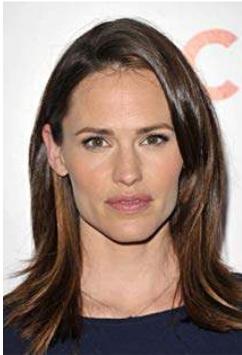
forgettable films in the genre. Think of it as “Death Wish” with a female star.

After a brutal drive-by shooting leaves her husband and 10 year old daughter dead, Riley North (Jennifer Garner) awakens from a coma in a state of anger and clarity. After she correctly identifies the gang members responsible, she faces the harsh reality of a corrupt police department and legal system.

Five years go by and Riley is on the run, showing up everywhere from an underground fight club in Hong Kong to robbing a gun store in downtown Los Angeles. During that time, she has transformed herself from suburban mom to urban guerilla. Hell-bent on exacting revenge that our justice system didn’t, Riley goes



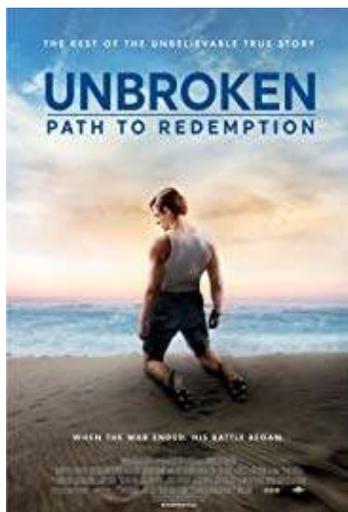
on an insane murdering spree and wipes out the criminal underworld and corrupt bystanders one by one.



I hate to call bloody violence refreshing, but this R-rated action film doesn’t shy away from the gruesome aftermath of gun play, stabbings, and beatings. Garner is more than convincing as a grieving wife and mother turned vigilante. She handles the physicality and emotional depth (or what there is) of the role with ease. The rest of the cast is paper thin and filled with stereotypes. Watch as tattooed Latino gang members line up to get slaughtered by Skid Row’s badass guardian angel.

The film may be formulaic, but it has its moments. The ending sets it up for a sequel — one that probably will never happen, but one that I’d watch.

Fun action that will rent as well as **DEATH WATCH, BREAKING IN, THE HURRICANE HEIST, PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING, RED SPARROW** and **PROUD MARY**.



12/11 UNBROKEN: PATH TO REDEMPTION DRAMA

\$9 MILL BO 1620 SCREENS PG-13 98 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Samuel Hunt (TV---EMPIRE, CHICAGO PD, CHICAGO FIRE, DAYS OF OUR LIVES)

A tidy opening montage recaps neophytes to what was told before ending with Zamperini's airport homecoming to California. Louis (played by Samuel Hunt, best known as a recurring character on NBC's *Chicago P.D.*) denies his place and stature as a hero, saying he merely survived as he returns to hugs and headlines in Torrance, California. Gifted insurance money pushes him as a poster boy to travel the country pitching war bonds for his new commanding major (stalwart character actor Bob Gunton of *The Shawshank Redemption*). Behind his dashing good looks and winning smile is a tortured soul still haunted by the hell he experienced marooned at sea and at the hands of his villainous captors. Frequent nightmarish visions of sharks, the squalid conditions, and his chief tormentor, Mutsuhiro "The Bird" Watanabe (David Sakurai), jolt him towards the bottom of a bottle and instead of the therapeutic offers from his VA doctor (the recognizable Gary Cole).

Two rays of sunshine would enter Louis's life to help battle the vices and fears he cannot rid himself. The first is the love of a good woman named Cynthia Applewhite (the alluring Merritt Patterson of *The Royals*) he meets in Miami, Florida. Wooed in a whirlwind, the two quickly marry and start a family together back in Torrance. Unable to earn breadwinner money and disappointed by setbacks trying to return to Olympic shape in time for the 1948 Summer Games in London, Louis bottoms out even further, squandering money and trust. Through the Cynthia's emotional and exasperated prodding, the second ray comes from Louis discovering faith through the 1949 Los Angeles roadshow crusades of evangelical leader Billy Graham (played by his grandson and spitting image Will Graham).



On paper and on screen, the lower budget of this film compared to the big studio push that was *Unbroken* is plain to see. Any cinematographer and composer was going to be a step down from the acclaimed Roger Deakins and two-time Oscar winner Alexandre Desplat. Nevertheless, the assembled crew here outperforms their levels wonderfully. Director of photography Zoran Popovic (*War, Inc.*) captures all of the gloss of the era to give a stellar glow to the excellent and corner-to-corner and head-to-toe production value from production designer Mayne Berke (*The Princess Diaries*), costume designer Diane Crooke (*CHIPS*), and makeup department head Marina Proctor (*Little Accidents*). Bathed in these impeccable period details, the troupe of mostly TV actors comport themselves equally well. The compliments for Samuel Hunt and Merritt Patterson far outnumber the wincers.



Unbroken: Path to Redemption does not hide its faith-based core, especially when directed by *God's Not Dead* franchise steward Harold Cronk working under the maligned sermonizing label that comes with the backing of Pure Flix Entertainment. In spite of that stigma, folks suspiciously expecting to be polarized can stand to be impressed by the given treatment of its true-life subject. Simply put, the Zamperini story material is worlds better than a scribbled *God's Not Dead* film, especially when fostered by Academy Award-nominated screenwriter Richard Friedenberg (*A River Runs Through It*) instead of Cronk himself. You cannot tell this story without a thick varnish of religious conviction. Doing so with soft grace and righteous composure stands as a testament to the man who lived that very path rather than a shoehorned

agenda where one was not present. That successful portrayal of shifted strength is what earns this film priceless respect.

This will rent as well as **EIGHTH GRADE, LEAVE NO TRACE, ADRIFT, HEARTS BEAT LOUD, GOD'S NOT DEAD 2, TULLY** and **THOROUGHBREDS**.



12/11 THE WIFE DRAMA

**\$9 MILL BO 1382 SCREENS R 100 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY DIGITAL COPY WITH THE BLU RAY**

Glenn Close (TV---DAMAGES, THE SHIELD---FILM --- FATAL ATTRACTION, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, THE STEPFORD WIVES, AIR FORCE ONE, IN & OUT, HOOK)

Some of cinema's greatest works have relied on the close-up of a woman's face in order to confront the audience with the ambiguities that only the human face can hold. And the expressions on those faces often come in response to the rarely reasonable demands of men. It's in the sight of Maria Falconetti's Joan of Arc pleading for her life before the male jurists in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*; the crumbling visage of Liv Ullman's Marianne in *Scenes from a Marriage*,

dumbfounded by the avowal of her husband's betrayal and imminent departure; and in Greta Garbo's lovestruck and totem-like countenance in *Queen Christina*. Not for nothing did Roland Barthes famously describe Garbo's eyes as "two tremulous wounds."

In *The Wife*, it's Glenn Close's face, simmering with a storm of contradictions, that haunts the viewer from beginning to end. Though Björn Runge's film could hardly be described as great cinema, Close's perennial look of astonishment and resilience borrows from the misery of the aforementioned women of cinema, and of feminine despair writ large. It commands the action to the point of turning every other screen element into a gratuitous prop.



Close plays Joan, the wife of world-renowned writer Joe Castleman (Jonathan Pryce), who's about to get the Nobel Prize for literature. From the start, Joan seems paralyzed by the realization that she has wasted her life devoting herself to a man incapable of even the most momentary act of selflessness. Close's eyes, too, are two tremulous wounds, twitching with wrath and mourning, newfound anger, and an all-too-familiar tendency for acquiescence.

As Joan and Joe head to Sweden with their son, David (Max Irons), to accept the Nobel Prize, the viewer learns that it's Joan who should be getting the award, not Joe. The confrontation of this injustice could and should have been sufficient dramatic focus here: the settling of accounts of a man and a woman in an insipid hotel room in Stockholm as the unevenness of their domestic deal emerges. But Runge, whose film is based on the 2003 novel of the same name by Meg Wolitzer, adds several unnecessary subplots that ultimately dilute the gravitas that Close brings to this project, including one in which an insistent biographer, Nathaniel (Christian Slater), tries to pit the Castlemans against one another so that he can get juicy tidbits for an unauthorized book on Joe, and another in which the childish David nags his father to give him feedback on a short story that David wrote.

Close's stare, whenever we're allowed a few seconds to bask in it, keeps reminding us of the triteness behind the film's attempts at concocting a traditional narrative—one with villains, flashbacks, and drinks spilt on fancy gowns. When Close isn't in the frame to subtly distill Joan's pent-up emotions, *The*



Wife beats us over the head with a morality tale of women not standing a chance in the workplace. This is particularly true in a flashback scene where the young Joan (Annie Starke) meets a cartoonishly bitter female author who tells her she shouldn't write because she'll never get men's attention and her books will end up, at best, in the alumni shelf of some university bookstore, never to be read. Though there may be truth in that message, it's one that already lives in Close's face in less literal ways. As such, pairing an actress of Close's caliber with such banal material makes everything that isn't articulated by Close herself feel like soap-operatic redundancy.

This will rent as well as **BOOK CLUB, DISOBEDIENCE, EVERY DAY, LOVE SIMON, and LEAVE NO TRACE.**



12/18 A SIMPLE FAVOR DRAMADY
\$61 MILL BO 2978 SCREENS R 117 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO A DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO

Anna Kendrick (PITCH PERFECT 3, TABLE 19, MIKE AND DAVE NEED WEDDING DATES, TROLLS, INTO THE WOODS)

Blake Lively (ALL I SEE IS YOU, THE SHALLOWS, SAVAGES, HICK, THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS 2, SANDMAN)

Opening with the bouncy '60s French pop song "Ca S'est Arrangé" laid over a Saul Bass-inspired titles sequence, Paul Feig's *A Simple Favor* announces its intention to be guided by spryness above all else. The film exhibits a lightness of touch early on, as tightly wound but ever-cheerful single mother and cooking vlogger Stephanie (Anna Kendrick) is thrust into the exclusive social orbit of the sophisticated Emily (Blake Lively) after their kids meet for a playdate. And as the lonely, widowed Stephanie—euphoric simply at the opportunity to befriend the town's coolest, most urbane mom—gleefully spills her deepest, darkest secrets over a series of martini-soaked hangout sessions, Feig cannily allows us to luxuriate in the tensions that arise between the two women, all while their true intentions lurk beneath a haze of booze.

Both Stephanie's intense—and potentially sexual—feelings for Emily, which Kendrick conveys through her typical turned-up-to-11 neurotic restlessness, and Emily's coy nefariousness, masked by Lively's enigmatic gaze, allow for a number of provocative, mysterious, and amusing tête-à-têtes between the two women. But once Emily disappears without warning after leaving her son, Nicky (Ian Ho), with Stephanie, *A Simple Favor* suddenly shifts into Nancy Drew mystery mode, struggling to balance its initial playfulness with a desire to veer into noir terrain. The moment Stephanie is revealed to be more puckish than her soccer-mom exterior would have you believe, the film becomes a trite and increasingly inane story about the dark underbelly of suburbia.

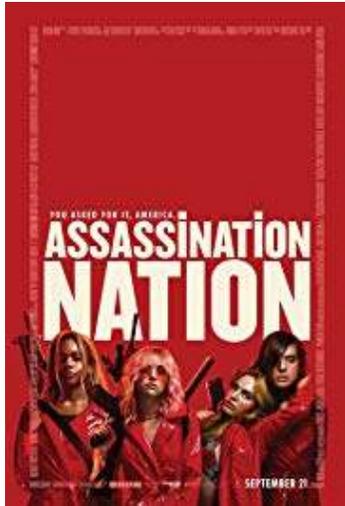


Feig's dive into the nastier side of his characters is laced with references to classic film noirs: a late-in-the-game insurance scam a la Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*; a painting of Emily's mom (Jean Smart) that recalls Otto Preminger's *Laura*; and a shamelessly awkward name drop when Stephanie asks Emily's husband, Sam (Henry Golding), if he's "diabolique-ing" her. But these call-outs are hollow at best, seeming to exist only for their own sake.



As Stephanie tracks down the elusive Emily, all while growing dangerously closer to Sean, the narrative becomes unwieldy. Feig's everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach allows for the introduction of plot points involving, among other things: incest, patricide, Christian summer camp, a failed literary career, and a psychotic artist who only paints knives. In doing so, *A Simple Favor* haphazardly vacillates between suburban satire, goofy comedy, and dark, twisted psychological thriller.

This will easily rent as well as **SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, OCEAN'S 8, SPY WHO DUMPED ME, TAG, BLOCKERS, I FEEL PRETTY** and **LOVE SIMON**.



12/18 ASSASSINATION NATION ACTION
\$2 MILL BO 1203 SCREENS R 108 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL CODE WITH THE COMBO

Odessa Young (TV---A MILLION LITTLE PIECES, HIGH LIFE, WONDERLAND, TRICKY BUSINESS)

“Assassination Nation” is a wannabe feminist revenge fantasy, a heavy-handed, metaphor-filled, angry little film about toxic masculinity that’s often too clever for its own good. The film’s high energy atmosphere, talented cast, and trail of gruesome, bloody violence may score big with horror genre fans, but its distinctive mash-up of social commentary with classic exploitation could both delight and disgust thoughtful moviegoers.

High school senior Lily ([Odessa Young](#)) and her crew of best friends ([Hari Nef](#), [Abra](#), and [Suki Waterhouse](#)) live in a social media haze of texts, posts, selfies and chats. But when an anonymous hacker starts posting details from the private lives of everyone in their small town, a few nudie pics and racy texts cause the entire town to go crazy. A deadly mob mentality ensues after the girls are fingered for the hack, causing most of the white men townfolk to take up arms, form savage gangs, and start hunting the four teens. Eventually, Lily and her friends start to question whether they’ll live through the night.



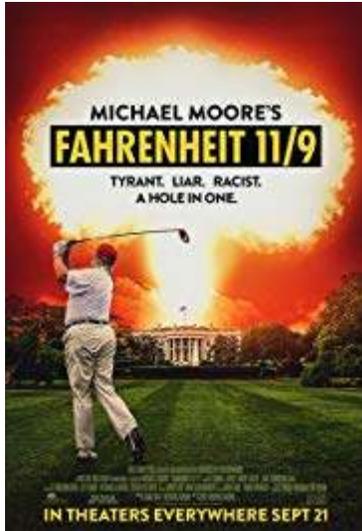
Think of this film as “Kill Bill” meets “A Clockwork Orange” meets “Spring Breakers” meets “Heathers.” The film is as interesting as it is unique, even if overall it’s a little too artistically academic. The 1970s washed-out cinematography vibe starts to feel gimmicky early on, as does the muted lighting, vintage costumes, distracting soundtrack, and the irritating slow motion and split screen shots that pepper the screen. The film seems to be a little too in love with itself and its visual ideas, which are no doubt being assumed to be groundbreaking (they aren’t). The script is off-putting in its obviousness. How clearly is everything spelled out? The film is set in a town called Salem (*get it?!*).

The film gets off to a very slow start and is a trying exercise for the first hour. Stick with it. After the story finds its footing, it becomes a scary and suspenseful roller coaster of bloody female rage. The feminist battle cry is effective but also undermined by the film’s exploitative vibe. While writer / director [Sam Levinson](#)



opines on the horrors that come from the treatment of women as objects, he also seems to take great pleasure in dressing the girls in skimpy outfits and over-sexualizing the blood-spattered violence. It feels unsettling in a way that certainly wasn’t intended. The lead characters are rebellious and smart, sexually liberal young women who rally against society’s general problem with nudity and the Lolita complex — while sexting dirty pictures to the fortysomething dad ([Joel McHale](#)) next door. It’s a film full of contradictions, but that doesn’t make the points any less valid.

“Assassination Nation” is an inventive, gruesome look at how quickly the court of public opinion can ruin (and even end) lives forever. It is one of the more interesting films of the year, and its message is one that’s as timely as it is important.



12/18 FAHRENHEIT 11/9 DOCUMENTARY
\$7 MILL BO 1198 SCREENS R 228 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Talk about leaving the theater with a sense of dejection. I'm sure that isn't what controversial filmmaker Michael Moore intended with his new documentary "Fahrenheit 11/9," a left-leaning film about America's current 'hell in a handbasket' state of affairs.

This isn't really Moore's typical rip-roaring anti-Trump tirade, which is unexpected. It's more of an anti-politician, anti-political party call to action that is, by design, made to rally the country's remaining liberal population. Nobody is coming to help us, he crows, so we need to help ourselves *before it's too late*.

Moore covers everything from the tear-filled election night of 11/9/16 to the teacher strikes in West Virginia to the Parkland school shooting to the water crisis in his hometown of Flint, Michigan while openly and harshly criticizing everyone from Trump, Pence, and Bill O'Reilly to, yes, even Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. His points are more than valid, especially when he sheds light on his theory as to why people in certain parts of the country didn't show up to vote because they felt their voices didn't matter.

But that's the problem with this film. As Moore blasts the Republicans, the Democrats, and America's political system in general, he creates a sense of overwhelming hopelessness. Encouraging citizens to speak up and demand action through protest and voting is all well and good, but a film that does so needs to end on a high note that will inspire people to get up and out into the streets. This one made me want to sit at home and do nothing.

The bits that don't work include a little too over-the-top and long drawn out piece that compares Trump to Hitler (although the undeniable similarities are chilling) and another rambling section about school shooting victims that feels out of place. Moore is still a talented political filmmaker and regardless of your personal politics, everyone should watch this film (if only for the eye-opening and truly tragic bits about poor black children who are suffering from lead poisoning due to a corrupt system). That story alone made me want to "get loud" from my internal anger.





12/18 HOUSE WITH A CLOCK IN THE WALLS

FAMILY

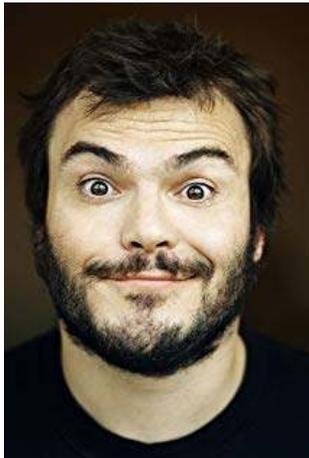
\$66 MILL BO 3592 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO 28
DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Jack Black (JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE, HIGH FIDELITY, BERNIE, TROPIC THUNDER, ANCHORMAN: THE LEGEND OF RON BUNDY)

Lewis Barnavelt a young orphan is set to live with his Uncle Jonathan and had no idea the magical world he was about to enter and sets out to help him and Mrs. Zimmerman find the clock that is built within the walls of the house.

We cannot help but feel sorry for Lewis from the start, he is a little bit strange. He knows that and then being thrown in with his Uncle who means well but doesn't really understand how to raise a child. Starting a new school and trying very hard to make some new friends, which does create a very bad situation but I think he really does help to show what children will do to fit in. Trying to convince someone of something so they will like them, although really when you think about that even more it is something adults still do as well.

Mrs. Zimmerman has some troubles of her own as she is struggling to use her magic since some tragic events in her life. The friendship with Jonathan is hilarious as they call each other all different names and have a little battle which I felt gave them brilliant character development. Mixing Lewis in with them creates an even better balance as they



become parent figures to him. Isaac Izard is a man who had a bad past and had not long died. He had built a clock into the walls of the house and Jonathan spent his nights searching for where it was hidden. The arrival of Lewis is something that really does help and hinder all of this. As the house responds to him. The story has plenty of twists and turns to keep it interesting along with the special effects in and around the house pretty much reminded me of enjoying films like this as a kid.



Performance wise I thought Owen Vaccaro led the film very well and found him to be engaging and showing plenty of different emotions. Very impressive from the young actor and I think it is really going to help push his career forward. Jack Black is well you know how you would expect him to be and back on top form with this film, with his crazy style. Cate Blanchett offers the elegance and class impressing as always and showing that she really can take on any role in any type of film. I hope that this film gets plenty of people watching it as I thoroughly enjoyed it and thought it was a fantastic trip to the cinema!

This will rent as well as **TRANSYLVANIA 3, WRINKLE IN TIME, PETER RABBIT, THE GREATEST SHOWMAN, FERDINAND, and COCO.**



12/18 LITTLE WOMEN DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 643 SCREENS PG-13 118 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO

Lea Thompson (TV—SWITCHED AT BIRTH, SCORPION, CAROLINE IN THE CITY, GAME OF YOUR LIFE—FILM—FATAL SECRETS, SPY SCHOOL, CALIFORNIA DREAMING, BACK TO THE FUTURE I, II, III, HOWARD THE DUCK)

Louisa May Alcott's beloved *Little Women* gets an update in this affectionate adaptation set in the present day. First-time director Clare Niederpruem and co-writer Kristi Shimek have Jo March (Sarah Davenport) as a headstrong 29-year-old trying to impress Prof. Freddy Bhair (Ian Bochen) with the fantasy novel she's writing, all the while flashing back to her teenage years with her three sisters (Melanie Stone, Elise Jones, Allie Jennings), their mom (Lea Thompson), and their honorary fifth sister, Laurie (Lucas Grabeel). (Dad, instead of being in the Civil War, is in Afghanistan.) Those scenes are warm and wholesome, capturing the give and take of a functional, loving family, and the Marches' peculiarities are endearing — and, if you came from a large family, relatable.

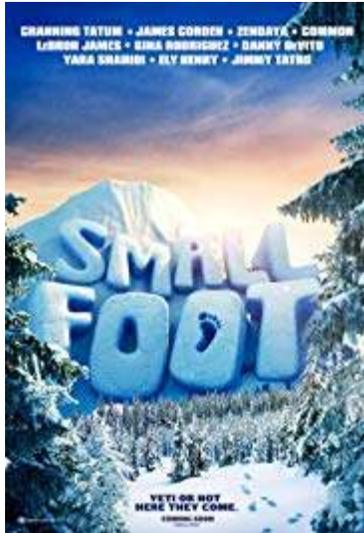
But I come to this as one with only passing familiarity with *Little Women* and no particular connection to it. I'm curious how hardcore Littletons (that's what we call *Little*



Women fans) will react. It has always seemed to me that part of the story's charm was its quaint old-timeyness, which is negated by the modern setting. This version is definitely Jo's story, too, with her sisters getting the short shrift and Jo sometimes coming across as a bit of a pill. Not all of the plot adjustments work, either — it's not clear why Prof. Bhair is Jo's only connection to the publishing world, for example — but the production is cheerful and heartfelt, and for some reason it's always Christmas, so it wins points for sheer merriness.



This will rent as well as **JULIET NAKED, 8TH GRADE, HEARTS BEAT LOUD, SEAGULL, TULLY, and THOROUGHBREDS.**



12/18 SMALLFOOT FAMILY
\$60 MILL BO 4131 SCREENS PG 96 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO 28
DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

VOICES OF: Channing Tatum, James Corden, LeBron James, Danny DeVito.

“Smallfoot” isn’t like other family oriented movies. It’s not the animation (which is barely acceptable, with its ugly bland blue hues and washed-out backgrounds), it’s not the far-from-lovable characters, and it’s not the toe-tapping original songs (which add a delightful pick-me-up). It’s the film’s exuberant encouragement for children to question what they’re told, especially when it comes to their beliefs.

The Bigfoot legend is turned on its head when Migo (voiced by Channing Tatum) encounters a mythical creature that he thought didn’t exist — a Smallfoot (voiced by James Corden). News of this discovery causes a panicked uproar in the yeti world as many begin to wonder what may lie outside of their snow-filled village. Migo is banned from the village and joins forces with the outcasts at the Smallfoot Evidentiary Society (Zendaya, LeBron James, and Gina Rodriguez) to find material proof that humans are indeed real.

In the film, the yeti faith comes from ancient stones (with are presented with an obvious religious connotation). The stones tell the yeti how to live and what to do, and even describe how their world was created with an origin story about mammoths underneath the clouds. It’s sort of a jaw-dropping that a major animation studio could get away with such a progressive message in today’s Pure Flix environment.

Yes, you can call this an anti-religion movie. But you can also call it one that’s anti-groupthink too. The story embraces and advocates curiosity and science-based evidence. The Stonekeeper (Common), an elder tasked with guarding the stones, eventually reveals that all of the stories are made up to protect the village from violent humans because, well, ignorance is bliss. I can assume this film may cause an uproar with the devout, which is a shame because the other main point of the story is that humans (and yetis) should never be judged on appearance nor rumors alone. There are even life lessons on integrity, kindness, and forgiveness.

“Smallfoot” is mostly interesting because it brings to the table something I haven’t seen before, especially in a kid-friendly film. Plus, I can’t get the modern, Disney-quality original songs out of my head.

This will easily rent as well as **TRANSYLVANIA 3, TEEN TITANS, ISLE OF DOGS, PADDINGTON 2, THE GREATEST SHOWMAN** and **FERDINAND**.





12/18 WHITE BOY RICK DRAMA
\$24 MILL BO 2387 SCREENS R 115 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY
BOTH DVD AND BLU RAY HAVE DIGITAL CODES

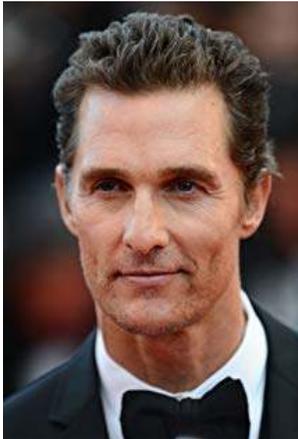
Matthew McConaughey (SING, FREE STATE OF JONES, THE WEDDING PLANNER, A TIME TO KILL, TROPIC THUNDER, WE ARE MARSHALL, THE LINCOLN LAWYER)

The seedy side of 1980s Detroit during the height of the crack epidemic sets the scene for “White Boy Rick,” a mildly successful film based on the true story of a blue collar, not-quite-legal gun salesman Richard Wershe Sr. ([Matthew McConaughey](#)) and his teenage son Rick ([Richie Merritt](#)). Rick Jr. became an undercover police officer and later an FBI-trained drug dealer who was sold out by the cops and sentenced to life in prison.

The story isn’t that great and the characters are far from deserving much compassion. Director [Yann Demange](#) takes his time with the storytelling but then picks up the pace so rapidly that you can’t help but feel that large chunks of the story are missing. I didn’t find Rick to be very sympathetic at all, which in turn hurt the story even more. In what could’ve been a blistering commentary about the connection of poverty and crime



(check out the phenomenal [“Blindspotting”](#) for a film that nails this aspect), the film instead nearly nosedives into a forgettably weak entry into the crowded crime drama genre.



Even with McConaughey doing what he does best, this film can’t quite overcome its mediocrity. The story lags while stumbling over roadblocks full of missed opportunities. The casting is on point (with an especially effective supporting turn from [Bel Powley](#) as a drug addict), but this doesn’t even come close to being a breakout performance from newcomer Merritt as the title character. It’s unfortunately clear in several of the more challenging scenes that he is indeed *acting*, making it even easier for McConaughey to slide right in and steal the spotlight with his strong onscreen presence.

This will rent as well as **BLINDSPOTTING, SICARIO 2, BREAKING IN, BAD SAMARITAN, TRUTH OR DARE** and **DEATH WISH**.



12/27 THE PREDATOR SCI/FI/HORROR
\$56 MILL BO 2874 SCREENS R 117 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO DIGITAL COPY WITH THE COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Boyd Holbrook (GONE GIRL, RUN ALL NIGHT, OUT OF THE FURNACE, JANE GOT A GUN, LOGAN, BOOMTOWN)

At the start of *The Predator*, a battle between two predator ships in deep space ends with one vessel escaping through a wormhole to Earth, where it crash-lands in a Mexican forest. The ship is soon discovered by Quinn McKenna (Boyd Holbrook), a black-ops American sniper in the midst of an assassination mission. Anticipating a cover-up, he steals some tech from the ship and mails it to his home as evidence before he's apprehended by a secret organization devoted to studying predators. It's some of the most fleet-footed work that director Shane Black, known for stretching out his scenes for the sake of exalting his characters' loquaciousness, has ever done, leaning on insinuation and minimal dialogue to swiftly lay out the film's premise.

Despite setting up an internecine conflict between aliens that's spilled out onto our planet, the film finds that secret agency far more intimidating a force. In short order, Quinn is passed off as mentally ill and shipped off to a high-security facility. He's a classic archetype, one of the best soldiers in his field, but also a believably normal character who responds to most threats with exasperated wisecracks. His witticisms are more than matched by the head of the research agency, Will Traeger (Sterling K. Brown), who acts like a teenager playing around with advanced technology. When a civilian scientist, Casey Bracket (Olivia Munn), objects to calling the aliens predators, arguing that their status as trophy hunters makes them "more like bass fishermen," he responds: "Yeah, well, we took a vote and predator sounded cooler."

Eventually, the humans must contend with both the shipwrecked predator and another, larger specimen chasing it through space. Despite the human-like qualities of these aliens and their hunting methods, security personnel are supernaturally torn apart like paper when the predators ambush them, and soon both Quinn and Casey must contend with the hunters and Traeger's group. The two quickly join forces, along with a group of soldiers being confined with Quinn for intense psychiatric evaluation. These characters are a menagerie of broad, flagrantly retrograde stereotypes, from Baxley (Thomas Jane), a vet with Tourette's who's prone to bursts of profanity, to Nebraska (Trevante Rhodes), a suicidal officer who makes light of his mental illness.



The cast's distinctiveness and endless quipping helps power *The Predator* through a number of instances of dodgy editing that gradually creep into the film after the concise first act. Curiously, the action here is mostly lucid, with logical shot progressions and coherent movement, but general scene-to-scene transitions are abrupt and occasionally baffling.

This becomes especially jarring when the film has to fuse the frantic, paranoid movements of the fugitive soldiers with the inclusion of Quinn's autistic son, Rory (Jacob Tremblay), who receives his father's mailed loot and manages to decipher the predator's language. Black peddles a simplistic depiction of autism, as Rory is seen as a child withdrawn and terrified by loud noises. But the boy falls comfortably enough into Black's wheelhouse of ironic interests: here, the child who's thrust into an adult scenario and ends up proving useful. Rory is also the star attraction in one of the Christmas-obsessed director's patented holiday scenes, though the film notably cedes the stage to Halloween as a backdrop, most memorably in a trick-or-treat scene that culminates with a moment of bracingly funny violence.

The two plots converge in the final act when all of the predators on Earth seek out the stolen armor. Black ramps up the gore considerably as the vets and Traeger's organization attempt to deal with the aliens, though it's notable how much less viscerally satisfying the copious amounts of CGI blood here are



compared to the truly nasty physicality of the carnage in the 1987 original. Nonetheless, Black indulges in a number of mordantly funny gags throughout, such as the bisected corpse of one unfortunate soul pouring blood over a camouflaged predator to reveal its outline, or an alien shooting away a suspicious human by sticking out a severed arm giving a thumbs up.

This will rent as well as **THE MEG, JURASSIC WORLD, PACIFIC RIM: UPRISING, DEN OF THIEVES, and THOR: RAGNORAK.**