



2/2 3 BIG STONE GAP COMEDY
\$1 MILL BO 280 SCREENS PG-13 103 MINUTES

Ashley Judd (INSURGENT, DOLPHIN TALE 2, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, DIVERGENT)
Patrick Wilson (BONE TOMAHAWK, INSIDIOUS, THE CONJURING, INSIDIOUS 2)
Whoopi Goldberg (GHOST, JUMPING JACK FLASH, PAULEY SHORE IS DEAD)

There's something about seeing your hometown on the big screen. Not just as part of a movie, but as the central, driving force. Tonight at the Virginia Film Festival, more than a 1000 anxious locals had a chance to see their town represented in the opening night feature, *Big Stone Gap*, a heartfelt and earnest homespun comedy about the family ties that bind us all together.

Based on the book penned by director Adriana Trigiani and partially influenced by her own life, the story centers on *Big Stone Gap*'s town "old maid", Ave Maria Mulligan, played by Ashley Judd with her usual blend of beauty and spunk. Of Italian descent, Ave makes for an odd fit in the Southern-rooted *Big Stone Gap*, but she stands as probably the most "normal" of a quirky cast of characters. She's the shining, good-natured centerpiece of the coal mining town, delivering meds to her neighbors and directing the town's play, but passion is something she's sorely lacking despite being in a relationship with her longtime best friend, the flamboyant Theodore (John Benjamin Hickey). But there's clearly something brewing between her and the town hunk, Jack MacChesney, played by Patrick Wilson whose *Big Stone Gap* roots run deep.



While the comedy and various romantic entanglements are pretty conventional, what shines through is that this is a labor of love for all involved. That includes Whoopi Goldberg as the acerbic Fleeta, who runs the town pharmacy along with Ave, and Jenna Elfman as the flighty and superstitious Iva Lou Wade, who believes love can be found through Chinese facial readings. It's an oddball mix of Altman-esque characters, with a deep multigenerational theme that really hits home. Feeling as if life has begun to pass her by and that *Big Stone Gap* has become more confining than rewarding, Ave reaches out to find a piece of her Italian heritage by locating her estranged father, but it's a development that arrives after long stretches of narrative drift. Not much happens in *Big Stone Gap*, it's a gradually paced film about a gradually paced place. But there's real chemistry between everybody involved, most especially between Judd and Wilson, and their romantically awkward scenes together are a joy. It's also safe to say Goldberg, who doesn't make many appearances on the big screen anymore, chose the perfect role for her brand of sharp-witted humor. This will rent as well as **THE END OF TOUR, VACATION, ALOHA, WOMEN IN GOLD, and PROJECT ALMANAC.**



2/2 1 BRIDGE OF SPIES THRILLER

\$63 MILL BO 2872 SCREENS PG-13 141 MINUTES

Tom Hanks (TURNER AND HOOCHE, FOREST GUMP, BIG, THE MONEY PIT, SPLASH)

Alan Alda (TV- MASH, THE BLACK LIST, THE BIG C— FILM—THE AVIATOR, WHAT WOMEN WANT, THE LONGEST RIDE, SWEET LIBERTY)

In the film's masterful, nearly wordless opening reel, *Bridge of Spies* correlates Abel's secretive lives with artistry. He lives in a building full of musicians, and twice he looks away from his easel to reveal the trinkets of double-agency: a stack of radio receivers and transmitters, and a hollowed-out nickel containing a secret microphotograph. His pursuers, meanwhile, are a mass of mid-century men in suits holding newspapers. Cinematographer Janusz Kaminski glides through and among the feds, tracking their trousers and trench coats, highlighting their anonymity and their mass. When they capture Abel at his home, he has the first notable words of the film ("Mind if I fetch my teeth?"), but he's not interested in talking.

James Donovan (Tom Hanks), the lawyer assigned to defend Abel, talks for a living. He enters the film speaking in cocksure, screwball patter (the script was co-written by the Coen brothers), offering a master class in the deceitful defense of insurance companies. Donovan is given a primer of ethical dexterity, but he quickly becomes the ideological lodestar of *Bridge of Spies*. "Everyone deserves a defense. Everyone matters," Donovan tells co-workers and family in order to justify his newfound status, as the unpopular advocate of a vilified criminal. In a series of jailhouse meetings, where a quietly commanding Rylance plays Abel with the serenity of Hannibal Lecter and the round, mundane countenance of Elmer Fudd, the duo acknowledge each other's common humanity, even as Donovan faces the disdain and occasional wrath of the American vox populi.



Only rarely does Steven Spielberg observe how queasily at odds our patriotism is with our humanity. Rife with Donovan's plainspoken moral authority, *Bridge of Spies* is a good movie that suffers from a lack of anxiety about its convictions. Spielberg counters the false binaries and nuclear bogeymen of Cold War America with an argument built from equal parts liberal humanism and earnest pleas to Constitutional law. Only rarely does the director observe how queasily at odds our patriotism is with our humanity: A stunning series of cuts segues from an audience rising in a courtroom to a group of schoolchildren reciting the pledge of allegiance, and then watching an educational video about how to defend oneself in the event of a nuclear holocaust. The impact of this sequence is blunt, but stirring. *Bridge of Spies* gracefully pivots into the second half of its bifurcated narrative with a miniature story arc, about a group of air pilots recruited by the CIA to fly a new U-2 spy plane high above the Soviet Union. When one of their planes is shot down, pilot Francis Gary Powers (Austin Stowell) refuses to follow orders that he end his life, and is captured by the Soviets. After Donovan's commitment to Abel's case ends, he's sent to Eastern Germany as a non-governmental agent. He'll negotiate for Powers's release in exchange for Abel's return to Soviet custody. This smooth transition, to what might otherwise feel like an entirely different movie, is a credit to Matt Charman and the Coens' well-structured, if slightly on-the-nose, screenplay. The film cleverly positions Donovan to learn from Abel: Donovan's art is negotiation, but Abel's influence assists his spy work. When an American student detained in East Germany complicates Donovan's mission, it doesn't compromise his convictions.

The final half of *Bridge of Spies* features more than enough double-crossings and tense stand-offs to satisfy, but the film seems to run out of artistic and thematic gas once it crosses into enemy territory. Spielberg's politico-humanistic concerns fail to deepen or expand in a frozen East Germany,

captured in a disappointingly bleak and unimaginative grayscale. Thomas Newman's score uses his trademark minor-key piano chords accompany the martial notes of John Williams's recent work with Spielberg, and the flaccid mimicry is palpable. Worse, an underplaying Hanks never really defines Donovan as much more than a constitutional crusader or a family man. As such, his rather solitary struggles to reckon with a prisoner's dilemma on both sides of the Berlin Wall never conjure any existential heft.

This will rent as well as **TRAINWRECK**, **TOMORROWLAND**, **TRUE STORY**, **THE LONGEST RIDE**, **KINGSMEN: THE SECRET SERVICE**, and **THE IMITATION GAME**.



2/2 1 THE LAST WITCH HUNTER ACTION
\$28 MILL BO 3082 SCREENS PG-13 106 MINUTES

Vin Diesel (THE PACIFIER, XXX, FURIOUS 7, FAST AND FURIOUS, RIDDICK, FAST FIVE)

During an age in which mainstream Hollywood entertainment seems fueled wholly by endless comic-book franchises and nostalgic resurrections of old television shows and even novels, one is almost tempted to embrace *The Last Witch Hunter* sight unseen simply for not being based on preexisting material—

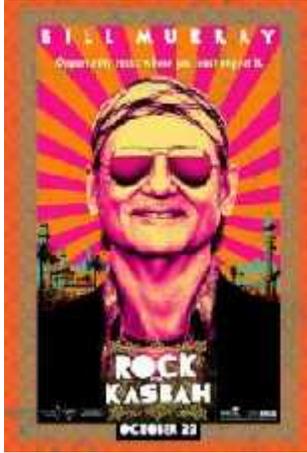
for being able to express itself without having to be too weighed down by audience expectation. The surprise of the film, then, is that it succeeds, at least during its first half, in enveloping audiences in a world that's intriguing in its uniqueness, creating as it does a mythological universe from the ground up and filling it with enough colorful detail to make it feel truly immersive.



Though the film mostly takes place in modern-day New York City, the setting is one in which witches live among us, wearing plain clothes and looking like any other human being. The story's refreshing disinterest in conforming to the conventions of genre is evident from the start: According to the script, witches dominated the land before humans came along and sparked a violent conflict—exemplified by the witches' deadly secret weapon, the Black Death—between the two groups during the Middle Ages. Witches still remain in the present day, and it's the job of the titular witch hunter, Kaulder (Vin Diesel), to capture them and bring them down to be tried and convicted in an underground witches-coven prison system. Even the witches' powers defy genre standards: Some witches, like Kaulder's eventual sidekick/love interest, Chloe (Rose Leslie), are able to enter a person's dreams and alter their perceptions.

The film's nuttiest conceits evince the childlike delight director Breck Eisner and company obviously felt in bringing them to fruition, such as the monster that sucks in and houses all the witches that Kaulder catches, or the spell which fools a young girl into seeing a tree with Gummi bears as leaves. *The Last Witch Hunter*, then, has enough ingredients for a reasonably entertaining fantasy adventure—except, that is, for an interesting lead character with an emotionally compelling hook. Cursed with immortality by the Witch Queen (Julie Engelbrecht) back in the Middle Ages, Kaulder has now spent around 800 years slaying witches. Still pining for the wife and daughter, from whom he was separated centuries ago, and exuding a general air of world-weariness from all the evil he's witnessed during his time on the planet, he walks in the stock footsteps of many a loner before him.

This could rent like **TERMINATOR/GENYSIS**, **THE MAN FROM UNCLE**, **SOUTHPAW**, **THE GIFT**, and **GOOD KILL**.



2/2 3 ROCK THE KASBAH COMEDY
\$4 MILL BO 2012 SCREENS R 106 MINUTES

Bill Murray (GHOSTBUSTERS, STRIPES, CADDY SHACK, ZOMBIELAND, DUMB AND DUMBER TO)
Zoey Deschanel (500 DAYS OF SUMMER, OUR IDIOT BROTHER, YOUR HIGHNESS, YES MAN)

The rise of a Pashtun singer, Salima (Leem Lubany), in *Rock the Kasbah's* fictionalized account is similarly milked for maximum suspense, but the film is primarily sunk for orienting the fabulist story behind the Clash song that gives it its name as a celebration of a white man's redemption: A nation's optimistic trajectory is subservient to the shocks Richie Lanz (Bill Murray) must endure to get Kabul's boogie men to let the raga drop.

Richie runs an agency out of a Van Nuys motel as washed up as his reputation, spin-doctoring terrible singers onto his client list under the amusingly cynical belief that, given Celine Dion and Niki Minaj's successes, America doesn't know talent. Early on, Murray's deadpan belies his character's delusion: Richie repeats that he discovered Madonna with such certitude that, after booking a karaoke gig for his client-cum-secretary (Zoey Deschanel), one believes he thinks it's a good idea to take her to Afghanistan to sing for the troops. But one plane trip to Kabul later and *Rock the Kasbah* has already settled into a depressingly one-note groove as a culture-clashing circus act, the pinnacle of which is Deschanel's would-be singer barfing up a storm at the sight of all the turban-wearing men in her midst.

The film quickly settles into a depressingly one-note groove as a culture-clashing circus act.

For audiences, some relief comes from Deschanel disappearing into the night, at which point the film sketches a portrait of life in Kabul that feels deliberately abstract, as if understanding that this world almost resists representation. One moment Richie and a posse of shady Americans staying at his hotel are smoking weed and dodging bullets on the streets, and the next they're hobnobbing with locals and foreigners alike inside a club that points to the nascent youth culture taking hold in the country.

Salima, on the *Afghan Star* stage, tellingly sings a song by a musician who controversially converted to Islam, but her triumph is framed, predictably and sentimentally, only in relation to Richie's redemption story. In the end, the only thing that distinguishes him from all the other cogs in the white-savior industrial complex who believe the world exists only to validate their privilege is that he possesses Bill Murray's talent for perpetually cracking wise.

This one should rent as well as **ST. VINCENT**, **FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD**, **WHILE WE'RE YOUNG**, **DANNY COLLINS** and **SONG ONE**.





2/2 3 SUFFRAGETTE DRAMA

\$5 MILL BO 617 SCREENS PG-13 106 MINUTES

Helen Bonham Carter (CINDERELLA, THE LONE RANGER, DARK SHADOWS, THE KING'S SPEECH)

Carey Mulligan (FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD, THE GREAT GATSBY, THE GREATEST, AN EDUCATION)

Women are still far from having achieved equal rights almost everywhere in the world, but think how much worse we would be without the right to vote—those of us who have that right, that is. We make up half of the world's population, yet some of us are still denied the vote, and those who have it won it only through great struggle—and, as title cards at the end of Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* point out, shockingly recently in many nations.

In Britain, where the film is set, full rights weren't achieved until 1928; Swiss women couldn't vote until 1971; and Saudi Arabian women are still waiting. Yet most of us know very little about the fight to win women's suffrage, largely because popular culture has been so quiet on the subject: This is the first feature film about its evolution in Great Britain. Of course, just the fact that *Suffragette* explores an important and underreported topic isn't enough to make it worth watching. What does is how its episodes and attitudes register with searing immediacy while feeling true to their time period.

The even harsher oppression of working-class women is surfaced mostly through Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan), a fictional composite who serves as the audience surrogate. Orphaned at age four, Maud has toiled since she was seven at the laundry where her mother was scalded to death, working long hours for much less pay than the men there earn for doing less. Worse yet, the sexual assault she endured for years from her boss when she was a girl left her traumatized, stigmatized, and pregnant—"damaged goods" expected to be grateful that any man would marry her and raise her son as his own. And when she protests after her husband, Sonny (Ben Wishaw), throws her out of the house for her activism, and forbids her to see her son, he reminds her that she, as a mother, has no legal rights: "The law says he is mine."



Many will be surprised by how militant these suffragettes had become by 1912, the year in which the story begins. As their leader, Emily Pankhurst (Meryl Streep), puts it, women had asked for the vote peacefully for 50 years by then, only to be ridiculed and ignored. It was time to act—and acting often meant blowing things up, from mailboxes to the country mansion of David Lloyd George, a prominent member of Parliament. In addition to being the audience surrogate, Maud is a kind of Zelig who manages to be present at many of this movement's high points, highlighting the group's actions and frustrations and being targeted as a possible rat by the police inspector who's pioneering new methods of surveillance to try to crack the back of the suffragette movement.

Maud participates in rallies and hunger strikes in jail, witnesses a speech by Mrs. Pankhurst, and accompanies Emily Wilding Davison (Natalie Press) to the Derby and sees her commit the ultimate sacrifice to draw attention to their cause, an act that finally galvanized worldwide support. But as embodied by Mulligan, Maud feels nothing like a plot contrivance. The camera sticks close to the actress, homing in on Maud's face as she dresses, hugs, or plays with her son, her smile joyful and her eyes practically aglow with love. As Maude gradually becomes politicized, her initial instinct to appease and apologize slowly gives way to self-assurance as she sits straighter, looks people in the eye more, and speaks with steely intensity.

Suffragette has been fairly criticized for failing to show the women of color who were part of the crowds supporting the cause, and, aside from Maud's interactions with her son, the subplot involving her family cranks up the heartbreak in ways that feel out of sync with the rest of the film. The falsest moment comes when she talks her way into her apartment to see her son for the first time since being thrown out. Mulligan's tender ferocity has the makings of a powerhouse scene, but her performance is undermined by the melodrama of having Maude arrive just as George is to be whisked away by his adoptive parents, an arrangement Sonny hadn't even told her about.

As abominably as Sonny acts toward his wife, he isn't a bad man. He's just conflicted and cowardly, concerned about keeping up appearances in a culture that expects him to keep his wife—whom he does seem to love, as evinced in their earlier scenes—under control. That fairly complicated combination of traits is typical of the film, whose conscientious avoidance of anachronism make it feel engagingly alive.

This film will do as well as **MR. HOLMES**,



2/2 3 TRUTH DRAMA

\$3 MILL BO 1122 SCREENS R 125 MINUTES

Robert Redford (THE STING, A WALK IN THE WOODS, SNEAKERS, BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S)

Cate Blanchett (CINDERELLA, THE MOUNTAIN'S MEN, BLUE JASMIN, I'M NOT THERE)

At its best, *Truth* is an archaeological feat: an excavation of what was perhaps the first heinous overreaction to an online mob of self-appointed fact-checkers. It's built around a small mountain of impeccably curated details. Vanderbilt's feature directorial debut portrays the reportage behind

the 2004 *60 Minutes* exposé arguing that George W. Bush, then up for reelection against John Kerry, shirked fundamental duties in his time with the National Guard during the Vietnam War. Leading the story is Mary Mapes (Cate Blanchett), the CBS producer who had recently helped expose the military misdeeds at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. After online commentators began questioning the veracity of documentation Mapes used in her story, the producer was fired, a number of CBS News executives resigned, and legendary news anchor Dan Rather (Robert Redford) retired from his influential perch.

Truth's first half is, all at once, surprisingly fluid and leaden with exposition, a dogged hunt for sources and paperwork spearheaded by Mapes and supported by a ragtag cadre of reporters, including a retired colonel (Dennis Quaid), a leftist researcher (Topher Grace), and a young producer (Elisabeth Moss). Vanderbilt fills the screen with creeping zooms into analog phones, Chinese food boxes, and impressively thick binders. Meanwhile, he fills his characters' mouths with words that rob them of personality while assuring the audience that they're adept journalists. Crucial missteps in the team's reportage—failing to thoroughly vet sources (Stacy Keach plays a shady whistleblower) and authenticate reproduced documents from Bush's time in the Guard—are rigorously foreshadowed.



Amid the chase for the story, a few key themes are established, some more elegantly than others. The atmosphere of the 2004 election, in which Kerry has recently been "Swift Boated" and CBS is concerned that the Guard revelations may be portrayed as a deliberate counter-punch in the height of the campaign, is pungent. Mapes's relationship with Rather is portrayed as tenderly paternal, a way for the producer to overcome a childhood with an abusive father. CBS itself, referred to as the "gold standard" of television journalism thanks to the imprimatur of *60 Minutes*, is ominously threatened by the 24-hour news cycle and the advent of infotainment.

It can't develop themes because it's too busy disseminating information, and this extends to its main characters.

This will do pretty well and rent like **SELF/LESS**, **SOUTHPAW**, **TRUE STORY**, **MCFARLAND USA**, **THE GUNMAN**, and **MAGGIE**.



2/9 1 CRIMSON PEAK HORROR
\$33 MILL BO 2991 SCREENS R 119 MINUTES

Mia Wasikowska (THE DOUBLE, TRACKS, RESTLESS, ALICE IN WONDERLAND)

Jessica Chastain (A MOST VIOLENT YEAR, INTERSTELLAR, ZERO DARK THIRTY, LAWLESS)

Crimson Peak may be the quintessential Guillermo del Toro film, as it compresses his fetishistic attention to detail into a single looming set where creaking floorboards, scores of dying moths, and the frequent intrusions of mutilated ghosts are just pieces in the giant dollhouse where the director merrily plays. The combination of gothic ghost story and harlequin romance

doesn't break new ground for either genre, but the intensity of Brandt Gordon's art direction and Kate Hawley's costume design reinforce the innate connection that period romance and horror share in how these genres so purely express their most profound ideas through ornate style.

Amusingly, the action of the film's first act, the gamesmanship of high society's courtship rituals playing out in well-lit parlors, is no less tense than the story's eventual retreat into the dark confines of Allerdale Hall. The most dominant sound effects in these early scenes are the gasps and mutterings of New York's nouveau riche as English nobleman Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) ignores the pampered bachelorettes trotted out before him. Instead, he hones in on the bookish Edith Cushing (Mia Wasikowska), an aspiring horror author and the only child of a self-made magnate (Jim Beaver) from whom he seeks financing for mining equipment. Del Toro films a scene of Thomas and Edith waltzing for a gathered crowd of elites, all while trying to keep the flame from the candle they grip in their hands from going out, as if it were a circus stunt, the couple's willingness to dance in front of a wall of judgment akin to performing acrobatics without a net.



So precisely defined is every aspect of Allerdale Hall's physical decay that even the people who dwell within it feel more like conduits for the manse's soul than independent agents. If Wasikowska's surprisingly fortitudinous naïf is meant to recall *Jane Eyre*, Hiddleston's version of Rochester comes not from Charlotte Brontë's classic tome, but the revisionist version found in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a feckless brute who maintains a veneer of respectability just long enough to nab a wife he can exploit to boost his own faded status. Hiddleston's best performances always hint at a bit of sleaze beneath a show of welcoming charm, and the hunger that fills Thomas's eyes whenever talk of money arises lays bare the sham of his romance from the start.

Crimson Peak is Guillermo del Toro's fussiest, most compartmentalized construction, filled with the most powerful sense of repression and delusion.

Jessica Chastain outdoes him, however, as Thomas's even more mysterious older sister, Lucille, her face frozen in resentment and given to mirthless, thin-lipped smiles only in moments of extremely rare generosity. Perpetually clutching a set of ornate keys in her hands, Lucille is at once a judging matron, jealous sibling, and pitiless overseer. If Thomas embodies the house's self-loathing and revulsion, Lucille is its unrepentant pride—neither the hole in the ceiling nor the sinking floor, but the decorated walls and lavish furnishings that stand defiant to the reality of their obsolescence.

Compared to the siblings, Edith lacks a memorable hook, and Wasikowska doesn't get the chance to pore over her character the way that Hiddleston and Chastain do theirs. Nonetheless, most del Toro films feature a proxy for the director, and Edith's ghost-seeing bookworm fits the bill here. As in the director's other films, the supernatural is both real and imagined, clearly having a direct impact on a character's surroundings while also pitched with sufficient ambiguity that some encounters suggest projections from the mind. Del Toro typically plays that line for maximum fairy-tale effect, but Edith's tendency to continue to believe in the fundamental romance between herself and Thomas puts her in as much danger as her openness to the paranormal prepares her for the eventual confrontation with the truth of her new family.

This will rent as well as **TRAINWRECK**, **NO ESCAPE**, **INSIDIOUS 3**, **IT FOLLOWS**, **UNFRIENDED**, **THE GALLOWES**, and **THE GIFT**.



2/9 2 GRANDMA DRAMEDY
\$7 MILL BO 1061 screens R 79 MINUTES

Lilly Tomlin (TV—WEB THERAPY, EASTBOUND AND DOWN, DAMAGES—FILM--ALL OF ME, I HEART HUCKABEES, PINK PANTHER 2, THE LATE SHOW, NASHVILLE)

Marcia Gay Harden (TV—CODE BLACK, NEWSROOM, ROYAL PAINS –FILM NOAH, DETACHMENT, INTO THE WILD, RAILS AND TIES)

Sam Elliott (WE WERE SOLDIERS, MASK, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, MASK, DRAFT DAY, THE COMPANY YOU KEEP)

Writer-director Paul Weitz's *Grandma*, a proudly boisterous star vehicle for Lily Tomlin, has about as many ambitions as it does delusions. It's a road movie, it's a feminist movie, it's a family movie, it's an old-curmudgeon movie, it's a lesbian movie. The latter is easily the California-set dramedy's most successful angle, as it's the only one that never feels forced into existence. Elle (Tomlin) is an aging poet who's still mourning the death of her longtime partner, Violet, and who's taken to militant anti-establishment activities, like cutting her credit cards to make wind chimes after paying off debts. The film begins and ends with the exploration of Elle's new relationship with Olivia (Judy Greer), her significantly younger former student who's as open and forgiving as Elle is closed and disgruntled. The story's lesbianism is graciously treated as a nonissue, despite it being the most openly gay film for the long un-closeted Tomlin. For that and other reasons, it feels like a career high for the actress, but that's not exactly a good reason to go and see it.

Grandma's inciting incident isn't Elle and Olivia's breakup in the first scene, but a request that comes immediately after from Elle's granddaughter, Sage (Julia Garner), a pregnant teen with nowhere else to turn in her search to fund an abortion. In both exchanges, and in far too many moments that follow, Weitz encourages Tomlin to *do* Tomlin to the hilt, exaggerating every joke, expletive, and affectation to a degree that would be unwatchable if Tomlin weren't such an innately gifted performer. (A scene in a café where Elle harasses a barista is one of the more memorable cases of comic bitchery for comic bitchery's sake.) After some reluctance, a voluntarily broke Elle agrees to help Sage via the solicitation of old friends, kicking off a trip down memory lane that's partly an excuse to bring in guest stars. Some, like a superb Sam Elliot as Elle's experimental ex, Karl, make for lovely additions to the cast, bringing a weathered sadness that's both heartbreaking and sexy. Others, like Laverne Cox as a shrill tattoo artist, feel like stunt casting—flagrant tools to bring diversity and credibility to a film that needn't try so hard.

Paul Weitz's proudly boisterous star vehicle for Lily Tomlin has about as many ambitions as it does delusions.

The film ultimately falls apart because it never finds landing points for its two key arcs. It's firstly aiming to be a tale of redemption, wherein an old, world-weary bitch reclaims her humanity after helping her granddaughter. But unlike so many movies with male leads whose characters shed their grumpy skins, *Grandma* is too hung up on making Elle funny to make her truly unpleasant. Thus, while Tomlin seems to know the complex nuances of this character, and shares them in flashes when not going over the top, Elle's growth isn't earned or gathered so much as tacked on, for the woman we're meant to learn to love was never once hateable to start with.

Meanwhile, though *Grandma* has every apparent intention of wiping the shame away from a woman taking command of her own body (spoilers herein), it unwittingly treats issues of pregnancy and maternity as part of some fateful, genetically passed-down disease. As Elle continues to hunt down cash to pay for Sage's abortion appointment, we learn that Elle once had an abortion herself, and in addition, that her daughter, Judy (Marcia Gay Harden), was the result of a one-night stand. We also learn that Judy gave birth to Sage via a sperm donor, as she wanted nothing to do with a father who may perhaps disappoint.



This one will rent as well as **TIME OUT OF MIND, MOMENTUM, AMERICAN ULTRA, RICKI AND THE FLASH, THE AGE OF ADELIN, WOMAN IN GOLD,** and **WHILE WE'RE YOUNG.**



2/9 1 LOVE THE COOPERS COMEDY
\$25 MILL BO 2603 SCREENS PG-13 107 MINUTES

Diane Keaton (ANNIE HALL, AND SO IT GOES, 5 FLIGHTS UP, SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE, FATHER OF THE BRIDE, THE GODFATHER, SLEEPER)

John Goodman (THE HANGOVER III, THE INTERNSHIP, PARANORMAN, THE ARTIST, O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU?)

Ed Helms (THE HANGOVER, HORRIBLE BOSSES, FORCES OF NATURE, THE HANGOVER II and III)

For those who celebrate it, Christmas is primarily a ritualistic annual event steeped in the comforts of echoed traditions, comforts that carry at least those in the northern hemisphere through the darkest time of the year. In the case of Diane Keaton, executive producer for the new holiday dramedy *Love the Coopers*, the urge to circle back to the well and replay what had already been done before proved insurmountable.

Charlotte (Keaton) and Sam (John Goodman) have fallen out of love and are on the verge of separation, mutually recognizing that neither are the same person they originally married, though *Love the Coopers* goes to no great pains to define who they are currently. Nevertheless, they're ready to deck the halls with détente in order to give their children one last holiday gathering free from the awkwardness of a broken home.

Meanwhile, all of their kin and in-laws are picking up the slack for domestic discomfort just fine. Hank (Ed Helms) and Angie (Alex Borstein) are themselves separating. Emma (Marisa Tomei) is a kleptomaniac who feels no connection with her older sister Charlotte's sizable clan, but also can nuzzle up to a closeted gay cop and psychoanalyze



his history of repression. Buck (Alan Arkin) pushes classic movies on his favorite greasy spoon waitress, Ruby (Amanda Seyfried), in hopes of a strictly platonic love affair. And the family dog keeps scarfing down the mashed potatoes.

Sloppy and haphazard where it should be calculatedly chaotic, *Meet the Coopers* can't ever seem to settle on an appropriate tone. Imagine a Christmas tree covered not only in tinsel and lights and silver bulbs, but also snow globes and perfume samples and beef jerky and vials of virgin tears.

This will rent as well as **MY OLD LADY, THE BEST OF ME, DUMB AND DUMBER TO, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM 3, and UNFINISHED BUSINESS.**



2/9 1 SPECTRE ACTION

\$188 MILL B0 4032 SCREENS PG-13 2 HRS 28 MIN

**Daniel Craig (COWBOYS & ALIENS, DREAM HOUSE, SKYFALL, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO)
Christopher Waltz (EPIC, HORRIBLE BOSSES 2, DJANGO UNCHAINED, WATER FOR ELEPHANTS, INGLORIOUS BASTERDS)**

There's much to admire here, from its symbolically sickly aesthetic to its clearly shot action sequences.

More successful is how the film castigates its hero's personal failures. The screenplay doubles down on *Skyfall's* view of Bond as a broken child hardened into a thug, a straightforward observation that nonetheless gives the character much-needed flexibility and perspective. This especially plays out in the foregrounding of Bond's legendarily horrible treatment of women. The Craig era has put women in more prominent roles, from Eva Green's complex Vesper Lynd to Judi Dench's beefed-up role as a mirthless, pitiless M. The women Bond loved and lost haunt him to such an extent that *Spectre* could have referred to their lingering presences as much as the franchise's classic terrorist organization. Dench even appears as a digital ghost, leaving Bond instructions from beyond the grave to prompt his latest mission. Craig's hero may be a violent ape, but he's also deeply traumatized, and his interactions with the widow, Lucia (Monica Bellucci), of a man he killed, and Madeleine (Léa Seydoux), a woman who can help him track down Spectre, betray a self-conscious, balancing tenderness.

All of this revisionism centrally incorporates the history of the franchise, and the film both excels and suffers for frequently recalling its forbears. On the plus side, it's gratifying to see characters like Q (Ben Whishaw) and Moneypenny (Naomie Harris) retain their fundamental traits while getting more active roles. Less satisfying is how, say, a fight on a train so blatantly recalls *From Russia with Love* that the fisticuffs between Bond, Madeleine, and the film's main heavy, Hinx (Dave Bautista, muscles forever about to burst out of his suits), start to feel more like homage than original action. Only an idiot could fail to guess the true identity of Christoph Waltz's shadowy mastermind, but the belated reveal of his name is muted by the villain's personal connection to Bond, a hackneyed cliché of screenwriting that simplifies the character instead of adding new dimensions.



The film's inventive highs and frustrating lows are epitomized in the climax, which initially thrusts Bond into a demented funhouse made out of the old MI6 headquarters. This sequence, in which Bond is teased and spooked by gun-range targets with his face and holding cells containing photos of those whose blood is on his hands, may be the most legitimately unsettling moment in this 24-film series. But then the

whole thing ends with a ludicrous shootout with a helicopter that embraces the cheesiest elements of the franchise in a way that runs counter to Sam Mendes's dour directorial tone.

There's much to admire about *Spectre*, from its symbolically sickly aesthetic to its clearly shot action sequences. Even its attempt to provide Bond with a redemptive arc is, on its face, laudable. Both *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall* ended with the hero enduring such tragedy that he was forced to recommit to his job because he felt life had nothing else to offer him, and the suggestion that he might actually be able to break that cycle provides the franchise with its first sense of closure in its five-decade history. Were this the final installment in the series, it would mark a fitting end for a violent but compelling icon, but the resolution of the ending is undone by Mendes having to leave things open for the next person to come and thrust James right back into work.

This will rent as well as **FURIOUS 7, SKY FALL, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROUGE NATION, THE VISIT, THE MARTIAN** and **THE INTERN.**



2/9 2 SPOTLIGHT DRAMA

\$24 MILL BO 1089 SCREENS R 128 MINUTES

Michael Keaton (CLEAN AND SOBER, BIRDMAN, BATMAN, MR. MOM)

Mark Ruffalo (THE AVENGERS, NOW YOU SEE ME, DATE NIGHT, SHUTTER ISLAND, ZODIAC, ALL THE KING'S MEN)

Boston may be a major American city, but as described in Tom McCarthy's *Spotlight*, it's still a small town at heart. With a populace that skews nearly 50 percent Catholic, the conventions of this metaphorical village are organized under the jurisdiction of the church, which provides the clearest point of connection for immigrants old and new. Such insularity fosters tight-knit communities and deep ancestral roots, but it has its downsides, specifically regarding the exclusion of outsiders, as one Armenian character notes to another of Portuguese extraction. Even more insidiously, this environment encourages a private approach to community housekeeping, assuring that problems will be handled internally, and secrets will remain underground.

Based on the events leading up to the 2001 sex abuse scandal that rocked the Roman Catholic Church, *Spotlight* patiently charts the gradual development from rumors and whispers to a full-blown revelation of years of astonishing exploitation. As the film imagines, it's the singular character of the town, particularly its reliance on the moral authority of religious officials, that allowed dozens of pedophiles to remain at work, with the diocese shuffling them around the city once their crimes came to light, lying to parishioners, and offering scads of hush money. The task of revealing this rotten system falls to *The Boston Globe*, itself already in crisis, what with the arrival of Marty Baron (Liev Schrieber) as executive editor, appearing to herald greater control by the paper's parent corporation with a salvo of buyouts and layoffs.

A Jewish transplant from Florida, backed by the big-city pedigree of *The New York Times*, Baron is a classic interloper, a singularly focused workaholic unburdened by the constraints of social niceties, who doesn't play golf or know the catechism. This makes him the perfect person to spearhead the exposé, which seems to strike at the heart of everything the city holds dear.



His motives are contrasted against the more sensitive demands of Walter Robinson (Michael Keaton), whose award-winning Spotlight team, charged with the production of lengthy investigative pieces, handles the burden of the journalistic work. A native son with a strong local pedigree, Robinson has to weigh the needs of his community against the ethical demands of a journalist, while making similar decisions for his reporters, namely the dangerously obsessive Michael Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo) and the blandly proficient

Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), each of whom seems poised to suffer serious emotional damage from the production and fallout of the articles.

Spotlight entertains such weighty concerns while also spinning a masterfully paced potboiler. A familiar tale of scrappy underdogs taking on a secretive institution, it complicates that dynamic by having its protagonists operating under the auspices of a monolithic corporation, which many Bostonites are concerned intends to strip away the distinctiveness of their hometown paper, all while nosily digging into local matters and airing dirty laundry.

It devotes too much time delivering information to establish a convincing visual foundation for its account.

This is a complex film about moving past clannish parochial designations, one which ends up assigning the burden of guilt upon an entire populace for looking the other way, none of them quite aware of the scale of the problem they were avoiding. In tackling this mass culpability, the film also confronts the degradation of individuality which also occurs as communities stretch past their traditional limits and out into the ethereal fabric of the internet, as city papers become assets of global conglomerates, and local flavor turns into a surface characteristic rather than an essential quality of a place.

But the biggest downside to this approach is that, burdened with the telling of this expansive story, the film devotes too much time delivering information to establish a convincing visual foundation for its account, aside from a few ominous shots of church structures literally looming over everything. Full of reserved tracking shots and walk-and-talk exposition dumps, *Spotlight* seems submissively constructed around the contours of its voluminous dialogue, a feat of informational cinema that's equally thrilling and overwhelming. Good job with a tough subject.

This will rent as well as **AMERICAN ULTRA, SELF/LESS, SOUTHPAW, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROUGE NATION, THE GIFT, MAGIC MIKE XXL** and **GOOD KILL**.



2/9 3 99 HOMES DRAMA

\$2 MILL BO 691 SCREENS R 140 MINUTES

Andrew Garfield (THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN, THE SOCIAL NETWORK, LIONS FOR LAMBS, NEVER LET ME GO)

Laura Dern (WILD, WHEN THE GAME STANDS TALL, THE FAULT IN OUR STARS, THE MASTER, JURASSIC PARK, OCTOBER SKY)

Micheal Shannon (TV—BOARDWALK EMPIRE—FILM—SHE'S FUNNY THAT WAY, THE HARVEST, MAN OF STEEL, THE

ICEMAN, MUD, TAKE SHELTER)

With his spiffy tan suits, black-and-blue e-cigarettes, and interchangeable Orange County mansions populated with pampered women, Michael Shannon's Rick Carver is the spitting image of the evil economic 1% in Ramin Bahrani's latest hard-left polemic, *99 Homes*. As Rick, a Machiavellian SoCal real estate broker, Shannon doesn't need a bag of eccentric tics to sell the man's sociopathy; all he has to do is drop a hard stare from a distance and the ground seems to quake.

Andrew Garfield is the weaselly Dennis Nash, an early victim of Carver's predatory eviction hunting who, when pressed to come up with the cash to pay his family's way out of temporary motel slumming, kisses the snake that bit him by taking a gig as Carver's accessory. The realtor's inexplicably lawful but highly amoral practice—which involves actively seeking out properties exposing even the slightest of living code violations and bullishly terminating their owners' leases to make way for higher-paying newcomers—is cold gangster-movie stuff, and Bahrani conceives of Dennis's involvement in the business as an initiation into a mafia dynasty. Carver goes right for his employee's sweet spot in



proposing a deal centered on lifting the Nash family out of economic hardship, and does so not in the clinical space of an office, but in the faux-intimacy of his waterside palace. He also offers his new accomplice a handgun.

Naturally, the politically minded Bahrani has his sights on moralizing, not on probing the seediest depths of the central parasitic relationship, so while *99 Homes* could have shaded waywardly into fairy tale (Shannon the Big Bad Wolf to Garfield's Little Pig), instead it stays firmly planted in social realism. In realizing this veiled gangster yarn, Bahrani places emphasis not on the ghastly mastermind, but on the naïve underling gradually comprehending the full extent of his boss's Darwinian extremity, the righteous intention being to awaken the audience, simultaneously with Dennis, to the cruel machinations underlying the taken-for-granted neutrality of residential space. But, and notwithstanding Garfield's impressive work selling his character's profound gullibility, this arc isn't particularly illuminating, the cumulative unease of a series of scenes of Dennis awkwardly finding himself on the other side of the eviction procedure never matching the sheer force of Carver's own handling of the same devastating spectacle. We're seeing the messy outgrowths of evil, not the source of the evil itself.

Still, *99 Homes*'s fundamental schematics and overly neat symmetries aren't a dealbreaker. Bahrani's talent for orchestrating sequences of tightly wound tension is in full bloom here, as is his complementary knack for quieter grace notes. Evidence of the former comes in one karmic explosion of volatility on the motel grounds where Dennis shares residence with some of the casualties of his new vocation, as well as in a clincher of a final scene that brings to a boiling point another seemingly peripheral conflict deftly weaved into the plot. Bahrani's basically a functional formalist, so what he lacks in visual bravura he makes up for with furious cross-cutting between actors incited to various emotional extremes. At the same time, he also knows when to slow down and let a single, seemingly innocuous line delivered in close-up hover portentously in the air. Hence a key moment that lingers in the memory as a reinforcement of the movie's caustic downward spiral: an inebriated Carver, in a deceptive pose of relaxation on his dock at night, muttering ominously to Dennis, "Watch out for the gators, they don't sleep."

This will rent as well as **SELF/LESS, SOUTHPAW, BOULEVARD, GOOD KILL** and **TRUE STORY.**



2/16 1 BLACK MASS THRILLER
\$66 MILL BO 2498 SCREENS R 122 MINUTES

Johnny Depp (DARK SHADOWS, PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN, ALICE IN WONDERLAND, BLOW, SLEEPY HOLLOW, NICK OF TIME)
Benedict Cumberbatch (THE IMITATION GAME, THE HOBBIT, THE FIFTH ESTATE, 12 YEARS A SLAVE)

The film, which plays like a barrage of bullet points punctuated by a smattering of bullets, takes a dutiful approach to the evidence against James "Whitey" Bulger (Johnny Depp), the head of South Boston's Winter Hill Gang, and John Connolly (Joel Edgerton), the FBI agent who coaxed Bulger into becoming an informant while abetting the criminal's rise to regional kingpin status. Though the film succeeds in conveying the "unholy alliance" between two cocksure Southie brethren, it fails to make much sense of the richly detailed, ethnically charged world they inhabited.

Black Mass is deeply invested in the mythology of the Bulger case, but doesn't bother to explain much of it. The film will teach casual viewers that Bulger made money by running drugs and guns and laundering money, but the nuts and bolts of his criminal empire are left to the imagination, perhaps because some of them are profoundly uncinematic. (There are repeated references to a turf war over vending machines, along with a stretch devoted to Bulger's relationship with the owner of World Jai Alai.)

A few shots of money-counting machines constitute the glory of Whitey's operation, and a handful of solid actors (Jesse Plemons, Rory Cochrane, W. Earl Brown, Peter Sarsgaard) appear as partners and associates, but Whitey's network of thugs feels as sparsely populated as *Black Mass's* city streets.

Every conversation between Bulger and Connolly hinges explicitly on their shared heritage (hostility toward Italian-Americans is a running theme without a payoff), and Bulger's power plays lay a moral burden on the government agent tasked to expose Bulger and act against his own community. As Connolly, Edgerton nails the unique hypersensitivity of Boston bravado, strutting around in tailored suits and meekly attempting to weasel out of every half-truth he's caught peddling. *Black Mass's* shrewdest decision is to contrast Edgerton's antsy approach to Connolly's double life with Depp's tempered, clinical take on Bulger. Connolly's lies become a misguided attempt to achieve greatness, while Bulger's are purely transactional in nature.

Black Mass's jolts of pleasure are largely relegated to a few bits of stunt casting which, like the entirety of Cooper's film, seem designed to please old New England newshounds and politicians: Benedict Cumberbatch, eager to impress with an intriguingly reedy accent, portrays Whitey's politician brother, Billy; Adam Scott, wildly miscast as an FBI agent, spends most of his scenes standing in the back of rooms, waiting to deliver a single line. Despite the film's parade of famous faces and competing accents, there's a natural chumminess to the confusing network of policemen, politicians, and journalists that orbits around Connolly. That camaraderie is weirdly absent among the thinly sketched array of figures surrounding Bulger. *Black Mass* is under no obligation to make the criminal lifestyle glamorous or seductive, but the film's Wikified approach to the Bulger saga renders the character's actions and motivations impenetrable. A culture that thrills to its antiheroes will connect with this one.

This will be as big a renter as was **MAD MAX: FURY ROAD**, **AMERICAN SNIPER**, **FURIOUS 7**, **FURY**, **THE AVENGERS**, and **KINGSMEN: THE SECRET SERVICE**.





2/16 1 THE PEANUTS MOVIE FAMILY
 \$127 MILL BO 3902 SCREENS G 88 MINUTES

VOICES OF: Noah Schnapp, Bill Melendez

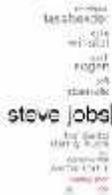
In approaching the task of bringing Charles M. Schulz's classic *Peanuts* to the big screen, screenwriters Bryan Schulz (Charles's son), Craig Schulz (Charles's grandson), and Cornelius Uliano have seemingly cherry-picked some of the more famous moments from the comic strip and the television specials in order to create something of a greatest-hits package. From Charlie's infatuation with the Little Red-Haired Girl to Snoopy's imaginary life as a crack World War I flying ace battling the Red Baron, the storylines closest to the hearts of the comic's fans have been rendered in a style in tune with current trends in children's animation.

The Peanuts Movie revolves around Charlie Brown's attempts to get the Little Red-Haired Girl's attention by projecting an image of success antithetical to his mopey conception of himself, and his attempts invariably fail. He perfects a magic trick for the school talent show, but never gets to perform it. He then learns some dance moves to perform at a school dance only to see his quest for a trophy thwarted by spilled punch. And after being paired with the Little Red-Haired Girl for a book report while she's out of town, he takes it upon himself to read all of *War and Peace* and write the report in one weekend—only to eventually see the report shredded by a model airplane.

Perhaps Charlie Brown's biggest indignity, though, arises in a lengthy episode in which he suddenly becomes a local celebrity after achieving a perfect score on a recent test—a score that, he eventually discovers, turns out to be someone else's, the mix-up the result of his accidentally putting his name on the wrong exam in a mad rush to turn it in. Failure, thus, hovers over *The Peanuts Movie* as much as it did in Schulz's comic strip, infusing even its most ebullient set pieces and designs with a sense of melancholy.



This will be as big as **ANT-MAN, FANTASTIC FOUR, INSIDE OUT, PIXELS, PITCH PERFECT 2**, and **PADDINGTON**.



2/16 2 STEVE JOBS DRAMA
 \$18 MILL BO 2136 SCREENS R 122 MINUTES

Michael Fassbender (SLOW WEST, 12 YEARS A SLAVE, X-Men: DAYS OF FUTURE PASSED, HAYWIRE, PROMETHEUS)

Kate Winslet (DIVERGENT, LABOR DAY, CONTAGION, IRIS, TITANIC)

Seth Rogen (22 JUMP STREET, NEIGHBORS, THIS IS THE END)



By now it's no secret that Steve Jobs was a controlling, egomaniacal bully. Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs* presupposes that, maybe, he wasn't all that bad. As if testing the mettle of its rendition of the late Apple co-founder, to say nothing of audience endurance, Aaron Sorkin's screenplay is broken into three

disparate chunks, each played in something approximating real time. Michael Fassbender stars as the Mephistophelean Jobs, seen exclusively in the minutes ticking down to one of his signature keynote speech-cum-product launches—the first Macintosh in 1984, the neXT “black cube” in 1988, and finally, the desktop iMac in 1998—with frisky expository montages filling in the peaks and dips of his storied career between acts. But despite this intriguing structure and the vigor of its execution, Boyle’s film can’t help but land in the same hagiographizing place as nearly every single other Great Man biopic churned out by the studio powers that be.

Johanna Hoffmann (Kate Winslet) is Jobs’s handler, unofficial shrink, and “work wife,” walking him through each of the three long mornings leading up to the respective launches, clipboard in hand. Each event is preempted by a litany of technical troubleshoots and confrontational “sessions” between Jobs, once-and-former Apple CEO John Scully (Jeff Daniels), and long-suffering developers Andy Hertzfeldt (Michael Stuhlbarg) and Steve Wozniak (Seth Rogen). Across the three chronologies, no through line is as dramatically pressing as Jobs’s pathological unwillingness to acknowledge his out-of-wedlock daughter, Lisa, and pay child support to his ex-girlfriend, Chrisann (Katherine Waterston).



True to Sorkin’s form, the majority of these hashings-out take place during peripatetic walk and talks, with each member of the film’s Greek chorus lodging both zingers and accusations at Jobs in equal, dogged proportion. As Boyle barely leaves time for the dust from these interpersonal clashes to settle, no viewer could be blamed for assuming Jobs’s naysayers—each, in their own way, having been demonstrably steamrolled by the tech guru—will vanish from the remainder of the film. Just as Jobs endures, so do they—all, exempting Chrisann, looping back around for another featured turn in each act, and with added life wisdom, to grapple one last time with their once and future, and legendarily dickheaded, boss.

Steve Jobs’s tripartite structure is probably as audacious a choice a Hollywood studio can make: the minute-to-minute claustrophobia of the launches means the acting (and the beyond-prolix script) are thrown under an unforgiving degree of scrutiny. But if the begraddled present tense of the three acts makes for a superficially exhilarating movie-going experience, Sorkin’s text betrays the hoariness of its motivating Big Concept early and often. Jobs’s on-screen relationship with Scully is essentially one protracted heart to heart that exists principally to unmask the titular antihero’s daddy issues before it’s too late. Jobs finally figures out how to redeem his deadbeat-dad self in perfect sync with the scoring his last (and greatest) Apple coup, wherein Hoffmann has cause to tell him iMac sales are projected to break a million in their first week. (For whatever reason, this histrionic, win-big-or-bust quality permeates nearly every film with Boyle’s name on it.)

This process means inevitably realizing there’s no way *Steve Jobs* can’t culminate in a treatise on why America (allegedly) adores Steve Jobs. Hurdling toward its conclusion, Boyle’s film takes pains to solidify its antihero’s image in its most enduring—one could even say streamlined—form: emaciated, adorned in his signature black turtleneck, spotless sneakers, and rimless granny glasses. On a sun-kissed Cupertino rooftop parking lot, with milliseconds between him and the iMac unveiling, Jobs’s mad rush to finally take responsibility for himself allows for the teasing of a yet-unseen new product: The now-teenage Lisa (played here by Perla Haney-Jardine) is more than jaded to her father’s overpromising, until he begins bellowing to her that he’ll find a way to “put five hundred or a thousand songs in your pocket.” Even by its surprisingly upbeat denouement, it’s way too late to ask if *Steve Jobs* is a full-bore promotion of Apple’s corporate philosophy: In 2015, no utterance of Jobs’s name in public can be mistaken for anything else.

This film will rent as well as **SELF/LESS**, **THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING**, **AMERICAN ULTRA**, **THE IMITATION GAME**, and **LITTLE BOY**.



2/16 2 THE 33 DRAMA

\$14 MILL BO 1856 SCREENS PG-13 127 MINUTES

Antonio Banderas (EXPENDABLES 3, MACHETE KILLS, RUBY SPARKS, HAYWIRE, THE LEGEND OF ZORRO)

The saga of the Chilean copper miners trapped when the Mina San José collapsed in 2010 was mesmerizing for the millions who watched it unfold. Not only did all 33 of the men who were working nearly half a mile underground survive there for more than two months, but, in a miracle of sorts, an international team of engineers managed to drill a narrow hole through tons of rock to hit the sweet spot where the men were hidden, without further destabilizing the precarious mine. The machine that hauled the men up to the surface looked endearingly crude, like a man-sized vacuum tube or a clunky *Dr. Who* time-travel machine, and their reunions with their thrilled loved ones supplied a whole gaggle of blockbuster-worthy happy endings.

After the hole is drilled to reconnect the men with the outside world, but before their rescuers figure out how to get them back to the surface, Antonio Banderas's Mario Sepúlveda, the heroic natural leader who takes over from his ineffectual shift supervisor, Don Lucho (Lou Diamond Phillips), has an epiphany. Mario apologizes to the other men for having portrayed himself to the media as the leader who saved a hapless group. "You are my brothers, and we are going to pull together to get out of here," he tells them. It's a nice speech, but the film undermines it by portraying him as a blue-collar superman. He singlehandedly restores hope to the panicking group during the dark early hours of their ordeal, convinces the others to ration their food when they're about to wolf it all down on the first day, and talks one man out of killing himself and another out of the paranoia that makes him hide in a corner with a drawn knife, afraid the others are planning to kill and eat him.

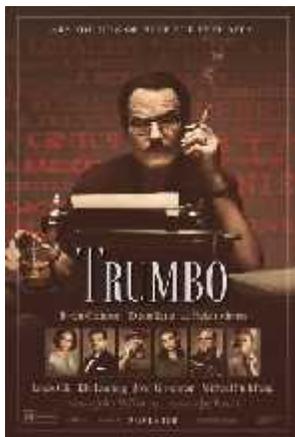


It doles out a shock or hits a (usually hollow) emotional note every few minutes with mechanical precision.

The miners had access to over a mile of tunnels in addition to the refuge where they first retreated for safety and supplies, but the film doesn't make that clear. Instead, they appear to spend all their time in or just outside the refuge. Even so, though the collapse of the mine is seat-rattlingly cataclysmic and its immediate aftermath creepily claustrophobic, that sense of being trapped in a small, dark space dissipates rather than intensifies over time. As the men argue or laugh or clasp hands in medium shots and close-ups, their faces strategically lit by shafts of light supposedly emanating from their headlamps, their setting begins to seem almost incidental, mere background for a series of superficially touched-on male-bonding tropes: the by-the-book boss who reluctantly cedes control to the charismatic rebel, the old-timer who helps a troubled young man kick his addiction, and the insider Chileans grudgingly accepting the outsider Bolivian.

Life above ground feels no more insightful or emotionally engaging. The nonstop effort to rescue the miners is drained of its complexity and drama, and the main mechanical breakthrough is attributed to an "aha" moment experienced by a government bureaucrat. The waiting family members who might have served as an emotional conduit into the story barely register as individuals, with the exception of their leader, Maria Segovia. She's portrayed as a stalwart advocate for the men in the mine, her relentless ferocity a note that's hit one or two times too many. But Juliette Binoche makes that note resonate, her tight lips, harsh voice, and mistrustful but sometimes softening eyes offering a believable portrait of a woman who learned early in life that it's up to her to stick up for her family. Because if she doesn't, as this film makes clear, life will flatten them like a giant slab of rock.

This should rent as well as **TIME OUT OF MIND, THE TRANSPORTER REFUELED, TOMORROWLAND, PAWN SACRIFICE, SELF/LESS, THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.,** and **SOUTHPAW.**



2/16 2 TRUMBO DRAMA

\$7 MILL BO 1657 SCREENS R 124 MINUTES

Bryan Cranston (TV—SEINFELD, BREAKING BAD, HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER—FILM—GODZILLA)

Diane Lane (EVERY SECRET THING, MAN OF STEEL, SECRETARIAT, KILL SHOT)

Helen Mirren (WOMAN IN GOLD, RED 2, HITCHCOCK, BRIGHTON ROCK, THE TEMPEST)

Trumbo is introduced to the audience by his then-friend Edward G. Robinson (Michael Stuhlbarg), who chides the screenwriter for putting too many “little sermons on citizenship” in his screenplays. Louis C.K. features as somebody named Arlen Hird, a composite of Trumbo’s “unfriendly” colleagues - some of whom would find themselves out of a job before the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings even started, simply for, say, attending an anti-Nazi rally back in the 1930s. Aside from this historical shorthand, Hird serves the narrative to exactly one purpose: haunting Trumbo as the latter’s Communist conscience, always at the ready to accuse the screenwriter of putting his own price tag above the Hollywood Ten’s inciting causes.

Beyond the psychic and professional costs of Trumbo’s refusal to name names before the HUAC, his ideology—both as a screenwriter and as a man—is addressed as flippantly as possible. As the sun twinkles drowsily above the man’s backyard hacienda, his daughter, Niki (Elle Fanning), asks if he really is a communist. Trumbo replies that she is too, as long as she’d be willing to split her lunch with a hungry schoolmate. It’s as heavy-handed as anything in Edward Dmytryk’s *Tender Comrade*, sure, but it’s also saccharine, witless, reductive. This, then, is how the film wants us to think of its storied hero?



By keeping Dalton Trumbo on the straight and narrow, the film saps his story of much of its power.

John McNamara’s screenplay is the opposite of subtle, its namesake surviving a decade’s worth of witch hunts one hokey-sounding diatribe and one-liner at a time—usually as scene punctuation. Cranston lends his custom world-weariness to Trumbo’s quips, but he’s ill-served by the actual words, which seem less like those of an embattled political thinker than a refrigerator-magnet legacy franchise. Hird embodies not just Trumbo’s conscience, then, but the screenplay’s as well. At one point, he has occasion to ask Trumbo: “Jesus, do you ever say anything that isn’t gonna get chiseled on a rock?”

The film is, to its makers’ credit, dense with names, dates, and events. Trumbo’s 11-month 1950 prison term is covered in about five minutes, and Roach’s saga culminates with him breaking the blacklist when he writes *Spartacus* for Douglas in a pinch (in reality, it was one of the most taxing artistic battles of Trumbo’s career).

This will rent as well as **TRUE STORY, GOOD KILL, ST. VINCENT’S, SELF/LESS, AMERICAN ULTRA, SOUTHPAW,** and **THE GIFT.**



2/23 1 **THE GOOD DINOSAUR** FAMILY
\$97 MILL BO PG 93 MINUTES

Jefferey Wright (TV—BOARDWALK EMPIRE—FILM—THE HUNGER GAMES 1 & 2, CADILLAC RECORDS)
Frances McDormand (FARGO, MOONRISE KINGDOM, TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON, BURN AFTER READING)

An odd duck in Pixar's filmography, *The Good Dinosaur* appears determined to not be a big deal, an impression that's immediately, inescapably apparent in the character design. Arlo (Raymond Ochoa), the titular Apatosaurus, is animated in such a fashion as to suggest a tossed-off pencil sketch that's been filled in with fluorescent green paint. He's an anonymous blob with round, white, bobby cartoon eyes, rendered with pointedly little of the painstaking detail that often abounds within even the most fleetingly glimpsed of Pixar's creations. The other dinosaurs are similarly basic in design, sometimes amusingly so, as is the case with a T-rex (Sam Elliott) with a huge, rudimentarily square head that juts out from its neck like the front of a tractor trailer, its body trailing behind with a dainty reserve that memorably contrasts with the character's fulsome western manliness.

The film's premise suggests that an asteroid missed Earth 65 million years ago, allowing dinosaurs to flourish as the planet's dominant species. Humans eventually came along, but are subservient to the dinosaurs, behaving like dogs. Which is to say that the dinosaurs of this film never properly existed, residing in an alternate world, and Pixar's method of animating them consistently calls out this unreality, this sense of divorce from an otherwise known atmosphere, while also affirming Arlo's gentleness and vulnerability. Surrounded by this impressive Pixar world, he's just a goofy little dino.

The main character is a collection of insecurities that have been calculatedly assembled so as to teach children the usual lessons about bravery, loyalty, and self-sufficiency.

At least the first act benefits from tension that Sohn isn't willing to properly interrogate. Arlo's father (Jeffrey Wright) tells his children they should strive to "make their mark," before pressing a mud print onto a silo he's built to protect their crops. Arlo's mother (Frances McDormand) also makes a print, saying that, one day, the children can do the same. The siblings are instantly able to fulfill their chores, earning their "marks," while Arlo's success is routinely undone by fear. Arlo's a pacifist, though he doesn't know it yet.

In other words, Arlo's parents are deliberately fostering a situation in which one of their children, obviously developing at a different pace than the others, is to feel inferior to the rest of his family. The parents are encouraging the sort of groupthink mentality that makes high school a living hell for those who aren't immediately adept at the physical activities that command a culture's attention at the expense of everything else. Yet Sohn portrays Arlo's father as a good parent, as yet another Disney patriarch to whom the hero must prove everything. The conformist implication of this scenario is so ghastly as to nearly throw the viewer out of the film, yet it lends *The Good Dinosaur* a hint of neurotic emotional friction.

Will easily rent as well as **PADDINGTON, MINIONS, INSIDE OUT, and PIXELS.**





2/23 3 MY ALL AMERICAN DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 2134 SCREENS PG 118 MINUTES

Aaron Eckhart (INCARNATE, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, THE DARK KNIGHT, PAYCHECK)

Based on the meteoric yet short-lived career of college football player Freddie Steinmark, *My All American*, on the surface at least, seems like your standard sports drama. It has the underdog-triumphing-against-all-odds dramatic arc that writer-director Angelo Pizzo previously traversed with *Hoosiers* and *Rudy*, both of which he scripted. Here, Steinmark (Finn Wittrock) fights an uphill battle against assumptions about his football-playing abilities based on his diminutive height to become a star defenseman for the University of Texas's Longhorns team during their triumphant 1969 season. And the film is chockfull of the kind of shamelessly corny yet wholly sincere moments of rah-rah heroism that often characterize these types of films.

But there's something more to the film than just sports-drama clichés, and a clue to what that lies in its subtle emphasis on Steinmark's Christian background. At least as Pizzo writes him and Wittrock plays him, Steinmark is chaste as all get out: endlessly devoted to his family, teammates, and friends (including his girlfriend, Linda Wheeler, played by Sarah Bolger); never seen doping or drinking even in the more permissive environment of college in the late 1960s; always saying his evening prayers. Indeed, he's the iconic squeaky-clean all-American boy, and that's how the film treats him: as a walking icon.

All of the film's nuances are ultimately negated by the its relentless canonization of its subject.

Steinmark is a proverbial life force, inspiring his teammates around him with his unwavering devotion to the Longhorns. At one point, Darrell Royal (Aaron Eckhart), Steinmark's coach, tells him after an impromptu locker-room chat that he feels so much better about things after talking to him. That's par for the course with the rest of his teammates, none of whom dare to speak ill against him, and who rally around him when he discovers, after their conference-championship victory against Arkansas, that he has a malignant tumor in his leg and will no longer be able to play football.

One could possibly find some perverse fascination in seeing a sports biopic about such a resolutely flat central character: no dark nights of the soul, no seismic shifts in attitude, just pure, virtuous essence all the way to his untimely end. Those who get onto the film's feel-good wavelength may well brush off the kinds of questions others might wonder about—such as whether Steinmark's insistence on playing through the persistent pain in his left leg was, in the end, more foolish than heroically selfless.

This will rent like **THE TRANSPORTER: REFUELED, PAWN SACRIFICE, END OF THE TOUR, AMERICAN ULTRA, LOVE & MERCY, MCFARLAND USA, and BLACK OR WHITE.**





2/23 2 SECRET IN THEIR EYES THRILLER
\$\$21 MILL BO 2045 SCREENS PG-13 143 MINUTES

Nicole Kidman (BEFORE I GO TO SLEEP, FAR AND AWAY, THE RAILWAY MAN, TRESPASS, THE INTERPRETER, THE STEPFORD WIVES)
Julia Roberts (PRETTY WOMAN, AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY, MIRROR MIRROR, LARRY CROWNE, VALENTINE'S DAY, RUNAWAY BRIDE)

Volleying across a 13-year time span, the film begins in the present with FBI counterterrorism agent Ray (Chiwetel Ejiofor) breathlessly returning to Los Angeles, bringing to his partner, Jess (Julia Roberts), and deputy district attorney, Claire (Nicole Kidman), information he believes will solve a case that's been haunting all three since the months immediately following the 9/11 attacks. In those days, the body of Jess's daughter had been found in a dumpster near a prominent and closely monitored mosque. Despite warnings from then-D.A. Morales (Alfred Molina) not to let the case overtake his primary directive (namely, preventing further assaults on the homeland), Ray let his personal investment in the girl's murder absorb him. Given Ejiofor's unwavering commitment to a role that otherwise fails to transcend cliché, the film initially seems to be on solid, if not innovative, footing.

The film makes everyone's lives nothing but the blank spots in fate's big book of Mad Libs.

The further Ray dug into the case in 2002, the dirtier his hands got, ultimately discovering that even when he nabbed an oily teen lizard he was convinced was the perpetrator, there was no way he'd ever get him to stand trial. The reason? He was Homeland Security's inside

man sitting on the potentially largest sleeper cell of terrorists in the country, or so Morales and his ilk believed. The not-even-veiled "freedom isn't free" insinuation that leaving the murder of Jess's daughter "unsolved" was institutionally acceptable collateral damage left Ray, Claire, and Jess disillusioned. By the time the action picks up again in 2015, at least two of them are well-nigh hollowed.

So much investment is put in the roundelay of plot reveals that when the big third-act twist comes, it arrives shortchanged of its intended political implications. (**Spoilers herein.**) The eye-rolling disclosure that one of the main characters has been taking the law into their own hands since the end of the events depicted via flashback is clearly intended to symbolically reflect the ultimate outcome of post-9/11 foreign policy, in "the true enemies are ourselves" fashion.

This should rent s well as **TIME OUT OF MIND, SOUTHPAW, TRUE STORY, BLACK OR WHITE** and **THE LOFT**.

