



2/6 A BAD MOM'S CHRISTMAS COMEDY
\$68 MILL BO 2678 SCREENS R 104 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Kristen Bell (TV—THE GOOD PLACE—FILM—HOW TO BE A LATIN LOVER, CHIPS, BAD MOM'S, THE BOSS, ZOOTOPIA)
Mila Kunis (BAD MOMS, MAX PAYNE, ANNIE, JUPITER ASCENDING, TED, BLACK SWAN)

In *Bad Moms*, Christina Applegate's judgmental PTA leader Gwendolyn James played the foil to Amy (Mila Kunis) and her two friends, Kiki (Kristen Bell) and Carla (Kathryn Hahn). Gwendolyn's relentless perfectionist was an inimical counterpoint to the central trio's parental shortcomings, and it caused the friends to eventually embrace the fact that when held up to the loftiest of standards, all moms are essentially bad moms. With *A Bad Moms Christmas*, directors Jon

Lucas and Scott Moore bring Amy, Kiki, and Carla's mothers into the fold to serve as pseudo-antagonists throughout a Christmas season of forced cheer and seemingly endless rituals. The lack of a unifying cause for the three women leaves them fighting individual family battles with their own mothers, who rarely rise above thinly conceived sketches. This too often limits Kunis, Bell, and Hahn's time together on screen, thus squandering the chemistry between them that was the first film's highlight.

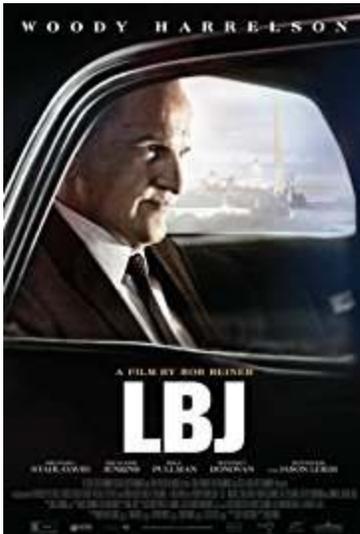
As it bounces from one family to the next, *A Bad Moms Christmas* gradually devolves into a set of loosely connected vignettes, spreading itself thin and subsequently leaving most of the on-screen relationships feeling too undeveloped to carry much emotional heft. The almost complete absence of a narrative through line is less of an issue early in the film when Amy, Kiki, and Carla are flinging around one-liners that have a fresh, improvised flair to them. Hahn once again outshines her co-stars as the overtaxed spa worker, selling lines like "Since when did every woman in America need a completely hairless vagina on Christmas?" as if her job depended on it. Even the introduction of their three mothers initially adds some humorously awkward interactions to the story while also providing insight into the ways that Amy and her friends' maternal anxieties and idiosyncrasies are tied to the dysfunctional relationships they have with their own mothers.



Among the newcomers to the cast, Christine Baranski is the clear standout as Amy's wealthy, uptight, and hypercritical mother, Ruth. The older woman's constant attempts to upstage her daughter by transforming Amy's house from a mellow, casual holiday hangout into a winter wonderland against her daughter's wishes makes for what is by far the most compelling of the film's three mother-daughter conflicts. And Baranski's deadpan expressions and subtle comic timing offer a welcome respite from otherwise broad characterizations and comedic strokes. Ruth's perfectionist impulse to have the best decorations and give the most expensive gifts is an overused conceit in holiday-themed films, but *A Bad Moms Christmas* at least attempts to mine the deep insecurities that drive Ruth to demand perfection from herself and her daughter and still garner laughs while doing it.

On the other hand, both Kiki and Carla's mothers, the overly clingy Sandy (Cheryl Hines) and the oft-absent, free-spirited Isis (Susan Sarandon), fare much poorer, never developing beyond the cartoonish logical extremes of their respective daughters. As the film's second half leans progressively more on the mending of mother-daughter bonds and toward multiple syrupy reconciliations, the lack of weight and depth given to everyone besides Amy and Ruth begins taking its toll. *A Bad Moms Christmas* is most enjoyable when it relies on Hahn's improvisational gifts and Baranski's bone-dry wit or simply sticks to mindlessly inane scenarios like the women getting drunk at the mall and stealing the Christmas tree from Lady Foot Locker

This will rent as well as **BAD MOMS, GIRLS TRIP, ROUGH NIGHTS, LOGAN LUCKY, BAYWATCH and SNATCHED.**



2/6 LBJ DRAMA
\$3 MILL BO 696 SCREENS R
98 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Woody Harrelson (WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP, WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, THE EDGE OF 17, NOW YOU SEE ME 2, FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, ZOMBIE LAND)

Lyndon Baines Johnson entered the White House as one of the most accomplished politicians in U.S. history. And as president, his vision of a Great Society led to the country's most ambitious liberal political reforms since Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, revolutionizing social security, the war on poverty, and immigration policies. Johnson also steered the nation during its confrontation with the communist bloc at the height of the Cold War, including the worst years of the Vietnam conflict. That Rob Reiner's *LBJ* chooses to focus primarily on Johnson's work on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a reflection of America's current political climate and the artistic and political conformity that holds sway in Hollywood. By pairing down Johnson's multifarious life and career to this one piece of legislation, the film fails to do justice to both the man and the fraught times he so fundamentally influenced.

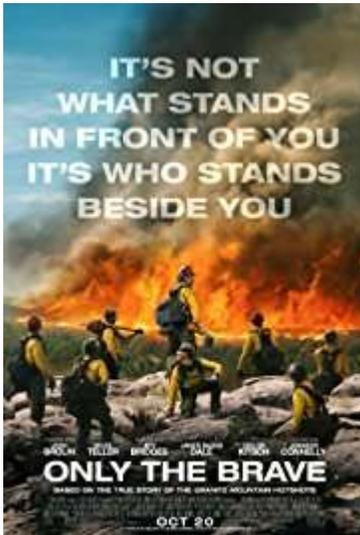
Johnson only becomes president two-thirds of the way through the film. Until that point, Reiner focuses on the man's tenure as John F. Kennedy's vice president, offering up a kind of conversion story, with L.B.J. as the St. Paul to J.F.K.'s Jesus; just as St. Paul did a lot of the leg work of spreading Christianity after Christ's death, the film reminds us that Johnson did most of the heavy lifting on civil rights legislation in the wake of Kennedy's assassination. The final result is a neutered portrait of L.B.J. himself in service of a fairly conventional and bland depiction of one moment in the creation of a law whose monumental prologue and epilogue are merely hinted at. The topical and transitory nature of the film means that viewers will have to look elsewhere to understand the full scope of L.B.J.'s life and legacy.

Johnson was a promethean figure in the American political landscape of his time, a swaggering Texan known for browbeating opponents and allies alike and using his phallus (which he refers to as "Jumbo" in the film) as a diplomatic tool. *LBJ* is most confident when showing the president, played in appropriately over-the-top fashion by Woody Harrelson, engaging in congressional horse-trading and giving his interlocutors what Johnson historians call "the treatment," an interrogatory mix of cajoling and intimidation that the president used to convince people to give him what he wanted. Harrelson, beneath prosthetic jowls and inches of makeup, captures L.B.J.'s garrulous tongue and Texas-sized chutzpah with aplomb. And Jennifer Jason Leigh, almost unrecognizable as Lady Bird Johnson, matches Harrelson stride for stride, fully and theatrically embodying the first lady.

At its best, *LBJ* successfully conveys the complexity of the legislative process as it observes the goings-on inside government committees and behind-the-scenes political meetings. But the film's primary and secondary characters generally see all their strengths and weaknesses neatly rendered by Reiner and screenwriter Joey Hartstone. Except, that is, for golden-boy J.F.K. (Jeffrey Donovan). The filmmakers don't have it in them to show any of Kennedy's wrinkles or warts, because if they did then the film would have had to wrestle with the complexities of how Johnson actually dealt with his second-banana role. Here we simply get a larger-than-life politician wallowing in his self-pity as part of a political midlife crisis, which only further serves to diminish him in comparison to the always effervescent, ever-smiling Kennedy.

This will rent as well as **STRONGER, BOOK OF HENRY, THE BIG SICK, NORMAN, and THE COMEDIAN.**





2/6 ONLY THE BRAVE ACTION
\$18 MILL BO 2856 SCREENS PG-13 134 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Josh Brolin (HAIL CAESAR!, EVEREST, SICARIO, INHERENT VICE, MEN IN BLACK 3)
Miles Teller (BLEED FOR THIS, WAR DOGS, ALLEGIANT, WHIPLASH, DIVERGENT)

Early in Howard Hawks's 1939 classic [Only Angels Have Wings](#), a cargo pilot named Joe Souther perishes in a crash while flying on a dangerous route through the Andes Mountains. When confronted about the tragedy soon after, his fellow pilots carry on as if nothing has happened, one of them eventually uttering: "Who's Joe?" There's nothing cavalier about their reactions, or lack thereof. The perilous nature of their jobs leads them to bury their vulnerability beneath seemingly impenetrable layers of professionalism, machismo, and sarcastic humor. Death lurks around every corner and it's when you think about it too much that it's most likely to come your way.

Only the Brave displays a kinship to Hawks's hard-nosed, old-fashioned pragmatism. It's in its rigorous depiction of a hazardous career, as well as in its attentiveness to the myriad ways that danger informs the camaraderie and bonding between men. From the opening scene, which patiently observes Eric Marsh (Josh Brolin), a supervisor at the Prescott Fire Department in Arizona, preparing and packing his gear before training a group of firefighters, it's clear that the film's interests lie in the intricacies and minutiae of firefighting and disaster prevention. Director Joseph Kosinski homes in on Marsh's crew as they prepare to make the challenging leap from a Type 2 hand crew to a "hotshot" crew (essentially the Navy SEALs of firefighting) that would be certified to battle dangerous wildfires. Their workouts are carefully detailed, as are the exhausting and exhaustive methods they use to predict the flow of wildfires, prepare a "line" at the edge of a containment zone, and clear brush and trees to confine fires, and all without using any water.

Because of the brutal physical demands required of these men when placed in front of a fire, testosterone flows freely at the firehouse. When Brendan McDonough (Miles Teller), a recovering junky trying to set his life straight after the birth of his daughter, tries out for the squad, he's put through the wringer, particularly by Christopher MacKenzie (Taylor Kitsch), who knew him from an EMT course they took and feared that he would drag everyone else in the crew down with him. And as the fire training intensifies, so does the ball-busting, and though Brendan is quickly nicknamed "Donut" because the men initially see him as a big zero, they eventually connect through shared effort and the sheer amount of long days spent in the field together.

Offsetting the contentious relationship between Donut and Chris are two paternal-like bonds that subtly and gracefully mirror one another. Duane Steinbrink (Jeff Bridges), the town's fire chief, is the elder statesman, and Eric repeatedly leans on the man's wisdom and experience, particularly when trying to strategize ways to get his crew's hotshot certification (they eventually become the Granite Mountain Hotshots). Elsewhere, Eric plays the role of mentor for Donut, subjecting him to a form of tough love that implies a deeper understanding of the young man's struggles with substance abuse. The film wisely leaves this and other connections between the men to bubble under the surface as subtext, allowing bonds to take shape organically.



Only the Brave skillfully juggles the difficulties of the men's treacherous work and of remaining close with their families due to working away from home for weeks at a time. Amanda and Natalie (Natalie Hall), Donut's future wife, are rarely on screen, but they're very much understood to be present in the minds of Eric and Donut, especially when the men are stuck in potentially deadly circumstances. And because Kosinski so deftly and scrupulously lays down such emotional groundwork, the fires that inevitably come at the end of the film carry with them an emotional heft and pathos that feels wholly earned. Even for those familiar with the story, the filmmakers dramatize it in such a way that gives the events both a vivid immediacy and poignant intimacy that's rarely achieved in large-scale natural disaster films.

This will rent as well as **THE DARK TOWER, WIND RIVER, THE WALL, GHOST IN THE SHELL, and PASSENGERS.**



2/6 SUBURBICON THRILLER
\$8 MILL BO 2014 SCREENS R 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

Matt Damon (STUCK ON YOU, JASON BOURNE, WE BOUGHT A ZOO, INTERSTELLAR, CONTAGION, THE MARTIAN)
Julianne Moore (THE BIG LEBOWSKI, KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE, STILL ALICE, CARRIE, BOOGIE NIGHTS)

Black lives don't matter in Un-Pleasantville, a.k.a. Suburbicon, the Ikeram hamlet introduced via a mock-promo reel that promises safe streets, good schools, and a diverse populace (New Yorkers and Mississippians—of the Caucasian persuasion, that is—side by side!). But when the first African-American couple, Mr. and Mrs. Meyers (Leith M. Burke and Karimah Westbrook), and their son, Andy (Tony Espinosa), move into the neighborhood, tensions begin to rise among the all-white masses. That's just a side drama, however, to the main attraction, which is the hustle cooked up by seemingly virtuous patriarch Gardner Lodge (Matt Damon) and his plucky sister-in-law, Margaret (Julianne Moore), with whom he's in love, to off the latter's twin sister/Gardner's wife (also Moore) and collect the insurance money.

The duo's twisty, twisted scheme is seen mainly through the eyes of Gardner's young son, Nicky (Noah Jupe), who is, like the audience, initially in the dark about his dad and aunt's skullduggery. But the sins of the father eventually come to the fore, as they must, and in the bloodiest of ways. Jupe is so good at delineating his character's slowly corrupted innocence that, for a while, it keeps the film's shallowness at bay. All the better to revel in Robert Elswit's sun-dappled, saturated color palette and the heightened depravity of Moore, Damon, and, in a very funny two-scene role, Oscar Isaac as an insurance agent with both a nose for flimflamery and a hunger for ill-gotten gains.

Everyone here is a bastard, worthy of being shot, stabbed, blown up, or poisoned with lye. Everyone, that is, except for the Meyers family and Nicky. The Meyerses are Teflon saints, noble constructs without any human shades who exist purely to act dignified in the face of the most virulent behaviors, be it a passive-aggressive encounter on the grocery checkout line or while hiding in their home from a bellicose mob. When one of the clannish Suburbicon residents hangs a Confederate flag on the Meyers's house, you want to slap Clooney upside the head for his hamfisted attempt at sociopolitical currency. And in Nicky, Clooney sees hope for a future generation that can hopefully move past the all-consuming bigotries of its ancestors.

This will rent as well as **THE GLASS CASTLE, TULIP FEVER, BOOK OF HENRY, THE CIRCLE and NORMAN.**





2/13 DADDY'S HOME 2 COMEDY

\$92 MILL BO 3575 SCREENS PG-13 100 MINUTES DVD/
COMBO

Will Ferrell (THE CAMPAIGN, THE HOUSE, ZOOLANDER 2, GET HARD, ANCHORMAN)

Mark Wahlberg (BOOGIE NIGHTS, TED, TED 2, THE SHOOTER, LONE SURVIVOR, 2 GUNS)

Mel Gibson (THE PATRIOT, WHAT WOMEN WANT, THE ROAD WARRIOR, PAYBACK, BRAVEHEART, LETHAL WEAPON)

When future academics look back on the crisis of masculinity in late-2010s America, they could do worse than to watch Sean Anders's *Daddy's Home* films, a comedy franchise so steeped in contemporary male insecurity it's practically begging to be unpacked in a gender studies seminar. Like its predecessor, *Daddy's Home 2* takes great delight in finding ways to emasculate Brad (Will Ferrell), a good-natured suburban stepdad who's routinely humiliated for incorrectly performing the masculinity that comes naturally to Dusty (Mark Wahlberg), the biological father of his stepchildren.

Where the earlier film pitted Brad and Dusty against each other in a competition to prove their worth as fathers, the new film finds them seamlessly trading off parenting duties as "co-dads." That is, until Brad and Dusty's own fathers—Jonah (John Lithgow) and Kurt (Mel Gibson), respectively—join them and their families for a Christmastime cabin retreat. Brad and Jonah are openly and, in the film's eyes, uncomfortably affectionate, greeting each other with a long, hard kiss on the lips—an image Anders treats as a Farrelly brothers-level gross-out gag. Dusty and Kurt, on the other hand, have a cold and resentful relationship, due largely to the fact that Kurt spent more time getting drunk and picking up barflies than raising his son.



The film portrays parenting as the death of manhood, a final surrender to the castrating effects of domesticity. Only those who patently refuse the responsibilities of fatherhood, as Kurt has done his entire life, maintain their virility. Meanwhile, those like Brad and Jonah who happily embrace their parenting duties are deemed effeminate weirdos and are accordingly subjected to all manner of wild slapstick violence, from a wolf attack to repeated snowball beatings to temporary death by electrocution. While the film ultimately pays some lip service to Brad and Jonah's gregariousness, emotional availability, and supportive parenting style, that's only after 90 minutes of mocking these traits as embarrassing character defects.

No film that features Ferrell, Lithgow, and Wahlberg is likely to be completely free of laughs, and indeed it's hard not to at least crack a smile at some of their quirkier moments here: Wahlberg blithely wrapping his tongue around the script's goofy wordplay; Lithgow warbling the delivery of the punchline ("buttquack") to a kids' joke; and Ferrell's rubbery facial contortions as Brad hopelessly attempts to hold back tears. This sequel also wisely expands the role of Brad's wife, Sara (Linda Cardellini), which allows for at least a few moments to explore the comedic possibilities of feminine insecurity. But ultimately these actors are locked into a formulaic, over-plotted Hollywood comedy that favors outsized set pieces, like a runaway snow blower tearing through Christmas decorations, over subtle actorly moments.

This will rent as well as **LOGAN LUCKY, GIRLS TRIP, BABY DRIVER, ROUGH NIGHT, NEIGHBORS 2, GOING IN STYLE** and **SNATCHED**.



2/13 THE FLORIDA PROJECT DRAMA
\$8 MILL BO 876 SCREENS R 101 MINUTES DVD/
BLU RAY

Brooklyn Prince (ROBO DOG: AIRBORNE)
Willem Dafoe (THE GREAT WALL, JOHN WICK, PLATOON,
OUT OF THE FURNACE, THE AVIATOR)

The film opens with Moonee and Scooty (Christopher Rivera) spitting on a car from a nearby motel's second floor, and after being forced to clean up the vehicle, this band of misfits gains a new member, Jancey (Valeria Cotto). But later, after the trio accidentally sets fire to an abandoned condo, Scooty's mother, Ashley (Mela Murder), no longer allows her son to play with Moonee. This is a small tragedy that Moonee's mother, Halley (Bria Vinaite), is actually responsible for—a fact that neither Moonee nor Halley will ever know, or pretend to know,

because underlying so much of the anecdotal events of this film is a sense of people, for sanity's sake, needing to often trade in denial.

One take on the project of the film's title is the unspoken social contract that binds these lives: the understanding that they're in this life together, united in their love for their kids. The Magic Castle's manager, Bobby (Willem Dafoe), spends much of *The Florida Project* fulfilling his contractually obligated duties while also empathetically taking on the extracurricular role of Father Goose. He breaks up skirmishes and repeatedly asks Halley for her rent, fake-begrudgingly granting her extensions. In one of film's loveliest scenes, he moves his office chair back so Scooty and Jancey can hide from Moonee under his desk. And in one of its nerviest, he scares off an old man (Carl Bradfield) for hanging pervily around Moonee, her friends, and all the other children passing through the Magic Castle on their way to destinations unknown.

At one point, a man (Macon Blair) walks in on Moonee taking a bath, and just as he notices and acknowledges her existence, Halley pulls the man out of the bathroom. It's telling how he's unseen to us, and if Moonee knows why her mother is with him then you wouldn't know it from her face—though when we do finally see the man, after he comes back to the motel demanding what Halley stole from him, you'll know the nature of her work from the way Baker blocks the crisis between them that Bobby attempts to negotiate. Bobby looks away from Halley to the john and Halley instantly broadcasts her contempt for the man with her face and middle finger, and the scene's slapstick-like construction attests to the filmmakers' uncondescending look at Halley's life.

Earlier, Moonee will ask her mother about why the security guard at a nearby resort tries to stop them from reselling wholesale perfumes to the tourists heading to and from the building. As she runs from the guard, Halley drops some of the boxes of perfume, which Moonee understands to be as precious a bounty as the free grub that the little girl picks up almost daily from the diner where Scooty's mom works. But Halley doesn't tell Moonee why she *really* left the boxes on the ground, because to do so would be to have to tell her little girl, and a little too soon, that she has to strive for more in life than recess—idle days of bugging strangers for ice cream money and spinning fantasies, as in Moonee and Jancey patiently waiting under a huge tree for the rain to pass and Moonee telling her friend that the cows in the distance are a gift to her.



It's also telling how often the people who live at the Magic Castle spin stories around or simply give the finger to a symbol of all they can't attain: a helicopter that repeatedly takes off nearby, probably from the resort outside which Halley sells her perfume and, unknown to Moonee, her body. Baker and co-writer Chris Bergoch understand the pull of Disney on young lives and they posit the Magic Castle as a temporary place, whose upkeep feels like a hard, desperate means to keep a dream alive for the young: a pit stop on the way to hanging out with Mickey Mouse. A bitter irony here is that, when the shit hits the fan and Moonee's eyes open in ways they never have before, she makes a heartbreaking, last-ditch effort to run toward that dream, fulfilling something that her mother could never give her. But I'd like to think, given this girl's precociousness, that she's also hellbent on destroying this dream, if

only to dream bigger: of a world not so small, after all, and as such not predicated on the self-containment that enables capitalism and turns us into its suckers.

This will rent as well as **DETROIT, THE MOUNTAIN BETWEEN US, VICTOR AND ABDUL, THE GLASS CASTLE, and LION.**



2/13 ROMAN J. ISRAEL, ESQ. DRAMA
\$14 MILL BO 1635 SCREENS PG-13 122 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Denzel Washington (FLIGHT, FENCES, THE EQUALIZER, TRAINING DAY, THE PELICAN BRIEF, RED OCTOBER)

Writer-director Dan Gilroy's *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* is a film whose protagonist and plot are out of sync. Roman J. Israel (Denzel Washington) is an over-the-hill activist lawyer who goes through what can best be described as a midlife crisis after the death of his mentor and boss. Having spent his life working for peanuts defending the poor, Israel suddenly ends up working for the high-end law firm of his mentor's former student, George Pierce (Colin Farrell). The new gig, along with a financial windfall that eventually sets what little there is of the film's plot into motion, allows Israel to live luxuriously for the first time in his life. This

reversal of fortune causes the man to see himself as a sellout, and allows Washington to indulge in all sorts of nervous ticks and goofy eccentricities that are utterly extraneous to his character.

Gilroy's screenplay undermines his character study of a man selling his soul for material comforts by failing to convincingly blend it together with the elements of a legal thriller. Not only is Pierce far from the slick, heartless shyster that Israel sees him as, but the latter's new job actually allows him to continue standing up for the poor. In fact, it even enables him to do so in a more effective way than ever before. And what leads to Israel's downfall is a private decision that has nothing to do with his new position; he could have just as easily made the same choice at his previous job. Throughout the film, it's almost like Washington and Gilroy have two completely opposing and irreconcilable visions of who Israel is supposed to be.

This is because Israel speaks in a kind of grandiloquent, moralizing legalese that could almost be a parody of better legal dramas if his words were either funny or witty.

Instead, they're mostly just incoherent and nonsensical, the wild utterings of a man completely disinterested in meaningfully communicating with his interlocutors. Similarly, Gilroy seems equally uninterested in conveying *Roman J. Israel, Esq.*'s purpose to his audience, hiding whatever larger political or philosophical points he wants to make behind Israel's meaningless pseudo-philosophical jargon.

Gilroy's *Nightcrawler* made great use of its Los Angeles setting to indict the thirst for violence cultivated by American TV journalism. One of the few successful moments in this film makes similarly thoughtful use of its own L.A. setting. The first thing Israel does with his newfound financial freedom is go on a staycation in Santa Monica, and this montage works as both a paean to L.A. as a city where dreams come true and a sendup of the illusory nature of those dreams. Another effective scene involves Israel, a veteran political activist grown out of touch with the scene, unwittingly arguing with a young woman about intersectionality without fully understanding the nature of their disagreement. Here, *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* successfully conveys the cannibalizing tendencies in contemporary social justice discourse, where identity politics often end up canceling each other out in the fight for larger socioeconomic goals.

This will rent as well as **DETROIT, THE GLASS CASTLE, BEGUILLED, BOOK OF HENRY, KIDNAP and THE CIRCLE.**





2/13 SAME KIND OF DIFFERENT AS ME DRAMA
\$7 MILL BO 697 SCREENS PG-13 119 MINUTES DVD/BLU
RAY

Renee Zellweger (BRIDGET JONES' BABY, LEATHERHEADS, CINDERELLA MAN, NURSE BETTY, MY OWN LOVE SONG)

Everybody has a story to tell, each of them is unique. Many may share similarities but there are many things that we do not see with our eyes. It's only when we look with our hearts that we can begin to understand who people really are. That is what Deb is trying to do... She looks at those around her with her heart instead of her eyes. In doing so, she sees what others either can't or won't. A vision in a dream that she has

will help guide her on this path. With her loving persistence, she'll soon help others to see with their hearts. It won't be without its difficulties though. There was something in her dream/vision that helped to show her one special individual. A gentleman named Suicide, or at least that's how everyone knew him. Angry and forlorn, he pushes anyone away. Why though? As Deb and Ron (her husband) open up to him, the layers of anger around him begin to fall away. When the truth behind his story is revealed, it reveals much more than any of them could have imagined. This story digs deep into some matters that can be difficult for some to deal with. It challenges the viewer to look outside oneself. In doing so, it challenges many ideas that we have. Truly a heartwarming tale that is based on a true story, that will take you outside your comfort zone. Is that what you expect? Maybe not, but maybe, just maybe, that might be a good thing.

This will rent as well as **THE GLASS CASTLE, BOOK OF HENRY, THE HERO, THE BIG SICK, THE CIRCLE, and TABLE 19.**





2/13 **WONDER** DRAMA
\$122 MILL BO 3597 SCREENS PG 113 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Julia Roberts (MONEY MONSTER, ERIN BROCKOVITCH, RUNAWAY BRIDE, NOTTING HILL PRETTY WOMAN, SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY)
Owen Wilson (ZOO LANDER 2, NO ESCAPE, BOTTLE ROCKETS, MIDNIGHT IN PARIS, HALL PASS, YOU ME AND DUPREE)

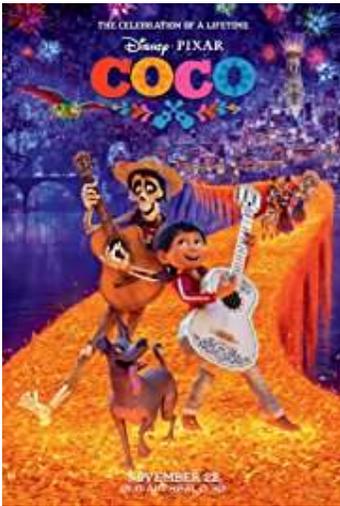
Early in Stephen Chbosky's *Wonder*, inspiring English teacher Mr. Browne (Daveed Diggs) quotes the late self-help guru Wayne Dyer on the importance of kindness: "When given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind." That simple dictum informs every frame of the film, accounting for both its warm-hearted sense of empathy as well as its mawkish sentimentality, audience-flattering righteousness, and total lack of ambiguity or irreconcilability. Given the choice between making a film of truth and insight and making one that's merely nice, Chbosky firmly chooses the latter.

Based on the bestselling children's novel by R.J. Palacio, *Wonder* follows Auggie Pullman (Jacob Tremblay), a shy, sensitive fifth-grade boy who suffers from facial deformities as a result of a rare genetic condition, as he navigates his way through his first year in a school outside of the home. Presided over by a grandfatherly principal (Mandy Patinkin), the school is a relative safe haven from the brutalities of childhood, with kindly teachers and generally well-meaning students, including Jack (Noah Jupe), with whom he forms a fast friendship. However, even here, Auggie isn't entirely free from the scorn and ridicule of bullies. The narrative eventually broadens its scope to focus on the difficulties of Auggie's family, with chapter-like sections narrated by side characters such as his sister, Via (Izabela Vidovic), who often feels neglected by her Auggie-fixated parents (Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson).



In contrast to the cynical emotional machinations of *Gifted*, in which every plot point and character action is calibrated with engineer-like precision to manipulate our feelings, *Wonder's* big stirring moments arise more or less organically from the characters' lives. Even the death of a beloved family dog—perhaps the most surefire means of exploiting an audience's sentiments—is handled with relative understatement. One of the film's deftest moments—in which, after a falling out, Auggie and Jack reconcile within the digital world of *Minecraft*—captures a uniquely contemporary idea: that the strongest emotional connections can often occur in purely virtual spaces.

This will rent as well as **MASK, WIND RIVER, PARIS CAN WAIT, THE BIG SICK, EVERYTHING EVERYTHING, and THE PROMISE.**



2/20 COCO FAMILY ANIMATION
\$153 MILL BO 3987 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

Many of Pixar's best films capture something truly elemental about the experience of being a child. *Toy Story* evoked the enduring emotional bond we have with our childhood toys. *Monsters, Inc.* played on our primal fear of the unknown. *Inside Out* gave voice to our bewildering tangle of emotions. And now *Coco* explores a similarly resonant theme: the tension between our family traditions and our burgeoning sense of personal identity. But the film embraces cultural specificity in a way that no other Pixar production has before, combining the studio's customary emotional directness with a deep dive into a great nation's

art, music, history, and customs.

Focused on the tradition of the Day of the Dead, in which families gather to celebrate their deceased ancestors, *Coco* offers a festive, reverent, and wide-ranging pastiche of Mexican culture, touching on everything from Frida Kahlo to luchadores to the golden age of Mexican cinema. And at the center of the film is Miguel (Anthony Gonzalez), an impish 12-year-old who lives in Mexico with his family of shoemakers. Per a rather stringent ancestral tradition, Miguel's family prohibits playing or even listening to music, a ban which the young boy surreptitiously disobeys by sneaking off to a hidden spot to sing and play guitar along to the films of legendary cowboy singer Ernesto de la Cruz (Benjamin Bratt). These scenes of Miguel jamming along to old songs without a care in the world, lost in pure musical bliss, are some of the most potent in the film, capturing the earnest intensity of youthful passions.

But, of course, no childhood oasis remains forever undisturbed, and Miguel's secret is soon discovered. His family demands that he give up on his musical dreams and begin taking up the family trade because, as his father (Jaime Camil) tells him, a Rivera is a shoemaker through and through. But scrappy little Miguel remains undeterred, resolving to compete in the local talent competition even if it means missing out on his family's Day of the Dead festivities. Instead, however, thanks to somewhat ill-defined metaphysical happenstance, Miguel finds himself transferred over to the realm of the dead, where he will discover the hidden secrets of his family's past with the help of a scheming drifter named Héctor (Gael García Bernal).



Drawing heavily on traditional Mexican folk art, director Lee Unkrich and co-director Adrian Molina depict the dead as gangly skeleton figures with colorful skulls. Though the dead can cross over to the world of the living via a bridge of marigolds, they otherwise reside in their own vibrant, bustling cityscape where neon-gleaming alebrijes fly through the sky. Here, the memory of the living serves as both a kind of currency as well as a life source. The more you're remembered, the richer you are; once you're completely forgotten, you disappear even from the land of the dead, floating away in a puff of glitter.

Much of the drama in *Coco* hinges on Héctor's desperate maneuvers to be remembered by someone, *anyone*, in the world of the living so that he can cling to his afterlife. With the possible exception of *WALL-E*'s depiction of our planet as a depopulated trash heap, this is perhaps Pixar's bleakest vision, a world in which one dies not once but twice, the second time from a collective disregard for a person's very existence. And this gloomy theme is underlined throughout the film by an unusually dark undercurrent of humor, such as gag in which De la Cruz is crushed to death by a bell.

The mood, though, is lightened considerably by the film's exuberant musical numbers. Written by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, the songs cover a broad range of traditional Mexican styles, from plaintive ballads to raucous mariachi. The wacky "Un Poco Loco" serves as the basis for the film's most purely joyful sequence, a show-stopping musical performance featuring Héctor whisking his bones around like a deranged marionette. And the tender "Remember Me" serves as a motif deftly woven into the narrative fabric of the film, all

the way to a poignant emotional climax in which Miguel plays the song for his great-grandmother, Mama Coco (Ana Ofelia Murguía).

This will rent as well as **BOSS BABY, THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS, SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE, MOANA and MINIONS.**



2/20 LADY BIRD COMEDY
\$32 MILL BO 2134 SCREENS R 93 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Saoirse Ronan (BROOKLYN, LOVING VINCENT, LOST RIVER, THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL)
Laurie Metcalf (TV—ROSEANNE, THE BIG BANG THEORY, SUPERGIRL, THE MCCARTHY'S, EASY MONEY)

Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* is an uncommonly nuanced and intelligent film about the volatile relationships between teenage girls and their mothers, and it begins with a brash, borderline-surreal expression of frustration. It's 2002, and 17-year-old Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan) is at the tail end of a road trip touring colleges with her mother, Marion (Laurie Metcalf). They've just finished the 21-hour audiobook of *The Grapes of Wrath*, faces full of tears, and a fidgety Christine is unable to abide her mother's request to "just sit with what we heard." Like a lot of adolescent protagonists in modern coming-of-age films, Christine talks too often and too blithely, but Marion is a formidable sparring partner: "How did I raise such a snob?" she asks, shortly before Christine hurls herself out of a moving car onto the pavement.

That's the sort of action that many teen movies would depict as a flight of fancy, a burst of quickly forgotten surrealism meant to illustrate an impulsive teenage mind; Christine spends the rest of *Lady Bird* sporting a fluorescent pink cast with the words "Fuck you mom" scrawled on it in black sharpie. Such glib, blithe quips are the motor oil of the teen comedy, but in her first outing as a solo writer and director, Gerwig is as sensitive to place and the fragility of young and old bodies as she is to her protagonist's often hurtful words.

Save her stubborn, overworked mother, Christine has trained all of her friends and family to call her Lady Bird, a sobriquet that straddles the line between dignity and cutesy appeal. Lady Bird has yet to obtain either trait, though her dyed hair does have a cardinal red tint. Inexperienced and unsure of how (and whether) to harness her evident ambition, she's a purely aspirational creation, and her hometown of Sacramento comes off as ill-tempered toward irony or audacity. Though Gerwig uses bulky computer monitors and an ambient unease about violence (*Lady Bird* attends a Catholic school because her adopted brother saw a knifing at the local public school) to conjure the film's post-9/11 moment, her Sacramento is authentically behind the times, a town one character calls "the Midwest of California." Alanis Morissette and Dave Matthews Band blare from car speakers, and Bone Thugs-n-Harmony's 1995 hit "Tha Crossroads" is still the featured ballad at school dances.

Gerwig roots around in meaty class issues with a marvelously deft touch. In *Lady Bird*, economic status is a fact of life that determines people's upbringing and their future limits. Lady Bird isn't always quiet about it, and she helplessly looks up to her supposed betters, but she mostly accepts these realities. Instead of stealing from Lady Bird's parents in order to pass as wealthy, she and Marion sift through thrift store racks together; her primary act of financial rebellion is to secretly apply to the sorts of liberal, East Coast schools that her family can't afford with money socked away from a summer job.

Though many of the mundane and enduring conflicts that erupt between mother and daughter are rooted in financial distress, the family's struggles become manifest in more subtle and devastating ways: Lady Bird's mother works a double on her 18th birthday, and her father, Larry (Tracy Letts), has to go back on expensive pills to treat depression because he's just lost his job.



The film's broader shift in perspective is its most impressive, as its sympathies gradually tilt from Lady Bird, a teen desperate to transcend her upbringing, to Marion, a mother who sacrifices her time and her body for her family without reward. Ronan, who seems to grow into her lanky frame over the course of the film, nails the sense that Lady Bird's life is a tendentious war between her ego and increasing sense of the world around her, while Metcalf masters Marion's inability to erase her frustration at her inability to be selfish or impulsive. Both performances are remarkable, brittle and diffident in wholly original ways that distinguish Gerwig's film from *The Edge of Seventeen*, *Pretty in Pink*, and other canonical coming-of-age works that attempt to honestly reckon with issues of privilege. A uniquely American comedy, *Lady Bird* is testy, humane, and firmly rooted in its time and place.

This will rent as well as **BATTLE OF THE SEXES, LAST FLAG FLYING, HOME AGAIN, GIRLS TRIP, and THE GIFTED.**



2/20 MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS
THRILLER

\$94 MILL BO 3879 SCREENS PG-13 114 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Kenneth Branagh (DUNKIRK, JACK RYAN: SHADOW RECRUIT, PIRATE RADIO, VALKYRIE, SLEUTH)
Penelope Cruz (ZOLANDER 2, I'M SO EXCITED, TO ROME WITH LOVE, SEX AND THE CITY 2, VICKY CHRISTINA BARCELONA)

A running joke in Kenneth Branagh's adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* is that Americans can't pronounce the first name of its hero, Hercule Poirot. He pronounces it, of course, "Air-kyool," in the French style, and brusquely corrects those who say "Hercules," like the Roman god. In her 1934 novel, Agatha Christie hardly needed to introduce her readers to her most masterful creation, as she'd already written seven successful novels and many more short stories featuring the detective. But even today's most well-read moviegoers might not have a working knowledge of Christie's achievements, so the film takes great pains to familiarize us with the mustachioed Belgian—satisfyingly played by Branagh himself—and his peculiar ways.

An extended prelude features the detective in Jerusalem in the '30s, fussing over the perfect soft-boiled eggs (which introduces his fastidiousness), then solving with apparent ease a complex case involving a priest, a rabbi, and an imam (which the film uses to highlight his particular ingenuity). Right away, Poirot is pitched as a social misfit and deductive superman, in the style of Benedict Cumberbatch's version of Sherlock Holmes, only a little Frenchier, though the film is still very much an old-fashioned, all-star affair, the sort of actorly epic that was especially popular in the mid-20th century, from *Grand Hotel* to about Sidney Lumet's own adaptation of Christie's novel.



The film's biggest liberty is to make Poirot's ultimate decision more palatable for American sensibilities. Poirot interrogates the passengers, sometimes in their compartments but just as often outdoors in the snow. Early on, the camera conspicuously lingers in any open space or large room it can find, as if anxious about getting onto the train and its cinematically confining narrowness. (Cinematographer Haris Zambarakos's glittering 70mm images relish the period details of Jim Clay's production design—glitzy, well-appointed Art Deco spaces—as well as the natural beauty of the sparkling Mediterranean, aboard a ferry.) And once the film gets to the Orient Express, it's as if Branagh is always itching to get off of it, even having Poirot at one point look over a list of names while standing atop the train for no discernible reason, except perhaps to enjoy the way the sun peeks out between two distant mountain peaks.

All this loitering means that when the central mystery kicks in, the filmmakers must hurry to get through it. The eventual solution to who killed Rachett isn't simple, involving a Lindbergh-like kidnapping case from many years ago (in which Poirot is somehow an expert), and it would be understandable if people who don't already know this story well were confused. Characters are introduced but barely developed. (Penélope Cruz's supporting role amounts to little more than a cameo; in Lumet's film, the part was juicy enough to win Ingrid Bergman an Oscar.) Branagh, though, does a credible job as Poirot, adding some nice touches—cackling while he reads Dickens, sleeping with a leather protector for his baroque mustache—while also overreaching: The character hardly needs a romantic backstory, but the filmmakers give him one anyway, which mostly allows Branagh to stare wistfully at a framed photograph and mutter ruefully in French.

Branagh and screenwriter Michael Green clearly enjoy Christie, but they're also unafraid to take liberties. The most shocking part of the novel is its last page: what Poirot decides to do with the guilty, and how quickly he decides on his course of action. The filmmakers drag out this moral conundrum; the intellectual Poirot, who in the film frequently talks about how issues of good and bad are black and white, must decide whether to listen to his

heart and accept that some moral problems are gray. It helps make the ultimate decision more palatable for American sensibilities, which at least traditionally trust the system to handle criminal matters fairly, rather than the caprices of an individual—especially one as weird as Hercule Poirot.

This will rent as well as **KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE**, **MOTHER**, **KIDNAP**, **BABY DRIVER**, **THE GIFTED** and **LOGAN LUCKY**.



2/20 THE STAR FAMILY \$26 MILL BO
2837 SCREENS PG 85 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

VOICES OF: Kristofferson, Ving Rhames, Tracy Morgan, Oprah Winfrey.

Every culture and era remakes Christianity in its own image, so it's no surprise that Timothy Reckart's *The Star*, an animated retelling of the Nativity from the perspective of a bunch of cuddly animals, treats the coming of the messiah less as a humbling parable of God's mercy and mankind's salvation than a heart-warming adventure tale with plug-and-play lessons about friendship and self-empowerment. Despite its biblically based subject matter and light sprinkling of overtly religious messaging—most of it delivered by Oprah Winfrey as a wise old camel named Deborah—*The Star's* characters, themes, narrative, and visuals are practically indistinguishable from those of any number of other contemporary

animated kids' flicks.

Essentially a Disneyfied version of the folk song "The Friendly Beasts," in which the manger animals relate the good deeds they performed to assist in Jesus Christ's birth, the film focuses on Bo (Steven Yeun), a scrappy little donkey who's taken in by Mary (Gina Rodriguez) after escaping from the gristmill where his owner kept him chained up night and day. Though he dreams of a life of fun and adventure with his pal Dave the dove (Keegan-Michael Key), Bo finds himself strangely attached to Mary. When he discovers that the evil King Herod (Christopher Plummer) is hunting for her, he teams up with Dave and a ragtag group of animals to protect Mary and her unborn child from Herod's vicious hench-dogs (Ving Rhames and Gabriel Iglesias).

The film makes some effort to maintain a sense of historical verisimilitude in its depiction of ancient Judea. In contrast to lily-white portrayals of the couple in biblical epics like *King of Kings*, Mary and Joseph are here represented as distinctly brown-skinned. Reckart also thankfully avoids the temptation to drop some gentle snowfall into the film's peaceful manger scene. In the film's most unusual and interesting scene, Mary reveals her divine pregnancy to Joseph (Zachary Levi) with some of the awkwardness and discomfort such a disclosure would no doubt provoke, and while he doesn't decide to seek a divorce as he does in the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph does genuinely grapple with the daunting responsibilities that this news places on him.

This will rent as well as **DESPICABLE ME 3**, **NUT JOB 2**, **EMOJI MOVIE**, **CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS** and **BOSS BABY**.





2/27 JUST GETTING STARTED
ACTION COMEDY \$6 MILL BO 2161 SCREENS
PG-13 93 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

Morgan Freeman (NOW YOU SEE ME 2, THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION, UNFORGIVEN, TED 2, GONE BABY GONE, THE DARK KNIGHT)

Rene Russo (THOR: THE DARK WORLD, THE INTERN, RANSOM, TIN CUP, GET SHORTY)

It begins as a Mob wife (Jane Seymour), under house arrest, spots a familiar face (Morgan Freeman) on a TV ad for Villa Capri, a luxury Palm Springs retirement resort. Seeking revenge, she dispatches her son to bump him off. Apparently, he was an F.B.I. informant who assumed the identity of 'Duke Driver' in the 'witness protection' program.

As the Villa Capri's charming manager, roguish Driver rules the roost, surrounded by hens (Glenn Headly, Elizabeth Ashley, Sheryl Lee Ralph) who are eager to share his nest when he's not poker partying with his pals (Joe Pantoliano, comedian George Wallace).

Shenanigans commence when prickly newcomer Leo McKay (Tommy Lee Jones) arrives, challenging Driver's supremacy on all fronts, while flirting with Suzie (Rene Russo), who was dispatched from corporate headquarters to audit the books and fire Driver.

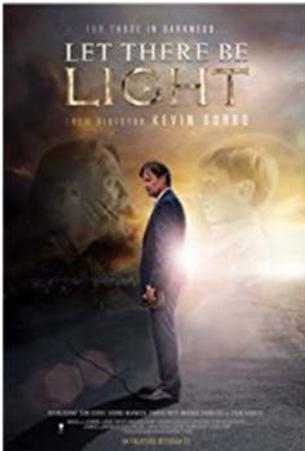
As a native of Los Angeles, I relished Driver's equanimity regarding warm weather at Christmas: "Well, Bethlehem is exactly the same latitude as Southern California, so probably the original Christmas was more like Palm Springs." Which is actually true. Song-writer Irving Berlin and greeting card marketers are the ones who created snowy scenes for Christmas.

Garrulous Morgan Freeman and taciturn Tommy Lee Jones, who has a dry sense of humor, had never worked together before, and their chemistry clicks. Too bad they didn't have better material.

FYI: Although there are some Palm Springs background shots, filming took place at the Four Seasons Resort Rancho Encantado in Santa Fe, New Mexico – for tax reasons. And before taking lessons for this movie, Tommy Lee Jones had never played golf, noting: "I can hit the ball a long way, but I don't always know where it's going to come down."

This will rent as well as **HOUSE, GOING IN STYLE, THE BOSS, and WHY HIM?**





2/27 LET THERE BE LIGHT
DRAMA
PG-13 100 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

Sorbo plays Dr. Sol Harkens, a takeoff on Richard Dawkins and others among the world's small supply of shrilly outspoken public atheists. He's quite the caricature of what some evangelicals believe is plotting against them: a smug, obnoxious cynic first seen rudely interrupting a cleric (Gary Grubbs) during a town-hall debate, his latest book called "Aborting God." He scoffs at any notion of religious belief, telling the cheering audience, "Don't look for any meaning in life, because there isn't any," while saying his personal faith lies in "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll." He ballasts this showboating performance by questioning that if God indeed exists and "is love," why

did He take away Sol's child via terminal cancer at age 8?

For all his rock-star swagger, Sol goes home to drink alone in front of the TV set in his luxury apartment. He's divorced from Katy (Sam Sorbo), who resents his public exploitation of their son's death — particularly since she and their surviving two sons (Shane Sorbo, Braeden Sorbo) remain steadfast Christians. Passing involvements with women like vapid Russian supermodel Vanessa (Olivia Fox) hardly assuage the spiritual emptiness he won't cop to.

Driving home drunk from his book launch party, he smashes into a wall, experiencing a vision (while clinically dead for four minutes) that finds him "going toward the light," seeing his deceased son and being given the titular message by the latter.

Naturally, the media is very curious about his having had a near-death experience, and whether he saw any "other side." But Sol's agent (Daniel Roebuck) and publicist (Donielle Artese) are equally eager that he stay on message at a moment when he's poised to become "the next Bill Maher" — and not undermine his entire public persona with an "Oops! There is a God after all" turnabout. But despite some resistance (as well as a lot of vodka), he cannot keep the "light" he's seen from leaking out for long, endangering his career while significantly repairing relations with Katy and the boys.





2/27 3 BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI

DRAMA/COMEDY

\$23 MILL BO 1878 SCREENS R 115 MINUTES

DVD/COMBO BEFORE REDBOX

Frances McDormand (BURN AFTER READING, FARGO, LAUREL CANYON, ALMOST FAMOUS, PROMISED LAND)

Woody Harrelson (THE EDGE OF 17, TRIPLE 9, THE HUNGER GAMES:2, NOW YOU SEE ME 2)

Martin McDonagh rebounds from the cheeky aimlessness of *Seven Psychopaths* with *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, the finest balance yet of his bleak sense of humor and offbeat moral sincerity. The billboards of the title become the focus of a scandal when Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand) rents them to air her grievances about the police's failure to apprehend the man who raped and murdered her daughter, Angela. Her stark call-out inspires sharp divisions in a small town where general respect for the authorities is undermined by accusations of brutality against minorities, opening up schisms that disturb the façade of a countryside idyll.

Mildred is a fitting showcase for McDormand's acidic comic timing and capacity for portraying moral absolutism. A conservative woman further hardened by her daughter's loss, Mildred refuses to accept even the most reasonable excuses for the unsolved murder, demanding that the blood of every man in town be drawn to compare against gathered DNA and suggesting that all males should have samples drawn at birth for a kind of pre-crime database. She verbally shreds those who urge her, with increasing reproach, to remove the billboards, from using church sex-abuse scandals to silencing a nagging priest to outsmarting cops' attempts at coercion. At times, she's even willing to get physical, as in a gruesomely hilarious scene in which she stops a dentist, using his own drill, from vindictively operating without novocaine. Dressed perpetually in a faded jumpsuit that matches her own worn and work-hardened face, Mildred sometimes seems formed out of sandstone, an immovable fixture of the environment impervious to intimidation.



McDormand's facility with the demented comic brinkmanship of the Coen brothers primes her for McDonagh's cutting humor, but the filmmaker's sense of moral reckoning allows the actress to explore similar terrain to different ends. Where the Coens' films tend toward gradually spiraling further and further out of control, McDonagh's work stresses an ultimate resolution to some kind of order, warped as it might be. The work of Flannery O'Connor, openly referenced in a shot of a character reading *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, hangs heavily over the film, wherein the external chaos that ripples outward from Mildred's actions ultimately resolves itself as an examination of her character and the pitfalls of her implacable stubbornness.

The film is the finest balance yet of Martin McDonagh's bleak sense of humor and offbeat moral sincerity.

McDonagh's stagey direction leaves ample room in his static images for suspense to mount, but for the most part it simply defers to the actors, who stare into the storm of McDormand's fierce work and match its humor and pathos. As Jason Dickson, a thick-headed cop who gets into verbal scrapes with Mildred that he loses and whose explosions of violence are as tragic as they are repulsive, Sam Rockwell keys in on the sliver of decency inside of an ignorant man. As Charlie, Mildred's ex-husband, John Hawkes intermittently slithers into frame to exude the horrible echo of whatever menace this man used to exert over her, inspiring apprehensive looks in Mildred's face but never getting her to back down from a fight. And Peter Dinklage, as James, a sweet, perpetually mocked man whose affections for Mildred do not preclude his ability to stand up to her withering barbs, scores perhaps the film's most concise put-down when appraising Charlie's teenage girlfriend.

The finest supporting performance, though, belongs to Woody Harrelson as Sheriff Bill Willoughby, who's tormented by his failure to solve the case of Angela's murder and struggling with terminal cancer. Bill's scenes with Mildred are showcases for Harrelson's talent for finding bleakly comic chemistry with his co-stars. Where

everyone else responds to Mildred with disapproval and hostility, Bill masks his irritation behind a goading sense of humor that actually stymies the woman, diverting her moral crusade into a battle of wits wherein the one who scores the best one-liner wins. Bill's affable cynicism pairs well with Mildred's despairing nihilism, and the two share a clear admiration for each other that leads to surprising moments of tenderness.

One of the film's most arresting moments comes in a heated argument between the two in which Bill becomes truly incensed, dropping his comical repartee to lay into her obstinacy. Just as he reaches the climax of his fury, he suddenly coughs blood in Mildred's face, shocking both of them into silence and immediately evaporating the anger between them. In a film that sets up a stark conflict between Mildred and an incompetent police department, the sight of her gingerly cradling Bill's face as he shamefully apologizes complicates the narrative, prefiguring later arcs of redemption and self-doubt that expand the already enormous moral range of McDonagh's story.

This will rent as well as **WIND RIVER, BABY DRIVER, GIRLS TRIP, THE GIFTED and LIFE.**