



1/5 3 INFINITELY POLAR BEAR COMEDY

\$2 MILL BO 110 SCREENS R 90 minutes

Mark Ruffalo (BEGIN AGAIN, IRON MAN 3, SHUTTER ISLAND, THE AVENGERS)

The polar bear of the title of Maya Forbes's debut feature isn't the literal animal, but a mistaken reference to "bipolar disorder" on the part of Faith Stuart (Ashley Aufderheide), one of two daughters of the manic-depressive Cam (Mark Ruffalo) and his estranged wife, Maggie (Zoe Saldana). Based on Forbes's own childhood experiences growing up with a manic-depressive father, *Infinitely Polar Bear*, structurally speaking, plays like a scrapbook geared toward emphasizing the positive. Seemingly rifling through a memory bank and choosing to exhibit only the most buoyant bits, Forbes reveals herself as a sunny optimist, insistent on remembering the ecstatic highs and never dwelling on the despairing lows.

There's an intriguing suggestion that, in the 1960s, when Cam and Maggie met and fell in love, Cam's manic-depressive behavior came off as rebellion in the context of the countercultural upheavals of that decade; when such a bohemian golden age passed in the late '70s and early '80s, his behavior was exposed for the mental illness it always was. Cam's privileged background also offers hints of something more incisive, especially when one discovers that, even though she technically pays her son's rent, his wealthy mother is deliberately refusing to help out her son and his family, thus forcing Maggie—a black woman from a working-class background—to put her daughters in Cam's care while she pursues an 18-month MBA program at Columbia. Instead of exploring such threads with any depth, however, Forbes plays coy, seemingly afraid of anything that might puncture the film's whimsical surface.



A fun film that will rent as well as **I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL, THE D TRAIN, ALOHA, 5 FLIGHTS UP, and INTO THE WOODS.**



1/5 1 SICARIO ACTION/THRILLER
\$42 MILL BO 2365 SCREENS R 121 MINUTES

Emily Blunt (THE FIVE YEAR ENGAGEMENT, THE MUPPETS, EDGE OF TOMORROW, INTO THE WOODS)
Josh Brolin (GUARDIANS INHERENT VIE, THE AVENGERS OF THE GALAXY, LABOR DAY)
Benicio Del Toro (GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, SAVAGES, SIN CITY, 21 GRAMS, THE USUAL SUSPECTS)

The cartel wars' corrosive corruption and psychotic butchery that have been progressively pulverizing Mexican society for over a decade have just now begun registering as more than a blip on the American cultural consciousness. One would think that such horror-film savagery and rock-and-roll street combat happening right next door, with a constantly mutating cast of heroes who turn out to be villains and villains who turn out to be monsters, would have grabbed more attention sooner. But, then, it was only after Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper* reimagined another murky conflict into a reassuring and essentially false good-guy crusader narrative that the public turned out in real numbers for an Iraq War film.

Now there is Denis Villeneuve's *Sicario*, set in a U.S.-Mexico border zone awash in drug money, paranoia, and double-digit body counts. Emily Blunt (painfully miscast) plays Kate, an FBI agent who during a seemingly routine raid in an Arizona suburb stumbles into a cartel kill-house where the walls are filled with dozens of plastic-wrapped corpses, like some macabre art exhibit. Pulling that string gets her yanked into a larger cross-agency task force swaddled in official hush-hush.

Soon Kate's riding in a convoy of black SUVs filled with close-lipped Special Forces types into Ciudad Juarez to escort a high-level cartel boss back to the States. She knows as well as the audience does that they're not making it across the border without a firefight. What she doesn't know is why they're doing this, why she's involved, or why everybody seems to think it's even remotely legal. (For once, the FBI rule-following stickler is made out as the villain.) Every question just invites snark from Matt (Josh Brolin), the flip-flop-wearing smart ass clearly hailing from some acronym agency, or gnomish pronouncements from the even more mysterious Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro).



Sicario is a hard-nosed procedural for the post-post 9/11 era. Relevance to the modern era of imploding certainties is etched in every scene. Lines are blurred as spies, soldiers, federal agents, and cops are thrown into hybridized hunter outfits and sent after their targets in a landscape where morality comes in shades of grey and convenience. The film flashes on a collapsing social order, mutilated naked bodies swing underneath overpasses in Ciudad Juarez and hints of the same to come on the American side. The filmmakers put all they can into channeling the immediacy and drama of its bleak and beautiful setting, captured with stark beauty by Roger Deakins' gloriously epic cinematography. But they don't have any illusions about the interest of the wider world. After a couple carloads of second-rate cartel gunsels are shredded by the shooting-range-honed precision of the shadow-war veterans of Kate's entourage, she's told to shrug it off. "They won't even make the paper in El Paso."

There's a shrugging noir lilt to all this that gives the film's cynicism a properly worn-out attitude. That sensibility is best channeled by Brolin's Matt, a gum-chewing cowboy who can barely conceal his love of the hunt, or any random old thing ("I love Texans").

A good action film that will rent as well as **KINGSMEN: THE SECRET SERVICE, TAKEN 3, RUN ALL NIGHT, MAD MAX: FURY ROAD** and **INTERSTELLAR**.



1/5 1 THE VISIT HORROR
\$63 MILL BO 2156 SCREENS PG-13 94 MINUTES

Olivia DeJonge (THE SISTERHOOD OF NIGHT, POLARISED)
Ed Oxenbould (TV—PUBERTY BLUES—FILM—ALEXANDER
AND THE TERRIBLE, NO BLOOD, VERY BAD DAY)

“I want to do this for you.” Mom (Kathryn Hahn) is almost convincing when she says this, looking directly into the camera held by her 15-year-old daughter. What she’s doing is a little less clear: she goes along with the interview for budding documentary-maker Becca (Olivia DeJonge), to a point, and she agrees that Becca and her younger brother Tyler (Ed Oxenbould) can go visit their grandparents, from whom mom (otherwise nameless here) broke all ties when she was just 19.

Mom tells just enough of this story to Becca during her first two minutes on screen that you might wonder what could have been so catastrophic that she hasn’t spoken to her parents for 15 years. She also tells you enough that you definitely wonder why she’d send her kids off to visit with them for a week, while she goes on a vacation with her new boyfriend. Soon enough, the kids are confessing to the doc camera that they believe they’re doing something for their mother, rather than the other way around, that she needs away time with Miguel (mostly unseen, but played by Jorge Cordova). More to the point of *The Visit*, they want to reconcile Mom with her parents.

The idea that mother and daughter want to do something for each other isn’t a terrible way to ground a movie, and not even a very strange way to start a horror movie.

The kids’ combinatory competition and reliance on one another are put to the test when they’re confronted with Nana (Deanna Dunagan) and Pop-Pop (Peter McRobbie). No surprise, they’re odd, and right away. Though Becca thinks maybe their age and creeping dementia might explain their essential illogic (the kids are advised to stay in their room with the door locked after 9:30PM) and physical tics (Nana paces around the house, naked, at night, puking and scraping at the walls with her fingernails; Pop-Pop has a flat-out disturbing relationship with his rifle), Tyler is more inclined to panic. He’s not thrilled when Nana speed-crawls to chase him loudly through a dark, scary space under the porch, and even less happy when he learns the secret Pop-Pop is hiding in the barn.

Before their discovery, Becca and Tyler (and Mom, by extension, when they skype with her) see very little, and what they think they know is never quite right. Some of this business is contrived (Nana conveniently splats some gnarly, instantly hard biscuit dough on the camera lens of Becca’s laptop, so mom can’t see her children, even when she can hear them) and some of it is a function of the genre. But it’s still a decent reminder that despite the pervasiveness of cameras everywhere, despite the pervasive notion that cameras can protect you, they clearly can’t.

In an attempt to protect themselves, the kids set up a hidden camera in hopes of accumulating “evidence” of something. Becca carries it with her in search of “positive cinematic moments”, both use it as an excuse to “get B-roll” or to conduct interviews beyond their grandparents’ apparently very watchful eyes. They bear the camera like a shield when Pop-Pop declares: “We should play a board game. Families play board games.”

Oh yes, this will rent as well as **INSIDIOUS 3, IT FOLLOWS, THE GALLOWS, MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, TOMORROWLAND,** and **UNFRIENDED.**





1/5 1 THE WALK DRAMA

\$11 MILL BO 1891 SCREENS PG 123 MINUTES

Joseph Gordon-Levitt (DON JON, LINCOLN, THE INTERVIEW, 50/50, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES)

Robert Zemeckis's *The Walk* is, first, a loving tribute to the World Trade Center towers, and second, a recreation of Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire walk between them. An illegal act that Petit could never have carried out with anyone's official permission, the stunt has often been credited with imbuing the towers—unpopular at first among New Yorkers—with a certain *je ne sais quoi*, an essence, a spirit, that convinced the notoriously skeptical Big Apple to view its imposing height and utilitarian bulk with warmth, not malice. Not every giant in a city's skyline gets that treatment; just ask a sample of New York City residents about the 75-story One57 skyscraper in Midtown, which for most of us expresses only dizzying wealth and unattainability. If architecture is politicized, and One57 is a badge of the world's elite, then Zemeckis's film argues that the Twin Towers, recreated not just as daunting spectacle, but in physicality and limitless detail, belongs to the awestruck audience. Which is to say, everyone.

Integrated with the long middle section of *The Walk* that depicts Petit's scheming and conscripting of accomplices—he embraces the impropriety of his design, referring often to it as a “coup,” hinting simultaneously at “de grace” and “d’etat”—is a compendium of different images of the towers, as many as one film could expect to contain and still tell a coherent story. When Petit finally encounters the South Tower in person, he touches it not with his hands, but with his forehead, as if attempting to forge a telepathic link. Focused on his plan with fanatical single-mindedness and near-religious zeal, Petit hardly seems to notice the towers, except either as a series of obstructions (a crucial freight-elevator trip is denied to him by a bullish foreman) or as the proscenium for his performance. Zemeckis notices everything Petit is blind to, and the middle section of *The Walk* is an immersion in the World Trade Center as a reality: a place where people work, a sculpture of steel, concrete, and glass still being finished, and a newcomer to Lower Manhattan's then-underdeveloped skyline.

The Walk also works as a catalogue of all the strange activities one could carry out in and around the World Trade Center, without arousing suspicion, prior to September 11. Petit and his accomplices prowl around the buildings, wearing a variety of disguises, taking photographs, and behaving strangely. Attempted today, such conduct by foreign visitors would result in a visit from serious men carrying guns and badges, and very likely a complimentary plane ticket back to Gay Paree, or, worse, indefinite detention. Not much younger than Petit himself, Zemeckis would have known this more “innocent” time as a young man, and he recreates it with a clarity that ensures its inconceivability in a post-9/11 world isn't lost on the audience.

In order to make the walk, and in order for it to matter to him, Philippe Petit has to comprehend it as real *and* impossible. Robert Zemeckis teaches us the same lesson.

That covers the midsection of *The Walk*, up to the famous high-wire walk itself. The film's first 40-odd minutes detail the events of Petit's early life and training—partly self-taught, partly mentored by Rudolf Omankowsky (Ben Kingsley). Little that happens in this part of the film transcends the time-honored predictable tempo of the movie biopic: a small triumph is followed by a small setback, which is followed by a larger triumph, then a larger setback, and so on as the hero approaches his final test. Directed with all the Spielbergian razzamatazz one expects from the *Forrest Gump* auteur, the first chapter of *The Walk* may test one's patience with its relentless pop and good cheer. But when the very first shot of the movie is a 3D extreme close-up of Joseph Gordon-Levitt shouting enthusiastically into the camera, you can't say Zemeckis doesn't put his cards on the table right from the start.

When *The Walk* delivers its final emotional payload, it's an overwhelming vertiginous sensation of an entirely different kind: Breaking the fourth wall as he narrates his tale from the top of the Statue of Liberty,



Petit shows us his lifetime pass to visit the World Trade Center observatory. The expiration date, he explains, has been crossed out and overwritten with one word: "forever." The September 11 attacks are mentioned not once in the film, and as the final spoken word, "forever," is followed by the final image, we see the towers nestled among their Lower Manhattan neighbors. As the image fades to black, they remain lit the longest. Superficially a film about a daredevil and his once-in-a-lifetime stunt, *The Walk* is, at its core, a film about a pair of buildings imbued by human spirit, superseding and, finally, outlasting all other concerns.

This will rent as well as **TOMORROWLAND, SOUTHPAW, MAX, THE GIFT, THE LONGEST RIDE, MCFARLAND USA, and THE GAMBLER.**



1/12 1 **HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2** FAMILY
\$151 MILL BO 3692 SCREENS PG 89 MINUTES

VOICES OF: Adam Sandler, Andy Samberg

The film opens with the surprisingly swift nuptials of Cali stoner Jonathan (Andy Samberg) and nondescript vampire Mavis (Selena Gomez), only daughter of Count Dracula (Sandler). And then, with a procreative drive that would make the Duggars' heads spin, it moves on even quicker to the birth of the newlyweds' son, Dennis, who obsessive grandpa Drac hopes will mature into a pint-sized vampire, but who, for the most part, seems to be an unassuming, sweet-natured human boy. More distressingly, Mavis seems perfectly okay with the way her son seems to be developing. Though Dracula insists, "Human, vampire, unicorn—as long as you're happy," he privately schemes for ways to get the lad's fangs to pop before his fifth birthday, which is for reasons unknown the deadline. Even kids in the audience might wonder why Dracula doesn't just open a vein and force the kid to drink if he's so motivated to have another bloodsucker in the family. (It would hardly be any more grotesque than the various butt-centric slapstick gags.)

Maybe sensing that 2 a.m. naptimes aren't the most appropriate thing for their toddler, Mavis and Jonathan pack up and head to California to scope out potential new "appropriate" neighborhoods for their boy to grow up in. Swooping in on the opportunity, Dracula bands together the rest of his monster squad in order to show Dennis what real ghouls do. Unfortunately, Frankenstein, the Invisible Man, and the rest all prove so ferociously out of practice it almost seems to justify the anti-miscegenation credo of Drac's own estranged father, who's been kept completely in the dark about the "mixed marriage" of his granddaughter.

In spirit, the road-trip sequence functions on the same comedic level as it does in "Homer's Phobia," with the adults' good intentions ultimately revealed for the hang-ups they truly are, and the kids' nonchalant attitude toward their own nascent essence a case of students schooling teachers. But whereas *The Simpsons* lampoons the fear of parents coming to terms with the idea that their kids are unique individuals and not carbon copies, *Hotel Transylvania 2* finally undoes that beautiful satire. Sure enough, and at the very last minute, two mosquito-bite fangs poke down in young Dennis's mouth, allowing him to save the day and validate Dracula's mission. The message is all too clear: It's perfectly fine for kids to be "unicorn" (read: "different"), so long as they're *other people's* kids.



This will rent huge just like **JURASSIC WORLD, PITCH PERFECT 2, PENGUINS OF MADAGASCAR, HOME, PAUL BLART 2, STRANGE MAGIC, and INTO THE WOODS.**



1/12 3 IRRATIONAL MAN DRAMA
\$4 MILL BO 1493 SCREENS R 95 MINUTES

Joaquin Phoenix (HER, WALK THE LINE, INHERENT VICE, I'M STILL HERE, THE MASTER, GLADIATOR)
Emma Stone (BIRDMAN, MAGIC IN THE MOONLIGHT, THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN 2, GANGSTER SQUAD, FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS)

Joaquin Phoenix plays Abe Lucas, a self-styled bad-boy philosophy professor who has arrived at a small campus to teach for a summer. Abe, depressed and usually drunk, still manages to become an immediate big man on campus, capturing the attention of Jill Pollard (Emma Stone), an impressionable young student, and Rita Richards (Parker Posey), a science professor feeling trapped in her job and marriage. Their affections seem lost on Abe, adrift in his own malaise, and it is only once he turns to something more sinister that he is able to revive himself.

The film plays out as a light satire of campus manners airlessly trapped within a bell jar of dour seriousness—what Allen in *Annie Hall* once called *heaviosity*. The film is peppered with references to various greatest hits of the liberal arts canon, Kant and Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and De Beauvoir, elevating the cloistered, hermetic atmosphere. The dark mood threatens to become a parody of itself until Allen punctures his own pretenses with a laugh line like, “Just what the world needs, another book about Heidegger and fascism.”

In early scenes, Phoenix's pot belly essentially precedes him on-screen, and his boozy blankness when he first meets the college dean is a thing of understated comic, awkward wonder, timed just behind the beat. As the story moves along and his somnambulant stupor turns to confident excitement and then mania, Phoenix manages the rare feat of playing the male lead in a Woody Allen film without aping the well-known manner of Woody Allen. Yet no one conveys inner torment quite like he does, and today any role Phoenix takes on makes for necessary viewing, as he is the most exciting American actor working today.



The film's most unexpected wallop, right at the end, is a deeply felt consideration not only of how decisions and actions alter the main character of Abe but also his unintended collateral victims and what they are forced to live with after. *Irrational Man* never does make sense of the inscrutable Abe, just as most people, Allen included, remain mysteries to themselves and others. This finally reveals the film to be neither comedy nor drama, but an all too human horror story where the monster is within.

This one should rent as well as **THE AGE OF ADELINÉ, ALOHA, WOMAN IN GOLD, WHILE WE'RE YOUNG, STILL ALICE,** and **THE LOFT**



1/12 2 **SINISTER 2** HORROR
\$31 MILL BO 2136 SCREENS R 97 MINUTES

James Ransone (THE TIMBER, TANGERINE, CYMBELINE, ELECTRIC SLIDE)
Robert Daniel (BAD TEACHER, HERO OF THE DAY)

This time around, the haunted house is actually an abandoned church *next* to a house, somewhere deep in rural Illinois. Single mother Courtney Collins (Shannyn Sossamon) lives here — the house, not the church, which was recently the site of a horrific massacre — with her 9-year-old twin sons, hiding out from an abusive estranged husband (Lea Coco) who has the local police force in his pocket. Dylan (Robert Sloan), the frailer of the two boys, is visited nightly by a host of spectral ghoul children, all of whom take turns screening their personal highlight reels of sadistic family annihilation, like some sort of Manson clan show-and-tell. His more jockish brother, Zach (Dartanian Sloan), may or may not be able to see them as well, though Mom is predictably clueless.

Reprising his supporting role in “Sinister,” James Ransone essentially takes the lead here as an unnamed former sheriff’s deputy who oversaw the sad fate of the Oswald family in the first film. Now working solo to track down and burn houses that may be prime boogeyman portals, he shows up at Chez Collins with a can of gas in hand, surprised to discover anyone living there. Opting not to tell the family anything about the whole Bughuul situation for some reason, he hangs around the property to see what strange doings might be afoot.

In contrast with the first film, where Hawke’s true-crime writer intentionally moved his family to the murder house to do research, Courtney is aware of the property’s history but simply doesn’t care. Using the boarded-up church as a workshop for her custom-furniture business, she hasn’t even bothered to Google the details of the Unspeakable Ritualistic Torture Murders that took place on that very spot. Bughuul certainly has an eye for easy marks.

There’s something narratively cheap about the way “Sinister 2” limits its gore to nameless and anonymous figures seen in violent video vignettes — old slasher pics at least bothered to write the cannon-fodder characters a few lines of dialogue before dispatching them — but for that peculiar class of viewers who judge their horror product solely on the inventiveness of the kills, the home movies do present one particularly twisted murder. Yet given the complete absence of the first film’s mounting unease, “Sinister 2” leans heavily on jump scares.

If you rented these well then you will be fine with this one too: **INSIDIOUS 3, THE GALLOWES, POLTERGEIST, MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, IT FOLLOWS** and **TAKEN 3**.





1/19 3 THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL

DRAMA

\$3 MILL BO 795 SCREENS R 102 MINUTES

Bel Powley (TV—MURDERLAND, M. I. HIGH, THE WHISTLEBLOWERS)

Kristen Wiig (WELCOME TO ME, THE SKELETON TWINS, GIRL MOST LIKELY, DATE NIGHT)

True to its title, Marielle Heller's adaptation of Phoebe Gloeckner's semi-autobiographical novel has the loosely structured, unfiltered feel of a young person's diary. The film cleaves to 15-year-old Minnie (Bel Powley) in mid-'70s San Francisco as she lurches toward self-knowledge, careening from tearful insecurity to defiant self-assertion to ecstatic experimentation. Her voiceover narration and Powley's impassioned, emotionally naked performance capture the way things can feel simultaneously terrifying and thrilling at that age, as well as the way new experiences can make someone—especially someone young—feel like a whole new person.

We first encounter Minnie just after she has lost her virginity. Reveling in the memory, she thinks: "I had sex today. Holy shit!" Her outsized reactions are often funny, like when she brags to a friend that her much older lover is at an EST seminar, her pride revealing her childish idealizing of adult activities and the way she feels sophisticated by virtue of her association with a "worldly" adult. The humor is always kindhearted, though, emerging from and contributing to our understanding of the characters. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* may laugh at Minnie's delusions, but it never belittles her.

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Minnie's boundary-challenged, bohemian family doesn't offer her much support. Her mother, Charlotte (Kristen Wiig), who projects a free-spirited hippie-princess vibe that can't quite mask her insecurity or free-floating sorrow, is too busy trying to find her bliss to notice what her daughter is up to. Her little sister, Gretel (Abby Wait), is still a child, so she lives, for the most part, in an entirely different world than Minnie does. Her father is MIA, and when her self-involved former stepfather makes a brief appearance, it's mainly to whine about how hard it is on him not to see more of Minnie and Gretel since the divorce. Her mother's boyfriend, Monroe (Alexander Skarsgård, playing perhaps genuine cluelessness tinged with disingenuous charm), is an easygoing man who seems fond of Minnie. He might be her best ally, if he weren't also her illicit lover, the man she lost her virginity to and is seeing behind her mother's back.

The shock of those betrayals—of a mother by her daughter and of the daughter by every important adult in her life—makes the relationship between Minnie and Monroe deeply unsettling, yet this is no clear-cut case of a victimized child and a predatory pedophile. Instead, their affair is as complicated, messy, and unpredictable as nearly everything else in this movie—and, for that matter, in life itself. The 35-year-old Monroe wields most of the power in their relationship, and that imbalance does Minnie no favors as she struggles to find her emotional footing. At the same time, she thoroughly enjoys and often initiates the sex, and the relationship empowers her in some ways even as it disempowers her in others.

Minnie is a budding artist (she idolizes Aline Kominsky, whose work hers closely resembles), and her drawings often show up in the film, in books of sketches that sometimes come to life as animated sequences or as animation superimposed on the live-action frame. The latter technique is particularly effective at illustrating Minnie's thoughts and feelings, as when a cartoon Kominsky offers her big-sisterly support and advice, or when Minnie and Monroe do hallucinogens in a quietly dreamy sequence in which Minnie sees herself sprouting feathers, then growing wings. Powley's huge, round eyes, generously



padded cheeks, and wide, goofy grin make her look a little like a cartoon herself. They also give her an air of innocence that, together with her lush woman's body, perfectly embody the dichotomy that is Minnie, a child balanced precariously on the brink of adulthood.

This one will rent as well as **WHILE WE'RE YOUNG, ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL, WELCOME TO ME, THE SKELETON TWINS, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, SELF/LESS, and END OF THE TOUR.**



1/19 1 EVEREST THRILLER

\$44 MILL BO 2867 SCREENS PG-13 121 MINUTES

**Jason Clark (TERMINATOR GENYSIS, CHILD 44, WHITE HOUSE DOWN, DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES)
Keira Knightly (JACK RYAN: SHADOW RECRUIT, THE IMITATION GAME, BEGIN AGAIN, PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN)**

The key moment in *Everest* is when Jon Krakauer, the journalist who described enduring the fateful 1996 ascent to the summit of the world's tallest mountain in the book *Into Thin Air*, asks the rest of his group of adventurers why they want to attempt such a dangerous feat. Not just the film's key moment, it's the only moment where anyone is asked to step back from the precipice of presumed exceptionalism and explain themselves. It's a now-or-never moment since the group is just about to embark on the final leg of their journey. They pass the buck and offer up weak platitudes: they're doing it to make their children proud; they're doing it because they've tried before and failed; they're doing it because it's there. Krakauer (Michael Kelly) isn't convinced and presses the question harder. No one offers up anything more rational. The next day, they continue their march. A significant number of them never make it back to base camp.

Speaking as someone whose relatives I'm convinced believe just because I rock-climb I'm clearly in training to pull an Alex Honnold stunt, there are no better answers. Or at least no more reassuring ones. Everest, and all other vertical endeavors, are Mother Nature's Towers of Babel. And whether your urge is to redpoint a 40-foot 5.7 in the wild on a perfectly dry sunny day or flash a V10 150 feet above crashing waves, both still stem from a yearning to laugh in the face of gravity. No matter how you couch it, hubris is on parade, which is probably why *Everest* feels less like an cautionary adventure movie or the classy Hollywood equivalent of a *Reader's Digest* "Drama in Real Life" and much more like a disaster epic. Hubris is what fuels the best disaster movies, because without the Icarus mythology anchoring all that catastrophe, you're only left with the most unpalatable underpinnings: vengeful gods, family-friendly snuff, visual-effects houses trying to one-up themselves by submitting slabs of digital concrete through rounds of "Does It Blend?"

Baltasar Kormákur's film is a tasteful, sweeping, carefully balanced reconciliation between the irrefutable authority of nature and mankind's innate need to circumvent it.

Though the assembled members of Adventure Consultants guide Rob Hall's (Jason Clarke) 1996 class aren't guilty of, say, cutting corners to thread 137-story skyscrapers up with shoddy electrical wiring, their quest is subtly mined for its common solipsism. The thrill-sporting drive toward what climbers flatly term the "Death Zone"—or, the elevation at which there isn't enough oxygen for humans to live—represents hubris of an Everyman variety. And, sure enough, part of the reason the 1996 ascents went so horribly awry beyond the sudden heave of icy squalls ("This mountain makes its own weather," one guide barks) is because so many Everymen shared the same target. It may be the highest point on Earth, but it's also conveniently a more attainable goal than reaching the apex of K2. So along the way, lines form at crevasse-bridging ladders, competing groups jockey at the calendar for the perfect window, Sherpas are

overworked. Even before the mountain pulls the welcome mat out from under those poor souls' Scarpa ice boots, their fate seems sealed on the cosmic stage.

Everest ultimately avoids passing any flat judgments, in part because it (perhaps smartly) doesn't opt to shade any of its real-life figures beyond musing "there but for the Grace of God went they." The closest director

Baltasar Kormákur comes to a misstep is engaging in some outsiders' Texas-bashing, pointedly dressing Josh Brolin's Beck Weathers in a Dole-Kemp '96 sweatshirt and depicting Robin Wright's housewife organizing an affluent Stepford Wives' calling circle to get international authorities involved in Weathers's rescue. Otherwise, *Everest* is a tasteful, sweeping, carefully balanced reconciliation between the irrefutable authority of nature and mankind's innate need to circumvent it.

This will be a good renter as was **JURASSIC WORLD**, **FURIOUS 7**, **INSURGENT**, **RUN ALL NIGHT**, **THE GAMBLER**, and **UNBROKEN**.



1/19 3 LEARNING TO DRIVE DRAMA
\$4 MILL BO 459 SCREENS R 90 MINUTES

Ben Kingsley (SELF/LESS, EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS, ENDER'S GAME, WAR STORY, HUGO)

Patricia Clarkson (THE MAZE RUNNER, ANNIE, FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS, ONE DAY, SHUTTER ISLAND)

In the opening minutes, Darwan (Ben Kingsley), a Sikh driving instructor who moonlights as a cabbie, tells a young student that "driving is a freedom, as long as you don't hurt someone." The film takes that message to heart and deploys it in a number of ways, but primarily with Wendy (Patricia Clarkson), a Manhattan-based book critic who's forced to take driving lessons after her longtime, unfaithful husband (Jake Weber) walks out on her. For the bulk of her professional and domestic life, she's kept nearly everyone at a distance, including her husband and daughter (Grace Gummer), who appear throughout the film less as characters than passing reminders of Wendy's recurring failures as a wife and mother. This is yet another film where being a critic of some kind entails a coldness and active displeasure with those around her. Instead of interrogating that impulse as something valid or, more provocatively, suggesting Wendy's critical distance to be a potential source of positivity, *Learning to Drive* insists on becoming a 90-minute therapy session for the wound-too-tight character. Once Wendy discovers that her husband's been cheating on her, it's not so much a stunning revelation as a confirmation that she's "only trained to do one trick: ignore everything and everyone around me," as she will later state. The statement follows a failed driving test, which Darwan has been prepping her for between explaining his past as a professor during walks at the pier, and attempting to set up an arranged marriage for himself with Jasleen (Sarita Choudhury), a woman he's never met.

This one will rent as well as **WOMAN IN GOLD**, **THE IMITATION GAME**, **THE SECOND BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL**, **MAGGIE**, **I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS**, and **ST. VINCENT**.





1/19 1 THE MARTIAN SCI/FI/THRILLER
\$198 MILL BO 3954 SCREENS PG-13 144 MINUTES

Matt Damon (GOOD WILL HUNTING, STUCK ON YOU, THE BOURNE IDENTITY, WE BOUGHT A ZOO, TRUE GRIT)
Jessica Chastain (INTERSTELLAR, A MOST VIOLENT YEAR, ZERO DARK THIRTY, TAKE SHELTER, THE HELP)

Whatever happened to Ridley Scott? Since *Gladiator* 15 years ago, he's been Hollywood's go-to director for big, R-rated spectacle films featuring men with stubble and oodles of slow motion bloodshed. Even when Scott is called upon to resuscitate an familiar saga, like *Robin Hood* in 2010, he underlines its seriousness, a tack that might seem grim or maybe just padding according to the historical "record".

And yet... with his new movie, *The Martian*, Scott sloughs off all the baggage and strikes out for brighter climes. In a time just far enough in the future for interplanetary travel to be possible, but not far enough for new technology to fix every problem, NASA has landed a manned mission on Mars. When a sudden storm kicks up, the team is forced to evacuate, leaving behind Mark Watney (Matt Damon), whom they believe to be dead. Waking up half-buried in a sand dune, Watney faces one of those unfixable problems.

At a minimum, it's going to be four years until the next planned Mars mission arrives. Until then, he has to figure out how to live on a planet without a breathable atmosphere, and in shelter designed to last only a month, where no plant life can grow. At the same time, the film reminds us, the other members of his crew proceed on their months-long journey back to earth.

Based on Andy Weir's online serial (which he revised as a bestselling novel), *The Martian* is primarily a series of logic puzzles for Watney—and now the film—to solve. Since he doesn't have anybody else to talk to, he records a video log "for the record". It's a handy plot device—thankfully there is no adorable or snarky artificial intelligence with whom he might gab—that could easily have gone south.



But Watney, a botanist with the attitude of an ace fighter pilot, is at once cocksure, witty, and chatty, as when he vows, "Mars will come to fear my botany powers." Imbued with Damon's rare ability to exude confidence without edging into smarm, Watney steadily walks us through each predicament, telling his video recorder, "I'm going to have to science the shit out of this." He graduates from food production to power sources to telling Earth, "Hey, not dead."

That message eventually reaches home, where Watney's fellows provide the other part of this terrific ensemble pieces. While he scratches away in an all too fragile shelter, the usual gaggle of bloodless bureaucrats and eager engineers at NASA is gaming out how to keep him alive until their next craft gets there, as well as when they're going to tell his still oblivious crew-mates (including Jessica Chastain and Michael Pena). The earthbound cast is divertingly random, from Chiwetel Ejiofor's driven Mars mission chief to Kristen Wiig's annoyed PR flack, Jeff Daniels' snarky NASA director, and Donald Glover's pratfalling ultra-nerd. They're so entertaining that you might begin to wonder whether the whole thing is going to turn into a disaster flick. With the exception of a seemingly bored Daniels, though, everybody dives in and hurls the story forward with barely a whiff of cheese.

The Martian fits these many players together as neatly as the interlocking pieces of Drew Goddard's script. Pivoting from epic adventure to light comedy, the movie draws from the sort of characters' interplay that keeps the better Marvel films from imploding and also the grand awe and terror that comes from contemplating the solitude of the cosmos. By summoning his lighter side, Scott has ironically created a thrilling adventure tale that resonates more deeply than most of his purportedly more serious work.

This film goes with everything and will rent like crazy as did **TRAINWRECK, THE AVENGERS, MAGIC MIKE xxI, FURIOUS 7, AMERICAN SNIPER** and **SAN ANDREAS**.



1/19 1 **STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON** DRAMA
\$159 MILL BO 2947 SCREENS R 147 MINUTES

O'Shay Jackson, Jr (TV---ELLEN, ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT, MADE IN HOLLYWOOD, CBS THIS MORNING)
Corey Hawkins (IRON MAN 3, NON-STOP, ROMEO AND JULIET)

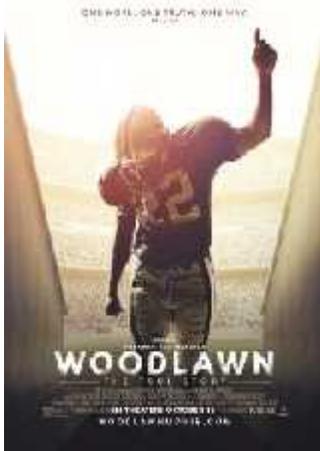
A gourmet, wide-canvas take on the woebegone rise-and-fall musician biopic we've all seen a hundred times, F. Gary Gray's *Straight Outta Compton* was doomed to contain multitudes: It's a steely un-action picture about police racism, a liner-notes history of West Coast gangsta rap, a musical family tree charting influences and samples, a rumination on the stakes of inner-city survival, a loving valentine to a bygone era when mainstream rap actually posed any kind of challenge to the American political establishment. When a young Dr. Dre (Corey Hawkins) aligns with hotheaded crack dealer Eric "Eazy-E" Wright (Jason Mitchell) and a blustering prodigy MC named Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson Jr., son of the real Ice Cube), in Reagan-era Compton, Niggaz Wit Attitudes is born—and the group's disparate histories are retold as if to achieve maximum balance between juicy real-life anecdotes and the hip-hop lore that's haunted the N.W.A legend to this day. That Gray's film manages to embody any of these threads without completely losing its tactility—that its set pieces manage to be brash, exhilarating, and even occasionally moving—is its most towering accomplishment.

But more than anything else, *Straight Outta Compton* is a capital-A authorized biography, a narrative product sanitized (and de-misogynized) to the point of occasional parody. (Nary a joint is lit on screen until 1993, seven years into the tortured screenplay's sprawling chronology.) What remains is largely a string of Greatest Hits, orchestrated to re-emboss the N.W.A brand for future generations. Potentially complicating characters, like N.W.A. co-founder Arabian Prince, or labelmates the D.O.C. and Above the Law, are kept peripheral at best, while the group's other two surviving members, MC Ren (Aldis Hodge) and DJ Yella (Neil Brown Jr., figure heaviest on screen only when Gray needs yet another slow-motion vista of the group walking apace like superheroes. (In real life, Ren has expressed lasting displeasure with the film's reduction of N.W.A history, even while making press rounds as one of its honorees.)

Given these gnashing influences, then, it's damn hard locating the emotional interiority of *Straight Outta Compton's* screenplay. The saga of Ice Cube (who, alongside Dre and Eazy's widow, executive-produced the movie) fares the best, in a walk: Jackson doesn't just imitate his famous father, but manages to embody his piercing insight, no-bullshit sneer, and crystalline cadence. Even the potentially corniest *Behind the Music*-grade moments—as in Cube, dissatisfied with an exploitative contract at Priority Records, taking a Louisville slugger to the gold-plated records hanging on the office walls—are performed with startling vulnerability, prompting otherwise unexplored questions about what it must feel like to gain such prominence at such a spectacularly young age.



This will rent very well. Much as **SAN ANDREAS, FRUITVALE STATION, LES DANIELS, THE BUTLER, FURIOUS 7, THE DUFF, SELMA** and **THE EQUALIZER** did.



1/19 2 WOODLAWN DRAMA
\$14 MILL BO PG 123 MINUTES

Sean Astin (TV—TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, CON MAN, THE STRAIN, --FILM—RUDY, STAY COOL, BULWORTH)

John Voight (TV—RAY DONOVAN, 24, LONE STAR— FILM—MIDNIGHT COWBOY, COMING HOME, TRANSFORMERS, THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE, ZOOLANDER, PEARL HARBOR)

Woodlawn opens and closes with images from a Reverend Billy Graham Crusade in 1972. Forced busing has created conflict in Woodlawn, AL as federal desegregation laws are being enforced across America. Woodlawn High School football coach Tandy Gerald (Nic Bishop) goes to work with a revolver strapped to his ankle.

The school year begins in chaos and the first football team meeting begins with self-imposed segregation. When the gnome-like Hank (Sean Astin) asks to speak to the team, Coach Gerald allows it. After Hank talks about his faith in Jesus Christ for an hour, the team becomes unified.

Woodlawn provides enough football action scenes to fulfill sport movie expectations; however, this historical movie is not clichéd. Woodlawn is a movie about character growth and development. In the center of the change is Tony Nathan (Caleb Castille), a high school student whose nickname is "Touchdown Tony". Caleb Castille's performance captures the quiet dignity of Tony Nathan. Castille is supported by Sheri Shepard as Mama Nathan. Having portrayed FDR and Howard Cosell in the past, Jon Voight adds Paul "Bear" Bryant to his quiver of celebrity impersonations. Gifted actor that he is, Voight manages to bridge the gap between the man and the legend. The actor's ensemble is worthy of the Woodlawn High School football team.



The issues raised in Woodlawn are just as relevant today as they were in 1973. There is a direct correlation between rioting for justice and finding common ground in sharing one's faith. Woodlawn is a good family movie or a film that can be used for a school field trip. This will rent as well as **AMERICAN ULTRA, MCFARLAND USE, BLACK AND WHITE, THE DUFF** and **WHEN THE GAME STOOD TALL**.



1/26 1 BRIDGE OF SPIES THRILLER
\$63 MILL BO 2872 SCREENS PG-13 141 MINUTES

Tom Hanks (TURNER AND HOOC, 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)

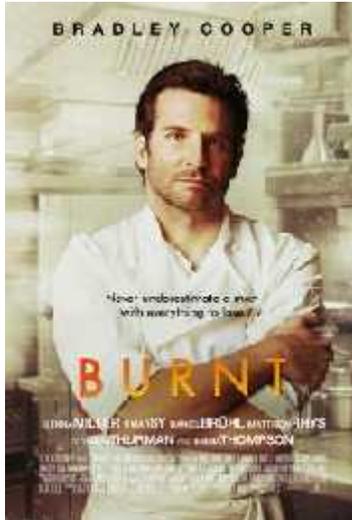
In the film's masterful, nearly wordless opening reel, *Bridge of Spies* correlates Abel's secretive lives with artistry. He lives in a building full of musicians, and twice he looks away from his easel to reveal the trinkets of double-agency: a stack of radio receivers and transmitters, and a hollowed-out 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**.



1/26 2 BURNT DRAMA
\$14 MILL BO 3003 SCREENS R 101 MINUTES

Bradley Cooper (AMERICAN SNIPER, ALOHA, THE SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, THE HANGOVER)
Sienna Miller (FOXCATCHER, MISSISSIPPI GRIND, UNFINISHED BUSINESS, AMERICAN SNIPER)

Adam Jones (Bradley Cooper) is a bad-boy chef trying to make good. You can tell he's bad because of his six-pack abs, movie-star shades, and leather jacket—and because we're forever being told about all the drugs, drinking, and women he used to do. As for the good part, he's clean and sober as the movie opens, determined to take over the kitchen of a fancy hotel restaurant and win his third Michelin star. (I wonder if he'll succeed?) But first he must round up his staff, recruiting a series of flattered and eager young men and one recalcitrant beauty, Helene (Sienna Miller).

Helene relents and joins him, of course, eventually becoming his partner in life as well as in the kitchen—but not until after the audience has been subjected to a plethora of food-porn montages, of golden globs of something or other getting ladled onto entrées and green sauce being drizzled artfully over white plates, some dramatic showdowns with Adam's arch-rival, Reese (a sadly wasted Matthew Rhys), and a tiresome litany of cliché-ridden dialogue straining to be insightful, like when Adam informs us: "I sentenced myself to hard labor shucking oysters and turned in the last part of my penance."

There are also a fair number of Significant Moments: Adam confessing to Helene that he needs her help to get his third star; Reese telling Adam that everyone in the city's restaurant community needs him; and Helen informing Adam that we all need each other. And just in case you aren't sensing a theme here, the "family meal" served to the staff in Adam's restaurant becomes a thuddingly predictable and literal-minded metaphor.



Adam's quest for fame and greatness starts with a failed opening night, during which he serves food so passé it was cooked in a pan (shudder) and is snubbed by the fooderati, and is followed by a triumphant comeback, in which his brave new menu wows the obligatory celebrity critic (Uma Thurman). That pattern is echoed by his two-pronged run at the third Michelin star, his first attempt ending in ignominy and his second in triumph.

But the "real" story is Adam's psychological rehabilitation. Our hero must transform himself from an abusive tyrant in the kitchen and a loner at home to the head of a loving and fully functional family, in both his professional and his personal lives. Can he do it?

This one will rent like **CHEF, FOXCATCHER, THE GAMBLER, INHERENT VICE, THE AGE OF ADELINE**, and **THE GIFT**.



1/26 1 **GOOSEBUMPS** FAMILY
\$46 MILL BO 2348 SCREENS PG 103 MINUTES

Jack Black (SCHOOL OF ROCK, THE D TRAIN, BERNIE, THE SEX TAPE, GULLIVER'S TRAVELS)

Jack Black's performance in *Goosebumps* as a fictionalized version of children's horror writer R.L. Stine embodies the divided heart of this big-screen translation of Stine's literary franchise. Black adopts an exaggerated near-lisp as Stine warns his new neighbor, Zach (Dylan Minnette), to stay away from his house and daughter, Hannah (Odeya Rush), immediately taking the menace out of the moment. The winking irony evident in such a mannerism has always been the actor's stock in trade, but he convincingly sells some of his later dramatic scenes in which he's called on to express shades of regret, even in the maelstrom

of action and CGI effects that surround him.

The jokey self-awareness, however, sits alongside plot threads revolving around characters working through past traumas and current anxieties—implicit attempts, perhaps, to account for *Goosebumps*'s appeal to children. Kids, after all, are the main characters of the books, and many of their frights are rooted in such universal adolescent fears as fitting in at school, dealing with missing parents, and adjusting to life in a new town. Letterman tries to inject his film with a similar sense of anguish, especially when it's revealed that Zach's father recently died and that the boy is still coping with the loss.

But the most pointed attempt to instill emotional heft into the material lies in the depiction of Stine himself. The monsters he created were borne out of his outsider status in high school, but at some point these literary creations became so much more real to him than the actual people around him that he was forced to lock them away, lest they sprout up again and intrude on reality—as ultimately happens when Zach and his new friend, Cramp (Ryan Lee), unlock one of Stine's books and thereby unleash an apocalyptic swarm of *Goosebumps* characters that threaten to destroy their town.



Could be scary for kids under 6 but this one will rent like **INSIDE OUT, PIXELS, STRANGE MAGIC, THE LEGO MOVIE** and **THE SPONGEBOB MOVIE**.