



1/2 AMERICAN MADE ACTION
\$52 MILL BO 3156 SCREENS R 115 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Tom Cruise (THE COLOR OF MONEY, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE, RISKY BUSINESS, TOP GUN, COCKTAIL)

Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle has a trenchant joke that encapsulates the fundamental arrogance of so much American war cinema: “American foreign policy is horrendous ’cause not only will America come to your country and kill all your people, but what’s worse, I think, is that they’ll come back 20 years later and make a movie about how killing your people made their soldiers feel sad.” Doug Liman’s *American Made*, a rollicking comedy based on the drug-smuggling, gun-running, contra-funding exploits of C.I.A.-backed pilot Barry Seal (Tom Cruise), represents a discomfiting corollary: Not only will America attempt

to destabilize your country with insidious covert ops, they’ll come back decades later and make a movie about how much fucking fun it was.

Liman, working from a Black List screenplay by Gary Spinelli, plays fast and loose with the details of Seal’s life, starting with the casting. A bulky, Southern good ol’ boy with a fondness for Snickers bars in real life, Seal resembled a young Joe Don Baker but is played here by the former Sexiest Man Alive in a role that serves as an ironic twist on Cruise’s iconic performance in Tony Scott’s *Top Gun*. If Maverick was the brash, bold face of American military hegemony, Seal, a T.W.A. pilot turned C.I.A. bagman, represents the seedy underbelly of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Where Maverick felt “the need for speed,” Seal evades capture by flying so slowly and for so long that the D.E.A. planes tailing him have no choice but to turn around and refuel.



In *American Made*, Seal is recruited by a shadowy intelligence officer named Schafer (Domhnall Gleeson) to take aerial reconnaissance photos in Central America. He quickly moves up the ranks, serving as a courier between the C.I.A.

and Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega and later running guns to assist the contras in their attempts to overthrow Nicaragua’s Sandinista-led government. All the while, he’s working up a lucrative side business smuggling vast quantities of cocaine for the Medellin cartel. When his drug-trafficking empire eventually attracts the heat of various law-enforcement agencies, Seal strikes a deal with the Reagan administration: In exchange for a vastly reduced sentence, he will take photos implicating the Sandinistas in the drug trade. The fact that it was the contras, not the Sandinistas, who were intimately wrapped up in the cocaine trade made no difference: The photographs served as useful propaganda. But their release spelled the end for Seal, who not long after was murdered by the cartel.

THIS will rent as well as **LOGAN LUCKY, ATOMIC BLONDE, THE HITMAN’S BODYGUARD, WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, and THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS.**



1/2 BATTLE OF THE SEXES DRAMA/COMEDY
\$16 MILL BO PG-13 121 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Steve Carell (THE BIG SHORT, FOXCATCHER, NEIGHBORS, ANCHORMAN 2, THE 40 YEAR OLD VIRGIN, DATE NIGHT) Emma Stone (LA LA LAND, ALOHA, IRRATIONAL MAN, THE AMAZING SPIDER MAN 2, THE HELP, FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS)

Tennis is the closest a sport gets to slow cinema; static, repetitive, and grueling, it's home for our most patient, determined, and gnomic athletes. Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris's *Battle of the Sexes*, though, recreates the moment where a single tennis match was as bombastic and highly viewed as a Super Bowl game: the 1973 exhibition between retired U.S. Open champion Bobby

Riggs (Steve Carell) and Billie Jean King (Emma Stone), who had just become the first woman to be named *Sports Illustrated's* Sportsman of the Year. This was a lopsided, heavily commodified entertainment, but Simon Beaufoy's screenplay deftly lays out the stakes of the event for the culture, the sport, and the two players facing one another across the net.

If anything, the film is too evenhanded in depicting the struggles of its twin protagonists. Riggs is a huckster and sucker whose days of masculine prowess are long behind him. A mediocre dad and a crummy husband, he gambles away the inherited wealth of his wife, Priscilla (Elisabeth Shue), as he idles through what's apparently a prolonged midlife crisis. The film's climactic showdown is his bid for one last taste of the spotlight, and Carell is appropriately timid as a figure with unavoidably Trumpian overtones. Riggs is shown to be averse to interiority, mocking fellow gambling addicts and turning therapy appointments into additional side hustles; the filmmakers diagnose his emasculation by surrounding him with tacky oil paintings of his wife until he comes to life conceiving his exhibition with King, performatively embodying the trite dichotomies of the era as the proud "male chauvinist pig" to King's "hairy-legged feminist." With his familiar snicker and ironic intakes of breath, Carell gracefully hints that Riggs is playing for the camera, turning the match into an ever-larger and more preposterous cultural sensation.



Though King enters her match with Riggs at the Houston Astrodome as a clear favorite, her professional and personal travails nonetheless dovetail in the manner of any great underdog sports story, and *Battle of the Sexes* treats King's lesbianism with an awkward mix of acceptance and cheeky boosterism. Her bland and dashing husband, Larry (Austin Stowell), provides a model of reasoned, progressive allyship, while Alan Cumming, as Ted Tinling, the outfitter for the women's tour, embarrasses himself as a sort of gay whisperer, cheerleading King with lines like "Calm down, Madame Superstar."

Dayton and Faris move rapidly through their best material in the final act, turning the media circus of the Riggs/King sensation into a set of training and PR montages. This buildup is immensely winning, a collision of insane photo ops and advertising kitsch complete with farm animals and tasteful nude shots. If the film makes King's victory for gender parity seem a little less inevitable than it probably was, it doesn't hesitate to point out that she has little choice but to indulge Riggs's shameless pandering to the camera. Still, *Battle of the Sexes* feels a bit complacent in celebrating King's victory as a decisive milestone. It was only recently when female professionals, with the help of the Williams sisters, began earning the same amount of money as men at major events, and our nation's recent upheaval have made clear that the likes of Bobby Riggs have an outsized influence on the fate of our culture and the world. Stuffed with endlessly repetitive lines about "a woman's place" in the kitchen or the bedroom, *Battle of the Sexes* sacrifices some of its innate appeal by making ham out of the supposed relics of a less enlightened era. But remember it was 1973, that's the way it was.

This will rent as well as **LOGAN LUCKY, GIRLS TRIP, HOUSE, BAYWATCH, THE GIFTED and BEFORE I FALL.**



1/2 BRAD'S STATUS COMEDY
\$4 MILL BO 935 SCREENS R 112 MINUTES
DVD/ BLU RAY

Ben Stiller (ZOOLANDER, DODGEBALL, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: SECRET OF THE TOMB, THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY, LITTLE FOCKERS)

Brad is hardly a generic icon of midlife disenchantment: He's a privileged white suburbanite who lives in Sacramento with Troy and his wife, Melanie (Jenna Fischer), and who measures his sense of failure—he's the head of a struggling nonprofit organization—in terms of material wealth. When scrolling through the Facebook pages and Instagram feeds of his closest college friends, or simply catching one such friend, political pundit Nick Pascale (Michael Sheen), on television, Brad finds himself envying what appears to be lifestyles that are more lavish than his own. His competitiveness is so keen that he even finds himself growing jealous of his own son, a talented musician who Brad fears may well become more successful than him.

Brad Sloan is, then, a paragon of middle-class entitlement. White is aware of the man's self-absorption, as the filmmaker has one supporting character—a Harvard college student, Ananya (Shazi Raja), who Troy knew in high school—take Brad to task for agonizing over what she accurately considers first-world problems. And yet, the film is less contemptuous of Brad than compassionate: brutally honest about his faults, yet ultimately understanding of them.

It helps that Brad has self-awareness to burn. Throughout the film's steady stream of voiceover narration, the man wrestles with his feelings, admitting his shortcomings while also trying to puff himself up. By making the audience privy to Brad's constantly shifting inner monologue, White denies us any ironic distance from the man. *Brad's Status* also offers some levity through a slew of amusing fantasy sequences in which Brad imagines both the possibilities of a life he hasn't lived and the lives of his theoretically more successful friends. Such visions do more than just infuse the film with a formally playful bent, as they flesh out its larger theme of the chasm between image and reality—between Brad's conception of his friends' more glamorous lives and what he eventually discovers are their harsher realities.



Mostly, *Brad's Status* resonates because White clearly sees Brad's faults but refuses to judge him for them. Instead, the writer-director recognizes the man's self-pity as symptomatic of broader insecurities: a deeply American fear of failure, which, for Brad specifically, is tied to the loss of the fiery political idealism that initially drove him as a college student. Such a character isn't exactly a stretch for Stiller, but White's unforgiving gaze—compared to Stiller's own vanity-stained perspective throughout *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and Noah Baumbach's stacked deck in favor of the older generation that Stiller represents in *While We're Young*—seems to have pushed Stiller into deeper and more poignantly introspective displays of emotion in this film.

This movie will easily rent as well as **HOUSE, PARIS CAN WAIT, GOING IN STYLE, HOW TO BE A LATIN LOVER, and BAYWATCH.**



1/9 THE FOREIGNER ACTION/COMEDY
\$32 MILL BO 2482 SCREENS **R** 113 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

Jackie Chan (RAILROAD TIGERS, THE KARATE KID, KUNG FU PANDA 3, RUSH HOUR 3, RUMBLE IN THE BRONX)

“Jackie Cries” doesn’t quite have the same ring as “Garbo Smiles,” but like *Ninotchka*, *The Foreigner* does at least briefly, maybe even radically, subvert the iconography of the star at its center. For decades, we’ve seen Jackie Chan break bones—and not just his own—throughout his largely comedic approach to frenetic action. Martin Campbell’s film announces itself as decidedly darker fare for Chan when his character, Quan, loses his daughter, Fan (Katie Leung), in the opening scene, when a London bank falls victim to an I.R.A. bombing. Quan spends the remainder of the first act sadly shuffling around with his shoulders hunched like

Charlie Brown and shedding the occasional tear—the sort of posturing that’s way outside of Chan’s comfort zone.

When Quan’s sorrow soon takes on the form of implacable revenge, *The Foreigner* shifts uneasily into the terrain of a latter-day Liam Neeson action vehicle, with Quan revealing himself as a man of few words who simply won’t take “no” for an answer. After the police and an Irish government official, Liam Hennessey (Pierce Brosnan), with ties to the I.R.A. are unable or unwilling to give Quan the names of the bombers responsible for his daughter’s death, Quan puts his former special forces training to good use by pressuring Liam to give him what he wants. While Quan resorts to increasingly violent tactics, planting a homemade bomb in Liam’s workplace bathroom and later stalking and toying with him at his family’s country house, a relatively by-the-numbers political thriller involving infighting between various factions of the I.R.A. takes center stage, leaving Chan to skulk around in the background.



Based on the 1992 novel *The Chinaman* by Stephen Leather, *The Foreigner* approaches the dangers of recent terrorist activity in London by simply invoking the return of the Northern Irish activism that peaked in the late ’80s with the Troubles. But even overlooking its fictionalized account of such an inexplicable political resurgence, the film falters in its needlessly convoluted plotting, which includes an endless parade of double-crossings involving Liam’s loved ones, from his wife (Orla Brady) to his mistress (Charlie Murphy) to his nephew (Rory Fleck Byrne). Liam, who’s de facto in charge of the I.R.A. in its current form, is surrounded by people who have different opinions on how much he should capitulate to the Brits in order to free his I.R.A. buddies who’ve been imprisoned for decades.

In *The Foreigner*’s homestretch, Campbell heavily leans on the sort of muscular action that displays Chan’s continued commitment to put his body at considerable risk for his kinetic art.

This will rent as well as **THE HITMAN’S BODYGUARD, ATOMIC BLONDE, TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT, and THE MUMMY.**



1/9 FRIEND REQUEST HORROR
\$5 MILL BO 682 SCREENS R 92 MINUTES DVD/BLU
RAY

Daring to ponder the ramifications of a popular college student befriending a demon on Facebook, *Friend Request* pivots on a potentially good joke: Advertising only our life's highlights on social media, we render ourselves human facsimiles who're readymade for the horror-movie slaughter mill. Laura (Alycia Debnam-Carey) is the sort of dully perfect protagonist that Facebook conditions us to resent, and whose life appears to be composed entirely of parties with friends, meet-cutes with unmemorable hunks, and charity benefits that seem to exist to extoll the virtues of their participants. Meanwhile, Marina (Liesl Ahlers) is Laura's social opposite, a goth cliché who offsets her pale complexion with an all-black wardrobe, suggesting the girl without the sexy dragon tattoo. When Marina arbitrarily fixates on Laura, a door to hell is opened, bringing two factions

of femininity into stark conflict.

Director Simon Verhoeven has occasional fun imbuing certain Facebook tropes with hopped-up dread, such as the annoyingly vague message that pops up whenever the site jams: "An unknown error has occurred. Please try again later." But the film's whack priorities are indistinguishable from those of its characters. The deaths of Laura's close compatriots are laughably accorded the same dramatic weight as the possibility that she might lose all her 800-plus friends on Facebook, which is the ultimate aim of Marina's campaign of vengeance. Literally born alone, as revealed in a ridiculously miserable backstory, Marina renders herself an omniscient wraith, recognizing that online "friends" are truly what matters in the culture of the 21st century.



This will rent as well as **ANNABELLE: CREATION, ALIEN: COVENANT, BELKO EXPERIMENT, and A CURE FOR WELLNESS.**



1/9 IT HORROR

\$328 MILL BO 4365 SCREENS R 135 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Bill Skarsgard (TV—HEMLOCK GROVE, CASTLE ROCK—
FILM—ATOMIC BLONDE)**

It is a lament for the twinned melancholy of children losing their childhood and adults' inability to get over that loss. King explored terror as viewed through both childrens' and adults' eyes before, but this novel afforded him the opportunity to show the scars of a single set of characters viewed through two different time periods. And this long-awaited film adaptation, for all its handsome scare-show professionalism, fails to capitalize on it.

King's novel crosscuts between the 1950s and the '80s, as a group of seven childhood friends battle not only bullies—both among their peers and their parental figures—but also a demonic, child-murdering shape-shifter who primarily materializes in the form of Pennywise (Bill Skarsgård), a malevolent clown with razor-sharp teeth. The Maine hamlet of Derry has been through this before, because as the members of the so-called Losers' Club discover, a spate of pitiless deaths seems to plague the town every three decades.

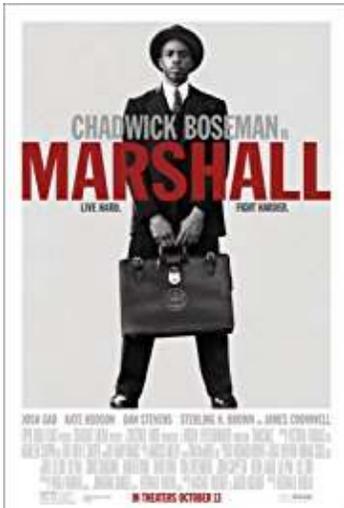
But as each successive generation has advanced to the next stage of life, no one has yet seemed to connect the pattern of grim reaping. At least not until King's motley misfits, who have nothing better to do with what little spare time they may have remaining but take to the library stacks and try to figure out what the devil's gone awry in their town, and why they all seem to be seeing physical manifestations of their greatest fears. (The cycle is updated here to feature the childhood Losers in the '80s, the better by which to capitalize on the lure of *Stranger Things* in the Creepypasta years.)

Nostalgia is possibly the most secretly punishing of the ways that the passage of time can wreak havoc.

It's the cruelty of the passage of time and the seductiveness of how we retain vestiges of the past that anchors King's mayhem. In segregating the childhood chapters from their surroundings, the 2017 *It* flounders, adrift from anything other than in-the-moment alarm, all in service of—in a truly shameless “chapter one” title sprung on us before the final credits roll—inaugurating just what the cinematic world needs more of these days: another franchise. It cashes in on trendy retroism—the remedial, brash distant second cousin to nostalgia—instead of utilizing the perspective of, to borrow from Joni Mitchell, seeing clowns from both sides now.

This will rent as big as **BABY DRIVER, SPIDERMAN: HOMECOMING, ANNABELLE: CREATIONI, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 2, and ALIEN: COVENANT.**





1/9 MARSHALL DRAMA

\$8 MILL BO 1789 SCREENS PG-13 138 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Chadwick Boseman (MESSAGE FROM THE KING, THE AVENGERS: CIVIL WAR, GET ON UP, DRAFT DAY)
Kate Hudson (DEEPWATER HORIZON, MOTHER'S DAY, NINE, BRIDE WARS, YOU ME AND DUPREE)

Marshall opens in 1939, crosscutting its way into a mission statement. Thurgood Marshall (Chadwick Boseman) is in the midst of losing a slam-dunk case in which he knows he's in the right; the NAACP has made it a point, he says, to only take on clients that they're completely assured are innocent of all charges. At the same

time, insurance lawyer Sam Friedman (Josh Gad) is winning a case over which, to judge by the cutaway shots of a weeping, wheelchair-bound senior citizen, *he* knows he's in the wrong, chalking up another score for the predatory free market. In one sweeping gesture, director Reginald Hudlin and father-son scripters Michael and Jacob Koskoff establish a justice system that exploits the underprivileged and rewards capitalism. And the exposition matter-of-factly depicts a black lawyer defending a black client losing, and a white lawyer defending white clients winning.

Marshall is assigned to the case of Eleanor Strubing (Kate Hudson), a Connecticut socialite who claims that she was raped and nearly killed by her chauffeur, Joseph Spell (Sterling K. Brown). Friedman is recruited to pass the case along to Marshall, but the trial judge (James Cromwell) refuses to allow it, dumping litigation duties into the very unwilling Friedman's lap as an equally unwilling Marshall is made to sit mute in the courtroom. To Marshall, racism is just as pervasive in the North; it's just pushed more neatly into the folds of civility. And when the firebrand lawyer's incendiary comments to the local press draw flocks of sign-wielding racists to the courthouse steps, he smirks to Friedman, "At least now they're in the open where we can see them."



That's not, however, what *Marshall* itself believes or shows. Hudlin pointedly films the small city where Spell's trial is set in a manner that makes its differences from the Southern locales more often utilized for similar period pieces functionally negligible. In addition to Cromwell's albino-toned authoritarianism on the bench, prosecuting attorney Lorin Willis (Dan Stevens) isn't so much a specious defender of tradition as he is overachievingly Aryan, a man-boy country clubber prone to saying to friends such things as "Let the Nazis and the commies fight each other and solve both our problems." And a mid-film episode that seemingly every film in the genre is obliged to deploy shows both Marshall and Friedman (a Jew all too aware of the rise of anti-Semitism both in Europe and closer to home) ambushed by thick-necked, A-shirt-clad yokels aiming to send the "you're not from around these parts, are you" fear of a white god into the freedom fighters' souls.

None of this falls outside of fair-game territory for a film that utilizes stock villainy and comedic buddy-picture tropes to give an otherwise battering genre some crowd-pleasing cred. Unfortunately, where the film falls into a regrettable and ultimately inescapable trap is in the specific case it chooses to re-litigate. *Marshall* arguably intends for societal 20/20 hindsight to provide the bulk of perspective here. At the risk of "spoiling" a case that was decided nearly 80 years ago, the film's liberal racial politics emerge without complication. But Friedman and Marshall's defense strategy of effectively blaming the purported victim of a sexual crime is presented with a freewheeling brashness that, in the same week that Harvey Weinstein's entire house of non-disclosure agreements crashes down all around him (as opposed to an entire culture of unbalanced power), carries with it an unsavory and hypocritical whiff of nostalgia.



1/9 MY LITTLE PONY FAMILY
\$23 MILL BO 2485 SCREENS PG 95 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

VOICED BY Emily Blunt, Live Schreiber.

Our hero is Princess Twilight Sparkle, (voiced by Tara Strong.) Tasked with planning the kingdom's all important Festival of Friendship, Princess Twilight is understandably stressed out. In this land of energetic ponies, there's apparently nothing to pass the time besides impromptu musical numbers and snacking on a wide selection of baked goods. No wonder her peers are brimming with excitement; it's about time someone broke up the monotony.

With her reputation riding on this, Twilight comes close to panic over the event. Fortunately, her loyal friends Pinkie Pie and Fluttershy, (both voiced by Andrea Libman,) Apple Jack and Rainbow Dash, (both voiced by Ashleigh Ball,) Rarity, (voiced by Tabitha St. Germain,) and Spike, (voiced by Cathy Weseluck,) have her back. But as preparations for the big day continue, the happy herd is

delivered a rude awakening. Storm clouds darken the sky, an airship descends out of nowhere and an army is deposited in their peaceful city. The leader of the invaders, a disillusioned pony named Tempest Shadow, (voiced by Emily Blunt,) soon makes her hostile intentions clear. Seems now our leading ladies have better things to worry about than botching a highly-anticipated shindig.



From thence, the tireless team embark on a quest to find help in throwing off their oppressors. While the team may be tireless, the audience isn't. As our protagonists journey across deserts, oceans and mountains, acquiring new friends through the charm of lengthy song and dance numbers, the tedium is only punctuated by the occasional pun.

More concerning for families are the frightening bad guys and their minions who lock helpless citizens in cages and force them to pull heavy loads like... well, ponies. All the while, the main characters face perils of their own. They must contend with extreme environments, menacing thugs, and the constant fear of capture. But tough situations throughout the film are leavened with the standard cartoon fare of slapstick comedy and complete buffoonery, and will only be troubling to the very youngest of viewers.

For all its faults, the movie is also full to bursting with moments of trust and friendship. The pals look out for each other, are willing to forgive, and are always happy to invite someone new into their circle—not half bad messages for kids to hear.

This will rent as well as **LEAP!, THE EMOJI MOVIE, CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS, and BOSS BABY.**



1/9 SOME 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.**



1/9 THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE DRAMA
\$11 MILL BO 2146 SCREENS R 103 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Miles Teller (BLEED FOR THIS, WAR DOGS, INSURGENT, FANTASTIC FOUR, WHIPLASH, THE SPECTACULAR NOW)

In director Jason Hall's *Thank You for Your Service*, warfare is depicted only in brief glimpses—fragmented and chaotic, like memories. The film primarily focuses on soldiers Adam Schumann (Miles Teller) and Solo Aieti (Beulah Koale) after they return home to Kansas following their final tour of duty and how the effects of PTSD cause an endless string of complications in their personal and professional lives. As with many other works that have tackled such subject matter, the film is admirably frank in its depiction of lingering trauma but too often struggles to capture

its more ineffable qualities.

On the surface, the film is acutely observant of the often unbridgeable gap between soldiers and the world that awaits them back home. Though his wife, Saskia (Haley Bennett), is sympathetic to the emotional baggage he now carries, Adam still feels the unspoken pressure to return to normalcy: to get a job, to play with his children, to regain emotional and physical intimacy with his wife. Where Saskia simply wants him to unload his war stories

on her to help him stabilize, repeatedly saying how tough she is, Adam is immobilized by the guilt of things he both did and didn't do in his latest tour.

Adam is especially haunted by the memory of dropping a wounded soldier, Michael Emory (Scott Haze), as he was carrying him down a set of stairs following an ambush. Despite a bullet to the head, Michael miraculously survived the assault, but for Adam, the taste of Michael's blood as it dripped into his mouth is something he can't shake. The graphic specificity of the memory, as portrayed in the film's opening sequence, makes Adam's trauma all the more haunting, but Teller is tasked with much of the heavy lifting throughout. The actor has to articulate the lasting effects that this event has on his character through physical tics that come to feel like too much posturing, and only go so far in conveying the extent of Adam's mental strife.

Thank You for Your Service is most effective in moments where its characters deal with their inner demons head on. Scenes of Adam and Solo reminiscing over a beer or attempting to navigate a broken V.A. system in order to get the psychological care they need express the sense of hopelessness and entrapment many veterans face upon returning home far more honestly than the film's more sensationally pitched expressions of trauma. Adam and Solo's friendship isn't unlike those we've seen in dozens of war-themed films, but the depths of these men's psychological wounds more frankly reveal the relentless bleakness of their future than most films about PTSD.

Only when Adam and Solo are hanging out alone or with their other military buddy, Will (Joe Cole), can they discuss their paralyzing fears and guilt, as well as their suicidal thoughts, which they conceal from friends and family. How they become their own family with bonds of shared experience exudes a restrained realism that escapes the lengthy subplot that has a desperate Solo looking to score ecstasy and involving himself in a criminal underworld of dogfighting and arms dealing. These scenes feel overcooked because they prioritize the suspense of his ordeal over its psychological and emotional dimensions. The nature of the suspense here, as well as in the depiction of a near-suicide attempt, is troublesome in the ways it uses a character's otherwise sincerely developed mental anguish as a source for cheap thrills.

Ironically, it's during these conventionally edge-of-your-seat scenarios that *Thank You for Your Service* becomes increasingly plodding and forced in its progression toward an uncomfortably feel-good ending. Throughout, Hall successfully conveys the shameful lack of resources and training at V.A. facilities and how the post-war experience for veterans is complicated by their families' inability to grasp the scope of their psychological despair. But like the harrowing memories of battle that open and close the film, the moments that are most contemplative of the veteran experience only appear in glimpses, so that the guilt and shame that Adam and Solo carry with them remain nearly as inscrutable to us as it does to their families.



This will rent as well as **WIND RIVER, BABY DRIVER, THE BIG SICK, THE ZOOKEEPERS WIFE and FENCES.**



1/16 BLADE RUNNER 2049 FUTURISTIC THRILLER
\$91 MILL BO 3254 SCREENS **R**
144 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Harrison Ford (WITNESS, THE FUGITIVE, AIR FORCE ONE, REGARDING HENRY, WORKING GIRL)

Ryan Gosling (LA LA LAND, THE PLACE BEYOND THE PINES, THE BIG SHORT, THE NICE GUYS, REMEMBER THE TITANS)

Remarkably disinterested in the sociopolitical relevance of its concept, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* follows a futuristic police precinct as it murders fugitive "replicants," synthetic people who rebel against their enslavement. Scott isn't blind to the strife of the replicants, as the film's most powerful scenes concern the brutal deaths of these androids, but he's so drunk on his now-iconic set design that he barely questions the story's classist society. Harrison Ford's Deckard, the central slave hunter, or "blade runner," is a romanticized figure, a sexy and disenchanted blend of a rogue P.I. from a 1940s noir and a ragged cop from a 1980s action film. Inasmuch as Scott's concerned with psychology at all, it's Deckard's pain that's prioritized, as the filmmaker paints a self-pitying portrait of a white man's burden.

Arriving 35 years later, Denis Villeneuve's self-consciously woke *Blade Runner 2049* is similarly a product of its age. Replicants are explicitly referred to as slaves in the film, which offers a striking contrast from the thematic muddiness of its predecessor. A police official, Lieutenant Joshi (Robin Wright), speaks of maintaining a wall between the humans and the replicants, so that each side knows their place in order to prevent revolution or chaos—language that recalls justifications given for repressing the actions of the civil rights movement. And the blade runner this time out, K (Ryan Gosling), is a replicant who weathers the pain of being a robotic Uncle Tom, as his own kind views him as a traitor while humans see him as inferior.

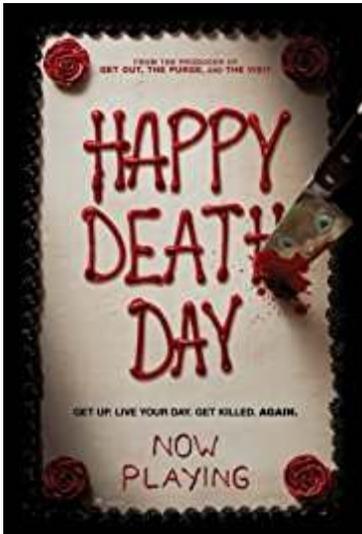


Blade Runner 2049's racial text is oft-plumbed by the horror and sci-fi genres, recently and with far more success by Jordan Peele's *Get Out* and Rupert Sanders's *Ghost in the Shell*. Villeneuve's film is designed to reward the audience for recognizing the references in the midst of an action pursuit, and, after an hour or so of the clipped and earnest signifying, one may find themselves nostalgic for Scott's unforced indifference to the issue. Somewhat subtler and more promising is the film's vision of a corporate world that preys on consumers with mechanized nostalgia. Though K was created long after the frequently sentimentalized 1950s, he longs for the simplicity of a role-play in which a working man returns home to his stay-at-home wife, who places a dinner on the table while the couple trades sexy banter.

Scott's *Blade Runner* is overstuffed with visual stimulation, suggesting a pre-gentrified New York City that's been imprisoned in the bowels of the sexualized spaceship from the filmmaker's earlier *Alien*, with Asian and French aristocratic bric-a-brac thrown in for kicks. Take a shot every time Scott lingers without irony on a ceiling fan or a perfectly composed shaft of dusty sunlight and you'll be drunk before the end of the first act. A more elegant artist than Scott, Villeneuve prefers streamlined compositions with vast pockets of negative space that are occasionally punctuated with splashes of purple and blue as well as snow and rain and, say, a Romanesque statue. The enormity of D.P. Roger Deakins's images pleasingly contrasts with the simplicity of their through lines. Even the cityscapes directly lifted out of the first film have been streamlined, rendered in big brush strokes.

Like New York City, perhaps this future Los Angeles has also been gentrified over the course of time that's elapsed since *Blade Runner*. Slavery remains, but city designers have attained more restraint and taste, though something's been lost in the trade: As fatuous as Scott's film is, it has a gnarly, sweaty, dirty, sleazy, and deeply sexual intensity that suggests that there's more to it than meets the eye. Meanwhile, *Blade Runner 2049* embodies the sterile sanitization that continues to grip modern American filmmaking. That's the point in this sequel, but self-awareness is meager compensation for texture.

This will rent as well as **ATOMIC BLONDE, HITMAN'S BODYGUARD, SPIDERMAN: HOMECOMING, TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT, and WONDER WOMAN.**



1/16 HAPPY DEATH DAY HORROR
\$51 MILL BO 3281 SCREENS **PG-13** 95 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Jessica Rothe (LA LA LAND, BETTER OFF SINGLE, SUMMERTIME, THE TRIBE)

Christopher Landon's *Happy Death Day* not only transmutes the time-looping premise of *Groundhog Day* into a high-concept slasher comedy, it borrows the basic thematic structure of that film as well. Like Phil, the surly weatherman played by Bill Murray in Harold Ramis's film, bitchy sorority girl Tree (Jessica Rothe) finds herself reliving the same day over and over again, waking up every morning in the same bed to the same irritating song. The twist: Each day, Tree is murdered by a knife-wielding killer wearing a baby mask. Is it someone she knows or some random maniac? Only by solving the mystery and defeating her

assassin can she break the cycle. And, as in *Groundhog Day*, the whole process teaches her to be a more caring, more compassionate person. It's self-improvement through endless repetition.

Scott Lobdell's script is derivative, and openly so: In the film's penultimate scene, Tree's love interest, Carter (Israel Broussard), expresses indignation that she's never seen *Groundhog Day*. But the clever tweaking of the slasher formula injects some life into the moribund genre. *Happy Death Day* twists the inherent repetitiveness of slashers to its advantage by exaggerating it to an impossible degree. If in the archetypal slasher film, a mysterious intruder kills a bunch of largely indistinguishable model-hot young co-eds over the course of approximately 90 minutes, here the masked predator literally keeps killing the same young woman over and over again. Working in a slyly self-aware style that benefits greatly from the way Rothe magnetically balances caustic spitefulness and wounded vulnerability, Landon uses these kills less as opportunities for gore—of which there's practically none—than as playful little set pieces resembling those in Doug Liman's similarly themed *Edge of Tomorrow*, in which each reset serves as a smash-cut punchline.



The fact that Tree's life isn't bounded by the usual laws of time and physics prevents *Happy Death Day* from generating much suspense—after all, each death is simply a rebirth—but the impossibility of the premise liberates Landon's film from mundane concerns about plausibility that sometimes bog down these sorts of productions. The filmmakers can pile on the killings without having to concern themselves with the attendant consequences, like police officers, the press, and worried family and friends. Unlike Rudolph Maté's 1949 noir *D.O.A.*, which turned the theme of a man investigating his own murder into a kind of existentialist detective story, Landon and Longdell never explore their premise's built-in psychological and philosophical potential, content instead to utilize its relative novelty as a narrative stratagem to provide some bloodlessly entertaining thrills. There may be a lot of killing in *Happy Death Day*, but in the end, (almost) no one gets hurt.

This will rent as well as **THE DARK TOWER, UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS, THE MUMMY, TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT, RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER, and GHOST IN THE SHELL.**



1/16 THE SNOWMAN THRILLER
\$7 MILL BO 1745 SCREENS R 114 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Michael Fassbender (ALIEN: COVENANT, ASSASSIN'S CREED, THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS, X MEN: APOCALYPSE, STEVE JOBS)

The film centers around the unfortunately named Harry Hole (Michael Fassbender), a cookie-cutter detective whose alcoholism is tolerated by those around him solely because of his ability to solve even the toughest crimes. That aspect of Harry's professionalism, however, is largely taken on faith. He spends most of the film in a dazed rut of either drunkenness or uneasy stabs at sobriety. And when Harry finally lands a new case, tracking a woman who disappeared

on a snowy night without a coat or purse and with the door to her flat left open, he reacts dismissively, pithily noting that the woman's husband should be questioned and that investigators should simply wait for her to turn up one way or the other. Only when his new partner, Katrine Bratt (Rebecca Ferguson), ties the disappearance to a series of cold-case murders does Harry find the motivation to actually get down to work.

The premise is simple enough, and *The Snowman* moves with a deliberate pace that gives the impression of a steady hand at the wheel. Flashbacks jarringly disrupt the narrative flow, flinging the story back nine years for a look at one of the early murder cases being researched by another detective.

Entire subplots seem at once vital and incidental, such as the relationship between Harry and his ex-wife, Rakel (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and their troubled teenage son, Oleg (Michael Yates). Harry's guilt and shame over losing them is meant to haunt him and inform every aspect of his being, but as Rakel and Oleg clumsily float in and out of his life, there's only a sense that they don't matter much to Harry whenever they're off screen.



Likewise, the implication of a regional magnate, Arve Stop (J.K. Simmons), in the murders introduces a thematic angle that isn't carried very far; the entire plotline leans on vague, generic class resentment, largely portraying the character as nothing more than a kooky creep. Even basic continuity breaks down throughout *The Snowman*, as in a late shot of Harry receiving a load of sealed envelopes from the killer that are never opened because Harry has already guessed the person's identity.



1/23 JIGSAW HORROR
\$38 MILL BO 2941 SCREENS **R** 92 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

Matt Passmore (TV—LETHAL WEAPON, THE GLADES, ROADIES, UNDERBELLY, SATISFACTION)

The franchise is simple. Best ones are. Thirteen years ago two Aussie kids turned their student movie into the *Saw* franchise, now one of the biggest in cinema history. The set up of the original was simple enough, two men wake up in a nasty bathroom, one – Cary Elwes' doctor – has his family held hostage while screenwriter Leigh Whannel played the photographer with info, a dead body between them, a serial killer on the loose and extended flashbacks that fill in the story.

With a killer twist, B-list actors – Elwes, Danny Glover, Ken Leung, Dina Meyer, Shawnee Smith and Monica Potter – and an annoyingly catchy theme tune this was the movie of 2004. Six sequels on and the saga of John Kramer AKA Jigsaw was seemingly over, his complex heartbreaking past revealed over the sequels, the loose ends tied up, more twists and a pile of dead bodies waiting in their wake, it appeared the franchise was as dead as the main character.

Seven years on, a decade after Tobin Bell's John Kramer died, there's another film. This time a group of five people find themselves in another game, looking to solve the mystery before they end up dead as hell, all the while a reckless cop goes on the hunt for the killer. At this point in time it's all very cliché. All the *Saw* movies are a cop thriller with gore traps, and as was always the case, cops, FBI agents, Internal Affairs... no one ends up looking too clever.

The central mystery – is John Kramer alive – is what drives the narrative. Seemingly the series ended with Dr Lawrence Gordon leaving Detective Hoffman in the bathroom, with no way to escape, as a punishment for killing Kramer's beloved ex-wife Jill. This time around, Callum Keith Rennie is the rogue copper punching faces and not going by the book. Rennie is actually brilliant in his role; one part Billy Bob Thornton look-alike, two parts intriguing enigma, and even if his character is the most annoying of cop movie clichés he still manages to chew gum like the best of them and the obsession does make his character compelling.
Callum Keith and Rennie Clé Bennett

The victims of the saw trap are all very boring too; Laura Vandervoort, a one time Supergirl, is relegated to the main heroine of the story but like so many in the franchise lacks any drive for us to want her to survive, and the others – Paul Braunstein, Mandela Van Peebles, Brittany Allen etc. are all boring, annoying and not worth the time to invest.

But it's not all doom and gloom, the *Saw* series was always engaging, always filled with over the top twists, questionable acting and traps and any new movie lives or dies by those very things. The central mystery and question drives the film and helps to create an air of tension, That theme tune by Charlie Clouser and the musical score as a whole, is a thread that keeps the film on the right path even as it falters into the more mundane elements.

The film also has an ace in the hole, with Tobin Bell. The man knows the John Kramer role so well and has such a smooth way of delivering his monologues and speeches, that without him the film would be nothing. He is definitely the linchpin of the franchise, and when his voice comes on over the tannoy it's hard not to want to cheer.



The film does pose more questions than it answers, and there's no way it'll be anyone's favourite, but it's proof of the acting of Tobin Bell, and the power of the *Saw* franchise. This is not the *Saw*'s version of *New Nightmare* that reinvents the series like Wes Craven did, but it opens the door to more installments, drives the need for more of these stories, and once again no matter how underwealming it is, gets us to play the game. Watch or don't... make your choice.

Folks who rented **THE DARK TOWER, WISH UPON, 47 METERS DOWN, ALIEN: COVENANT** and **RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER** will really like this one.



1/30 A BAD MOM'S CHRISTMAS COMEDY
\$41 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.**



1/30 GEOSTORM \$33 MILL BO SCI/FI/ACTION
2467 SCREENS **PG-13** 107 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFROE REDBOX

Gerard Butler (LONDON HAS FALLEN, 300, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, LAW ABIDING CITIZEN, THE BOUNTY HUNTER)

In the face of a wave of extreme weather events in 2019, we're told, "The world came together as one," building a network of weather-adjusting satellites. The scientist behind the whole thing, the genius who saved humanity, was Gerard Butler. You got a problem with that, buddy?

Butler's Jake Lawson was a maverick, though (you don't say!), and his unwillingness to follow protocol got him fired from his so-called "Dutch Boy" program. He was replaced by his brother Max (Jim Sturgess), presumably because the U.S. senators in charge understood that disaster movies, for whatever reason, require some long-seething family resentment to briefly get in the way of saving the world.

Three years after Max takes over, things start going wrong with the God machines. A desert village in Afghanistan is flash-frozen; the streets of Hong Kong erupt in flame. The president (Andy Garcia, speaking from his sternum) and his secretary of state (Ed Harris, slumming like crazy) call Jake back into service, sending him up to the International Space Station IV to do diagnostics. There, the new crew doesn't even recognize the man who saved the world three years ago.

As Jake starts collecting evidence of sabotage aboard the ISS, his brother is gathering disturbing clues about what may be going on. A colleague from Hong Kong comes all the way to Washington, D.C., to warn him of the "geostorm" someone may be planning to unleash — that's an irreversible chain-reaction of disasters — but he's killed before he can explain much. Luckily, Max's girlfriend Sarah (Abbie Cornish) is on the president's Secret Service detail, and her ethics prove remarkably flexible when her honey asks for illegal favors. (On three separate occasions, he asks her to commit possibly treasonous acts; each time, she offers one sentence of argument before agreeing.)

Viewers may have been drawn in by ads featuring tsunamis in Dubai and killer hail in Tokyo. But most of the body of the film consists of people logging into servers, talking about encryption, and reviewing surveillance footage. This happens both on Earth and out in space, and when the brothers need to testily share intel, they don't just log on to Skype: Jake must go into a special room for some reason, where a wall-sized "virtual conference" screen may be intended to remind us we're *in the future*. (On the plus side, design-wise, the little fold-out "holoframes" that have replaced smart phones here are sort of cool.)

A conspiracy to seize global power by destroying most of humanity eventually comes into focus, but in their screenplay, Devlin and Paul Guyot have laid no groundwork for the villain's unmasking. They know we've heard this story before, so why bother? More puzzling is their refusal to attend to the other business that makes viewers care about individuals when the end of humanity comes knocking. Having introduced Max's teenage daughter before he leaves on his mission, they completely forget about her until the movie is almost over; they also decline to create any kind of rapport between Max and the astronauts who are about to help him save the world.

This will rent as well as **VALERIAN CITY OF 1000 PLANETS, ATOMIC BLONDE, GHOST IN THE SHELL, BABY DRIVER, THE AGE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES, and THE LOST CITY OF Z.**





1/30 SUBURBICON THRILLER
\$8 MILL BO 2014 SCREENS R
105 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

Matt Damon
Julianne Moore

A truly nasty piece of work, *Suburbicon* sees a bunch of candidly left-leaning movie stars doing their best to out-awful each other. George Clooney, working behind the scenes as director and co-screenwriter, dusted off an old Joel and Ethan Coen screenplay set in a 1950s suburban tract community and detailing a murderous insurance scam gone wrong. Then, with writing and producing partner Grant Heslov, he grafted on a slow-burn subplot that tackles racism, and as such is meant to resonate with contemporary U.S. anxieties. Yet the result is a hysterical and

simplistic—if still in-the-moment compelling—parody of bourgeois American greed and ignorance.

Black lives don't matter in Un-Pleasantville, a.k.a. *Suburbicon*, the Ike-era 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 flimflammy 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. Though to this end, the film's final, meant-to-be-inspirational image only manages to attain Stanley Kramer-ish levels of naïveté and obtuseness.





**1/30 TYLER PERRY'S BOO 2! A MADEA
HALLOWEEN COMEDY**
\$38 MILL BO 2856 SCREENS PG-13
101 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

Tyler Perry (BRAIN ON FIRE, MADEA ON THE RUN, A MADEA CHRISTMAS, MADEA GETS A JOB, ALEX CROSS)

On her 18th birthday, Tiffany (Diamond White), the parochial-school heroine of the first "Boo!," with her normal-girl-meets-Teen-Vogue generic Barbie-doll hauteur, is invited to another Halloween frat party thrown by the geek muscleheads of Upsilon Theta. Perry stages an expository scene in front of the frat house that feels like it takes 10 rambling minutes to establish that, yes, the character of Jonathan (Yousef Erakat), who's like Vin Diesel crossed with Arnold Horshack, is still on board as Tiffany's unlikely love interest; and that the party is going to take place at Derrick Lake, a woody "Friday the 13th" sort of place where a handful of kids were murdered on a fateful night in 1976.

Tiffany's beleaguered dad, Brian, played by Perry in one of those roles that requires no stylized costume and no sense of humor, thinks that it would be a terrible idea for her to go to the party. But he's overruled by his ex-wife, Debrah (Taja V. Simpson), who has just given Tiffany her own car: a snazzy burnt-orange Mini-Cooper. Let the battle between discipline and permissiveness begin.

If Hollywood has learned how to do anything over the last 40 years, it's to charge a frat party with mad energy. But the party in "Boo 2!" makes you think, "Yes, this really does look like it was shot at Tyler Perry's film studio in Atlanta," because it's threadbare in the worst way: perfunctorily lit and even more thinly written. The guys and girls gather, and there isn't a halfway developed character among them; the bacchanal fizzles before it starts. Then the DJ fades out, the dancing stops, and the banal mock terror commences.



The couples who sneak off in order to hook up encounter a spectral figure draped in long black hair, like the girl in the "Ring" films, the hair parting to reveal a slashed face that makes you wonder: Did Perry *intend* all this to look like a special effect purchased in a dime-store costume shop? (The answer, it turns out, is yes, though that doesn't make it any more satisfying.) And that's just the warm-up for a pair of chainsaw-wielding killers in gas masks.

Mostly, though, there is Joe (played by Perry), with his mischievous beady eyes and Brillo pad of white hair, who in "Boo 2" takes over the role of Outrageous Force of Nature from Madea. He's a lewd and crusty old man who fancies himself a pimp, and Perry gives him some lines that are simultaneously groan-worthy and funny in their utter lack of taste. "You had the pony," says Joe to his divorced daughter-in-law, "you didn't have the stallion!" When he's told to pray for Tiffany, he says, "No! Pimps don't pray. The ho's is the prey!" (Hey, I don't write this stuff, I just report it.) It's not that the lines are good, or even that they're supposed to be — it's that Tyler Perry so believes in the egotistical chintziness of their mid-20th-century inner-city strut. Joe is the one character in the movie who's impervious to fear, because he's so caught up in his geriatric blaxploitation nostalgia.

This will rent as well as **GIRLS TRIP, ROUGH NIGHT, OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY, and BAD SANTA**