

7/4 2 THE ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE DRAMA
\$17 MILL BO 2138 SCREENS PG-13 127 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Jessica Chastain (CRIMSON PEAK, THE MARTIAN, THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR, INTERSTELLAR)

During the second hour of Niki Caro's *The Zookeeper's Wife*, one of the children who Antonina Zabinski (Jessica Chastain) is hiding inside the basement of the Warsaw zoo from the Nazis during World War II points to what looks like snow falling outside a window. When Zabinski goes outside to see for herself, she discovers that it's not snow but ashes coming from the nearby Warsaw Ghetto, which the Nazis are burning to the ground. Given the horrifying context behind the ash that fills the air around the zoo, one may question the picturesque nature of the scene—and this moment, in its intermixing of the bleak and beautiful, is indicative of the film as a whole.

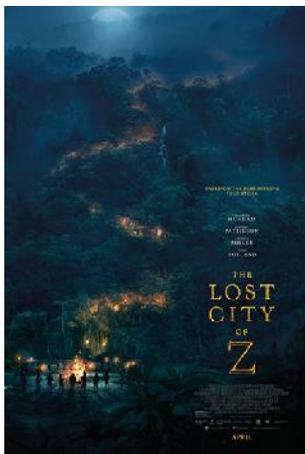
Based on the true story of Antonina and her zoologist husband Jan's (Johan Heldenbergh) heroic efforts to save hundreds of Jews by secretly housing them in the Warsaw zoo, *The Zookeeper's Wife* is the sort of glossy historical drama that suppresses the darker aspects of the atrocities it chronicles for the sake of tasteful, crowd-pleasing affirmation. Even Nazi turpitude goes down easy here. Antonina and Jan's main antagonist is zoologist Lutz Heck (Daniel Brühl), who, before WWII, is presented as a sympathetic figure, with a love of animals to match Antonina's. But when we subsequently see him donning a Nazi uniform, spearheading the transport of some of the zoo's animals to Germany and the heartless killing of other creatures, he's instantly reduced to a mustache-twirling villain—and he becomes even more one-dimensionally brutish as he's increasingly drawn to Antonina.



While the film paints its historical canvas in broad strokes, there are some nuances in the characterizations that complicate the otherwise hagiographic portrait of the Zabinskis. In order for Antonina and Jan to carry out their plan of using the zoo they own as a front to hide both Jews and animals (the latter from being subjected to genetic experiments by Heck), Jan tacitly allows Antonina to use Lutz's obvious attraction to her in order to manipulate him as a diversionary tactic. Though Jan inevitably becomes jealous when he sees Lutz making romantic passes at his wife, more interesting is the effect this has on Antonina. Though she recognizes the necessity of using her sexual wiles in this way, she can't help but be repelled by the lengths she feels forced to go to in order to earn Lutz's trust, and that anguish is etched into every expression on Chastain's face when her character interacts with Brühl's. The nobility of Antonina and Jan's long-range mission is never in doubt, but in these scenes *The Zookeeper's Wife* flirts with an "ends justifying the means" moral relativism that gives it welcome hints of ambiguity.

Ultimately, though, Antonina's affection for animals offers the film's freshest angle on an otherwise typical uplifting Holocaust docudrama. That devotion is established early on in an intense scene in which she risks her life to rescue a baby elephant from death, lavishing the animal with the same kind of love that she later brings to all the Jews who she and Jan protect. But it's a monologue she gives during the film's first hour, in which she contrasts the pure-hearted innocence of non-human creatures with the duplicity of which men are capable, that reverberates most throughout the film, suggesting a vision verging on the misanthropic. Though *The Zookeeper's Wife* celebrates the triumph of compassion over evil, there are moments here which carry the more subversive implication that animals are, in some ways, better than humans because of their innocence and lack of guile. As Antonina says, "You look into their eyes and you know what exactly is in their hearts." When it's not overly trying to inspire, the film imbues a pessimistic view of the seemingly bottomless depths of human cruelty with sorrowful tragic force.

This will rent as well as **GOLD, THE SPACE BETWEEN US, THE FOUNDER, 20TH CENTURY WOMEN, and JACKIE.**



7/11 2 THE LOST CITY OF Z ACTION
\$8 MILL BO 1856 SCREENS PG-13 131 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Charlie Hunnam (TV---SONS OF ANARCHY)
Robert Pattinson

The Lost City of Z is a film of phantasmagoric form, as currents of emotional discord are ever lapping against the corners of its stolid and painterly surface. Early on, two members of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir George Goldie (Ian McDiarmid) and Sir John Scott Keltie (Clive Francis), enlist Fawcett to make his first journey to South America as a neutral third party to mark the border between Bolivia and Brazil. Tellingly, Fawcett must work to make his presence known to these agents of empire, even though they need him more than he needs them. And Fawcett's spirit of adventure seems ignited by a calling that's less higher than spectral, as one of the men, pointedly out of focus behind him, blurts out that this is the explorer's chance to redeem the legacy that his father drunkenly squandered. It's the first of many gestures that point to Gray's understanding of Fawcett as a wanderer in the bush of ghosts.

As it charts Fawcett's first two adventures in the Amazon, *The Lost City of Z* proceeds as a measured catalogue of the explorer's good instincts and hardy constitution. Because Fawcett was never witness to them, all the horrors committed against natives of the Amazon that allowed for the proliferation of the rubber industry within the jungle, and the building of a grand opera house where he enlists the help of a rubber tycoon, go reasonably unmentioned. Yet there's a sense that insight into Fawcett's view of how colonialist force exerted itself in the region might have allowed the explorer's open-minded outlook to feel less like it's been ascribed to him in hindsight. On his second trip to the Amazon, Fawcett barely bats an eye upon witnessing a tribe's endocannibalistic practices. And because Fawcett's education as a gentleman and explorer remains unelaborated throughout the film, there's little sense of how he freed himself of the dark impulses that grip men like his companion, biologist and Shackleton acolyte James Murray (Angus Macfadyen).

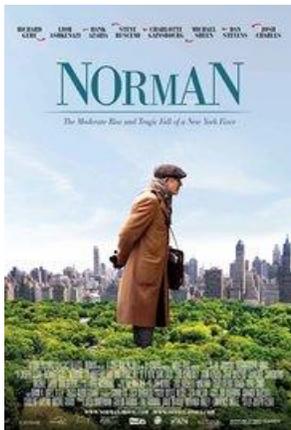


Gray, then, asks us to take his protagonist's essential goodness at face value. That is, until midway through *The Lost City of Z*, when, inside a stuffy Royal Geographical Society boardroom, Fawcett justifies his bona fides with a conviction and fervor that will serve him well during the First World War. "I refuse this madness," Murray yelps at the society's members, pretending his cowardice didn't nearly cost the lives of Fawcett and his two most trusted companions, Henry Costin (Robert Pattinson) and Arthur Manley (Edward Ashley). Suddenly, Fawcett's integrity is understood to be a product of a sense of brotherhood freed from the constraints of privilege and tradition. But Gray takes pains not to sentimentalize Fawcett, even when an enemy bullet fells Arthur on the battlefield with the same savage suddenness with which a tribesman's arrow earlier took out one of Fawcett's men along the Amazon River. In Fawcett's face, as his friend falls to the ground, is the key to the film's riches as a plumbing of a man's existential confusion.

When Fawcett, after the heroism he displays on the battlefield, speaks of his desire to discover the film's eponymous city and how it has nothing to do with place and rank, king and country, it's as if he's admitting to being cut from the same phantom cloth as Z itself. And the man certainly feels ethereal as he wafts in and out of the life he barely inhabits with his adoring wife, Nina (Sienna Miller), and their many children. *The Lost City of Z*'s great masterstroke is Gray and Hunnam's profound comprehension of Fawcett's drive to find Z as a form of self-erasure; both director and actor link every weathered look that Fawcett throws to the heart of the explorer's spiritual yearning. By film's end, which sees Fawcett and Jack caught in a purgatory-like expanse of jungle barely

lit by tribal fires, one feels Gray's pressure to rewrite *The Immigrant's* prismatic final shot. And he does, by evoking the manner in which annihilation and exaltation walked hand in hand throughout Fawcett's life as a haunting but euphoric lifeblood that can never ebb away.

This will rent as well as **THE GREAT WALL, SLEEPLESS, ALLIED, NOCTURNAL ANIMALS and END OF A GUN.**



7/11 3 NORMAN DRAMEDY
\$3 MILL BO 253 SCREENS R 118 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Richard Gere (AMERICAN GIGOLO, AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN, ARBITRAGE, THE DOUBLE, FINAL ANALYSIS)

Norman is a loner who lives in the shadows of New York City power and money, and he works hard, perhaps much too hard, at being everyone's friend as he offers the elite something he can't possibly provide on his own. His efforts, however, lead to little in the way of success, and his constant networking threatens to drive people away as people are easily annoyed just by the sound of his voice. Still, he comes across as a nice guy whom you wouldn't be quick to shoo away because Gere convinces you Norman means well even as he manipulates those around him to his benefit.

But one day he comes across Micha Eshel (Lior Ashkenazi), a charismatic Israeli politician who is alone in New York and at a very vulnerable point in his life. Norman seizes on this vulnerability and befriends Micha in a way few others would dare to, and he cements their budding friendship by buying Micha a pair of shoes. But these are not any ordinary pair of shoes which you would find at your local Payless Shoe Source. The price of this particular pair of shoes is the same as the average one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles, and while Norman initially hesitates once he sees the price, he buys them anyway to gain Micha's respect. This pays off big time three years later when Micha becomes Prime Minister of Israel as he quickly remembers what Norman did for him. From there, Norman bathes in the respect he has craved for such a long time, and he uses Micha's name to achieve his biggest deal ever.

This will rent as well as **TABLE 19, THE COMEDIAN, MISS SLOANE, THE FOUNDER, SNOWDEN and ALLIED.**



7/11 1 **SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE** FAMILY

\$44 MILL BO 2894 SCREENS PG 90 MINUTES

DVD/BLU RAY

VOICES: Demi LoVato, Rainin Wilson

Created by Belgian cartoonist Pierre Culliford under the pen name Peyo in 1958 and popularized in the U.S. by a 1980s animated TV series, the Smurfs, a community of small blue-skinned humanoids who live in the forest and speak in a bizarre dialect featuring liberal use of the word “smurf,” have never enjoyed a particularly coherent mythology. This is never so laughably apparent as in the Smurfs’ extreme gender imbalance, which, in most iterations, places a single female Smurf, named Smurfette, among dozens of males. With each Smurf defined by a single trait (Grouchy Smurf, Jokey Smurf, Vanity Smurf, and so forth), Smurfette’s tokenism is baked into her very identity, as even her name reduces her to “the girl one.” There’s a reason Katha Pollitt once dubbed the tokenization of female characters throughout a broad range of children’s entertainment as “The Smurfette Principle.”

In fact, per her origin in Peyo’s comics, Smurfette isn’t even a “real” Smurf, but the creation of the evil wizard Gargamel, who attempted to use her as a sort of Trojan horse to infiltrate the Smurf community until Papa Smurf broke the evil spell over her. While *Smurfs: The Lost Village* preserves this somewhat icky backstory, its screenplay, written by two women (Stacey Harman and Pamela Ribon), makes an admirable attempt to retcon some gender parity into the Smurfs universe. The story centers on Smurfette’s (voiced by Demi Lovato) quest to warn the inhabitants of another village about the danger posed by Gargamel (Rainn Wilson). She sets off with three of her fellow Smurfs, Hefty (Joe Manganiello), Brainy (Danny Pudi), and Clumsy (Jack McBrayer), and when they reach the village, they find it’s a mirror image of their own community: one populated entirely by female Smurfs like the tough Smurfstorm (Michelle Rodriguez) and the hyperactive Smurfblossom (Ellie Kemper).

The Lost Village’s attempts to break down the insidious sexism of the Smurfs property is admirable and largely successful, cleverly twisting Smurfette’s conceptual blankness into a positive by emphasizing that she can be anything she wants to be. The film itself, however, is a disposable and rigorously conventional animated kiddie adventure with a standard quest narrative broken up by an action sequence or musical montage every 10 minutes or so to keep its young audience from getting too restless. After an extended moment of overbearing pathos, it all culminates in a cheery dance party, a now practically mandatory finale for children’s animated films.

This will rent as well as **TROLLS, ROCK DOG, MOANA** and **THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS**.



7/11 3 **THEIR FINEST** DRAMA
\$4 MILL BO 581 SCREENS 127 MINUTES

Sam Claflin (ME BEFORE YOU, THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR, THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY 1 and 2)

Lone Scherfig's *Their Finest* is a handsomely mounted period drama set in wartime, specifically London during the Blitz. It's also a film about filmmaking, one that celebrates the power of art to bring audiences together. For some, that may trigger memories of recent films like *The Artist*, *Birdman*, and *La La Land*, middling works bestowed with temporary false importance by an industry that can't resist celebrating itself, but *Their Finest* narrowly escapes the feeling of insularity that can come with that type of film, and by virtue of downplaying the moviemaking aspects in order to focus on a woman's growing self-awareness and empowerment in a male-dominated industry.

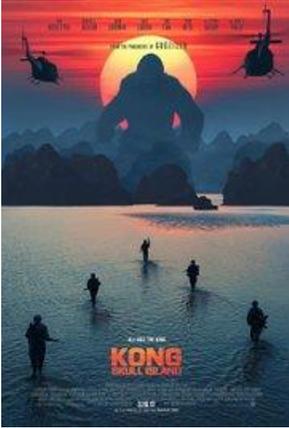
This woman, Catrin Cole (Gemma Arterton), is an advertising copywriter who's hired by the British Ministry of Information to write convincing female dialogue for wartime-propaganda films, and who gradually discovers a talent for screenwriting she didn't know she had. Some of *Their Finest's* richest scenes revolve around Catrin's intense brainstorming sessions with fellow screenwriters Tom Buckley (Sam Claflin) and Raymond Parfitt (Paul Ritter) as she attempts to infuse her own perspective into the project they're working on, achieving minor victories that, for her, feel like major triumphs.

Those scenes also derive their worth from the fact that it's rare for films about filmmaking to dramatize writing as a communal process; Catrin isn't seen working by herself on what's usually a solitary activity, but rather her creative energies bounce off of Tom and Raymond's own. As for the film's cinema-historical background, many of Britain's most celebrated filmmakers—among them Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, David Lean, and Carol Reed—emerged during the World War II era, and *Their Finest* generates some of its eye-opening frisson from its methodical depiction of the process of making a particular stripe of war-themed motion picture, right down to its use of international celebrities to try to appeal to non-U.K. audiences.



The fact that Catrin discovers herself in the midst of a by-committee propaganda production rather than an independent artistic endeavor is a bit of cognitive dissonance that another filmmaker might have milked for some sort of delicious irony. Scherfig, though, treats the material with the muted tastefulness that suppresses even the most roiling passions. During one scene, when a higher-up at the Ministry of Information demands a more overtly passionate romantic ending to appeal to the American audience's taste for melodrama, viewers might wish that *Their Finest* had been injected with a similar energy. The film's cautious aesthetic is unfortunately matched at times by its content, especially when the drama eventually circles around Catrin's budding romance with Tom, forsaking a measure of its feminist bona fides in order to suggest that she can't be happy without a man in her life.

People that rented **TABLE 19, GOLD, THE FOUNDER** and **LION** will probably like this one as well.



7/18 1 **KONG: SKULL ISLAND** ACTION
\$170 MILL BO 3987 SCREENS **PG-13** 118 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Tom Hiddleston (CRIMSON PEAK, HIGH RISE, I SAW THE LIGHT, THOR: THE DARK WORLD)

Samuel L Jackson (SNAKES ON A PLANE, PULP FICTION, XXX: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE, THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON)

“Mark my words,” says government official Bill Randa (John Goodman) as he reads news about Watergate in 1973, “there’ll never be a more screwed-up time in Washington.” This clumsily winking aside to audiences, an attempt to give *Kong: Skull Island* a spark of modernity by making it feel relevant to our current political climate, is emblematic of a film that can’t even capture its ’70s setting without indulging tediously literal-minded clichés and featuring overused period songs on its soundtrack. Randa, head of a covert government agency, gets approval for an expedition to an uncharted Pacific island by appealing to fears that the Soviets may otherwise get there first. Naturally, he has the unqualified support of the leader of his military escort, Preston Packard (Samuel L. Jackson), a career soldier who feels personally betrayed by the U.S. bugging out of Vietnam. America didn’t lose the war, Packard insists to the equally simplistic anti-war photographer Mason Weaver (Brie Larson), but rather abandoned it, a distinction that only a person like him can recognize.

No sooner does the team of scientists, soldiers, and adventurers reach the island than they encounter Kong, who promptly fends them off by destroying every helicopter and killing most of the men. This Kong is colossal even by its usual standards. In 1933, it scaled the Empire State Building, and here the beast looks as if it could use the skyscraper as a walking stick. The ape is so huge that it becomes comical, looming so ominously over the giant trees of the island’s rainforest that it at no point looks like a natural fit in its own natural habitat. Throughout, Kong is less terrifying for its brute or berserker rage than its inherent impossibility of existence; it’s as if its only natural predator were force of gravity. The beast devastates the humans what feels like seconds, and the scene of its carnage is so cataclysmic that it feels better suited the film’s climax than the creature’s introduction.



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Compare the monsters here to those from Peter Jackson’s *King Kong*. Like Vogt-Roberts, Jackson largely jettisoned overarching themes to focus on spectacle, but Jackson’s loving tribute to Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack’s 1933 original bursts at the seams with the imagination of a dedicated fan. His Kong, animated with technology less developed than the sort available to Vogt-Roberts, is still infinitely more expressive, and the restriction of the ape’s screen presence makes its action-packed appearances all the more thrilling. Furthermore, the other monsters in Jackson’s film were equally inspired. Indeed, nothing in *Kong: Skull Island* approaches the strangely mesmerizing beauty and genuine horror of the scene from *King Kong* where huge bugs slither and crawl all over the story’s characters.

An ambush in a pit filled with toxic gases and the skeletons of other Kong-like apes shows off a modicum of panache in the way sickly green fog hides the movement of the skullcrawlers and amplifies the impact of their surprise attacks. But even the handful of shots that resonate are spoiled by how insistently the filmmakers lean on them to be memorable, and that so little underpins the conflict in the film means that neither the action nor its lulls have any anchor. And by the film’s end, the standout element turns out to be John C. Reilly, who shows up as a long-marooned pilot driven loopy by his time on the island. Reilly has always been up to debase himself for a laugh, and his affably fatalistic demeanor here is genuinely funny, as when he greets squad members and enthusiastically exclaims how happy he would be to die with them. Where the other actors dutifully convey seriousness and malignant insanity, Reilly treats the material with the goofy detachment it deserves, marking him as the only consistently pleasurable aspect of the film.

This will rent as well as **XXX: THE RETURN OF XANDER CAGE, THE GREAT WALL, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, ROUGE ONE: STAR WARS, and LOGAN.**



7/18 3 THE PROMISE DRAMA

\$2 MILL 313 SCREENS PG-13 133 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Christian Bale (AMERICAN HUSTLE, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, OUT OF THE FURNACE)

In order to make the horrors of the Armenian genocide more palatable to audiences, Terry George's *The Promise* leans on that classic Hollywood strategy of filtering historical events through the lens of a romantic triangle. But whereas the characters in a film such as Warren Beatty's *Reds* were intensely engaged in the historical forces swirling around them, the intrigue that occurs among the members of a love triangle in *The Promise* barely intersects with the death and destruction happening in the Ottoman Empire. And while George's *Hotel Rwanda* had the benefit of being centered on one fully fleshed-out individual, the characters in his new film are so generic that it becomes tiresome whenever *The Promise* turns away from its historical context to focus exclusively on the dull interpersonal conflicts at its center.

Michael (Oscar Isaac) is attending medical school in Constantinople when he becomes smitten with Ana (Charlotte Le Bon), an artist and fellow Armenian. Complicating matters is that Michael is married and Ana is involved with an American photojournalist, Chris Myers (Christian Bale), who notices the budding attraction between the pair and is naturally roused to jealousy. Inevitably, they all get caught up in the Ottoman Empire's ethnic cleansing of Armenians, but Michael, Ana, and Chris are characterized so thinly, and George is so much less patient than David Lean was in *Doctor Zhivago* in at least allowing us the time and space to get to know these characters, that the film inspires less emotional investment than a more detached feeling of watching romantic clichés play out their predictable paces.



In the end, to have this uninvolved romance dramatized against the Armenian genocide becomes not just unfortunate, but downright offensive for how a dark and violent period in our human history is trivialized. Still, some of the lengthy stretches in which the audience follows the main characters simply trying to survive in a bloodthirsty environment do exude a primally harrowing power, specifically for the filmmakers' refusal to back away from showing the worst of the carnage against the Armenian populace. Most striking is a scene in a forest in which Michael and Chris stumble upon a slew of corpses of Armenians from the former's village in southern Turkey. George doesn't soften the barbarousness of the slaughter committed by Turkish soldiers, and the devastation of such a sight is indelibly etched in Michael's face when he discovers some of his closest loved ones among the dead.

The horror of that scene so forcefully and effectively weighs on the viewer's own mind that, by comparison, the romantic travails of Michael, Ana, and Chris feel like the stuff of soap operas. Which is a shame, because the Armenian genocide is worthy of an intelligent cinematic treatment, especially given that the Turkish government still refuses to officially acknowledge that it actually happened.

This will rent as well as **THE BELKO EXPERIMENT, BEFORE I FALL, THE BYE BYE MAN, SNOWDEN and SILENCE.**

BORN LEADER



7/25 1 THE BOSS BABY FAMILY

\$166 MILL BO 3986 SCREENS PG 97 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

Alec Baldwin (TV—SNL, 30 ROCK—FILM—CRIMSON TIDE, BEETLEJUICE, TO ROME WITH LOVE, GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS, CRIMSON TIDE)

Every Republican regime gets the ludicrous devious-baby saga it deserves. The Dubya years begat one of film history's all-time sequels no one asked for, Bob Clark's *Superbabies: Baby Geniuses 2*, in which a kid actor playing the young version of Jon Voight's crypto-Nazi character memorably whines, "I feel more German than American!" Appropriately, Clark's take on talking toddlers was moronic but irrepressibly itself, the cinematic equivalent of a doddering fool fumbling with his rain poncho. And this DreamWorks Animation misfire is a calculated, media-savvy fraud that seems to emerge from a parallel, unapologetically crass alternate universe ruled by the least culturally qualified gatekeepers.

That the title character is portrayed by Alec Baldwin, the same actor currently mocking—and, yes, normalizing—our encephalitic head of state on *Saturday Night Live*, is undoubtedly a coincidence. But an eerie coincidence it is. Baldwin plays the unwelcome baby brother to Tim Templeton, a seven-year-old who's enjoyed enough time as an only child that you latently suspect his virulent reaction to getting a baby brother—immediately suspecting the infant to be, in actuality, a corporate wheeler and dealer—represents a kiddie matinee experiment with the literary concept of an unreliable narrator.

It's quickly revealed that Boss Baby is, in fact, a hyper-sentient, ruthlessly ascendant upper-level case manager at Baby Corp., a company theoretically in danger of losing its market share to Puppy Co. but which clearly would thrive so long as there are parents who refuse to inform their children where babies actually come from. (Which, if they're taking them to conveyor-belt films like *The Boss Baby*, there are plenty.) With no love lost between Tim and Boss, the unwilling siblings agree to work together to stop Puppy Co. from unleashing the most heart-shreddingly adorable new dog breed, ensuring Boss a promotion that will sweep him right out of the Templeton house forever.

This will be as big a renter as was **STORKS, LEGO BATMAN MOVIE, MOANA, TROLLS, DESPICABLE ME, THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS** and **FINDING DORY**.





7/25 2 UNFORGETTABLE THRILLER

\$14 MILL BO 2145 SCREENS R 100 MINUTES DVD/COMBO
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Rosario Dawson (TV—IRON FIST, LUKE CAGE, THE DEFENDERS)
Katherine Heigl (TV—GREY'S ANATOMY, STATE OF AFFAIRS—
FILM—THE UGLY TRUTH, JACK AND RYAN, THE RINGER,
STAND-INS, KNOCKED UP)**

Unforgettable is outmoded in its depiction of gaslighting, deficient in its erotic charge, and doesn't even offer unique forms of torture for its protagonist. Anyone familiar with the days when Annie Dutton and Reva Shayne ruled *Guiding Light* will be decidedly unmoved when Tessa, in the moment a harried Julia decides the gloves finally have to come off, throws herself down a flight of stairs seconds before David enters the room (a strategy which, incidentally, was a whole lot funnier on the CBS soap). The truly depressing thing about a thriller as undercooked as *Unforgettable* is its failure to fly on dark fantasy, its descent into utterly attainable mundanity. If genre fans can't enjoy lurid, misogynistic catfights anymore, what's the point?

This will still rent as well as **SLEEPLESS, LIFE ON THE LINE, ALLIED, THE WHOLE TRUTH, and THE INFILTRATOR.**

