



3/1 1 CREED ACTION

\$97 MILL BO 2987 SCREENS PG-13 133 MINUTES

Michael B. Jordan (TV—PARENTHOOD, FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, THE ASSISTANTS, ALL MY CHILDREN—FILM--FRUITVALE STATION, CHRONICLE, RED TAILS)

Sylvester Stallone (VICTORY, THE EXPENDABLES, COP LAND, RAMBO)

The Philadelphia of director Ryan Coogler's *Creed* looks considerably different than the one depicted in *Rocky*. Though post-industrial malaise hung around the edges of the latter, the seventh film in Sylvester Stallone's apparently immortal franchise shows a city well past its glory days, a city of chipped façades and worn colors, of faded glory brightened only by the gaudy flash of corporate logos that adorn storefronts that are even more of an eyesore than the long-closed mom-and-pop shops they displaced.

The racial demographics have also shifted. Gone are the white Italian Americans, replaced by a predominantly African-American community. So radical is the shift that when Rocky Balboa (Stallone) is introduced humbly tending to his restaurant after hours, his quaint bistro looks completely divorced from time. It's a kitschy museum erected to enshrine the faded Italian legacy of the working-class neighborhood, a recreation of a previous civilization and its innocent ways. You get the sense that if the camera panned four feet to the right it would uncover some kind of novelty Frank Sinatra contraption that you could make sing for a dime. Not even a quarter, an honest-to-God dime, like your parents used to spend.

Yet it isn't Rocky, the hometown hero with a lifetime's supply of street cred, who looks out of place in this new Philly. That would be Adonis (Michael B. Jordan), the bastard son of Rocky's greatest rival, Apollo Creed, who leaves Los Angeles for the Italian Stallion's town to receive training and answers about his father.

Established as a scrappy, ruthless brawler from pre-pubesence, Donnie looks tough laying out cholos in underground Tijuana matches, but quickly stands out as pampered and untested when put in one of Philly's storied gyms and forced to show some fundamentals. *Rocky's* montages focused on using the street to the hero's advantage, with odd drills conducted all around town to beef up his boxing know-how with practical, unorthodox application. *Creed* flips that script and focuses on Donnie being taught the basics, and how he can't break the rules until he knows them.

By contending with the unglamorous nature of professionally beating other people into unconsciousness, however, the film makes more time for its characters' inner lives, and more so than any other Rocky movie, this feels like an actor's showcase. Front and center, of course, is Jordan, who gets to play the kind of character so rarely afforded to black men in Hollywood. Donnie is a hard, mean, self-isolating man, but he's also vulnerable, sometimes shockingly so, as when Rocky confronts him about his belligerent anger toward his father and prompts tears so suddenly that Donnie is too taken aback by them to even let himself feel sad.

The leads' impressive interplay is aided by a script that consistently trusts them to communicate without belabored speech. Screenplays these days have become too much like dictionaries: arranged in functional order and given to exacting descriptions of basic terms. But one of *Creed's* greatest traits is its reticence, its refusal to say 10 words when two will do, or to say one word when silence says it all. This has the effect of lending something evocative and abstract even when something is spelled out directly, so that the drama related to a health scare is suddenly, thrillingly resolved with the line "If I fight, you fight," or Donnie's entire attitude of rage and resentment is self-diagnosed in a single moment of clarity near the end of the film.

This will be as big as **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROUGE NATION, TRAINWRECK, AND-MAN, FURIOUS 7 and all ROCKY films.**





3/1 2 THE DANISH GIRL DRAMA
\$8 MILL BO 449 SCREENS R 119 MINUTES

Eddie Redmayne (THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, JUPITER ASCENDING, MY WEEK WITH MARILYN, HICK)

Based on the story of Elb, the first identifiable person to undergo gender reassignment, *The Danish Girl* begins innocuously as a portrait of a young husband and wife trying to eke out a living as painters. The postcard-pretty landscapes that open the story are ultimately revealed to be sights from Einar's youth that influence his work, but the past here exists only as a nebulous, sentimentalized sphere within which Einar once shared a kiss with his best friend. Hooper may be more fixated with Gerda's process, but the torments that inform her prosaic brushstrokes also remain foreign to us. The filmmakers' interest in Einar and Gerda's work begins and ends with the former's crisis of identity triggering the latter's success.

One doesn't doubt the filmmakers' empathy for Lili even as one questions its sentimentality. Every aspect of *The Danish Girl* gives the impression of being an unspontaneous illustration of a script element. Neither Redmayne nor Vikander, both technically impressive, are ever allowed to toss off their characters' expressions of joy and frustration. Both actors are at the mercy of a screenplay that stiffly and aggressively insists on pointing to its themes of identity and confusion with every line of dialogue ("It was like kissing myself," Gerda remembers of the time she first locked lips with Einar). Redmayne and Vikander are practically forced into a self-aware, literal-minded mode of performance, delivered across frames so luridly decorous and abundant in displays of forced angularity that their characters often feel as if they've been shoehorned into a period noir of Ryan Murphy's imagination.



Worse, though, than the almost unintentional distancing effects of *The Danish Girl's* texturelessly ornate melodrama is its infuriatingly jejune understanding of Einar's crisis of identity. If there's no sense of the Lili that lies suffocating beneath Einar's host body at the start of the film, it's because Hooper believes that Redmayne's androgynous beauty is enough to hint at Einar's gender dysphoria. Posing for Gerda in women's stockings and shoes, Einar balks at wearing a dress, until the feel of the fabric shakes him to the core of his being. After which one slow-motion caress of fabric leads to another, and soon Einar is peering through clothing racks at his glamorous ballerina friend, Ulla (Amber Heard), and, finally, imagining what he would look like as a woman by pushing his penis between his legs.

One doesn't doubt the filmmakers' empathy for Lili even as one questions its sentimentality. The fascination that the connoisseurs and dilettantes of the art world have for her peculiar beauty, thus pushing her to come out of her shell, can't help but feel like wishful thinking. Even the men closest to Lili—Henrik (Ben Whishaw), a gay man who finds solace in their friendship, and Hans (Matthias Schoenaerts), her childhood best friend—are beacons of all-knowing, consoling light. *The Danish Girl* may cater to stereotypes of femininity, but at least the feminine self that Lili adopts, all obvious signifiers, in search of objectification feels credibly rooted in the story's time period. But the preternaturally sympathetic way with which the world responds to her is precious fantasy. In so clearly viewing her through the lens of 21st-century political correctness, the film only blunts the resolve of her struggle.

This will rent as well as **DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL, GRANDMA, MISSISSIPPI GRIND, TIME OUT OF MIND, THE D TRAIN, and TRUE STORY.**



3/1 3 LEGEND THRILLER

\$3 MILL BO 207 SCREENS R 132 MINUTES

Tom Hardy (MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, THE DROP, LAWLESS, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES)

Emily Browning (GOD HELP THE GIRL, PLUSH, SUCKER PUNCH)

Part of the thrill of seeing Tom Hardy in *Bronson* and *Locke* lies in seeing him bring bronze statues to life—with either brute-force rage or a wealth of vulnerable human detail, sometimes both. But for his dual performance in *Legend*, the actor finally finds a role—or rather, roles—impervious to his considerable imagination. In spite of all the energy he brings to infamous twin gangsters Reggie and Ronnie Kray, the former heterosexual and sane and the latter gay and psychotic, Hardy fails to dig deep enough into these characters so as to illuminate their sometimes inexplicable personas. Instead, he overcompensates by dialing up his flair for mannerisms, such as the mumbly style of line delivery with which Ronnie speaks, distractingly evoking his performance as Bane from *The Dark Knight Rises*. Given how *Legend's* script is so bereft of insight into its characters' psyches, perhaps there's only so much even an actor of Hardy's stature can do. *Legend* is written and directed by Brian Helgeland, so it's no surprise that, like his 1999 macho actioner *Payback*, the film comes off as little more than a series of "cool" genre poses offering a little human interest.

Such empathy is foreign to Helgeland's sneering sensibility. Take his treatment of *Legend's* equivalent of *Goodfellas's* Karen Hill, Reggie's long-suffering wife, Frances Shea (Emily Browning). Helgeland's grasp of the reasons behind her attraction to Reggie doesn't extend far beyond her saying to her disapproving mother at one point that she thinks he's "sweet." Mostly she just comes off as a self-deluding ditz who gets what's coming to her. Surface, however, is everything in *Legend*. The closest Helgeland comes to suggesting anything of substance about what makes the Krays tick lies in a scene in which Ronnie openly admits his homosexuality to American gangster Angelo Bruno (Chazz Palminteri)—an openness that suggests a terrifying sense of freedom that, for the Krays, has translated into a complete absence of a moral compass. Otherwise, the film's analysis never goes beyond a barely explained sense of stubborn family loyalty on Reggie's part driving him to keep his crazy brother out of an insane asylum even as he runs their criminal empire to the ground. Mostly, Helgeland sees the story of the Kray brothers as grist for yet another black-comic riff on *Goodfellas*.



A good one here that will rent as well as **TIME OUT OF MIND, HITMAN, KNOCK KNOCK, NO ESCAPE, SELF/LESS, and GOOD KILL.**



3/1 3 MISS YOU ALREADY COMEDY
\$2 MILL BO 298 SCREENS PG-13 112 MINUTES

Drew Barrymore (ET, GOING THE DISTANCE, EVERYBODY'S FINE, WHIP IT, FEVER PITCH, 50 FIRST DATES)
Toni Collette (TAMMY, A LONG WAY DOWN, ENOUGH SAID, HITCHCOCK, THE WAY WAY BACK)

Many viewers will likely call Toni Collette "brave" for shaving her head in Catherine Hardwicke's cancer-themed dramedy *Miss You Already*, but one wonders how many will also cite the actress's wildly naturalistic laughter, which is of a piece with the emotional ebb and flow of the film. As Milly, a sweet, yet vain, mother and wife who's rocked by her fateful diagnosis, Collette is expectedly vivacious embodying this woman facing such dire straits. Her portrayal of grace under pressure, specifically via that boisterous laugh, both sells *Miss You Already's* philosophy of dying well (Milly can bellow into a cocktail while tucking dead locks of hair into her pocket), and saves it from being what the same film may have been sans Collette: forgettable.

Her performance has its drawbacks. She steals the show from Drew Barrymore, who stars as Milly's lifelong best friend, Jess. Barrymore is convincing enough as the low-key level head to Collette's historically heedless vixen, but the balance Milly and Jess supposedly give to each other is eclipsed by the sense that the actresses don't do the same. It may be telling that Rachel Weisz, not Barrymore, was initially slated to play Jess, as Barrymore feels somewhat shoehorned into the London-set production. Her function as Collette's foil is serviceably fulfilled when the girls, say, indulge their love of *Wuthering Heights* with a trip to the North York Moors, but Jess never even feels at home with her squeeze, Jago (Paddy Considine), in the myriad ways Milly does with her ever-struggling hubbie, Kit (Dominic Cooper).



Just as she was scarily exacting with the frenemy relationship at the core of [Thirteen](#), Hardwicke is unyielding in stressing the many pros and cons of Jess telling—or not telling—the very ill Milly that she's pregnant. Working from a script by Morwenna Banks, who adapts her own 2013 BBC radio play, *Goodbye*, Hardwicke expertly translates the sort of convoluted, mixed-message concerns of a teen-girl exchange into the very pivotal, life-and-death circumstances of grown women. She may not have made the next *Beaches*, and she may be shameless enough to opt for a tweaked race-to-the-airport climax, but *Miss You Already* winningly reflects how to utilize quiet understandings and, yes, very loud laughter.

This will rent as well as **VACATION, MAX, AMERICAN ULTRA, WHILE WE'RE YOUNG** and **MAGIC MIKE XXL**.



3/1 1 THE NIGHT BEFORE COMEDY
\$43 MILL BO 2980 SCREENS R 116 MINUTES

Seth Rogen (22 JUMP STREET, NEIGHBORS, THE INTERVIEW, THE GUILT TRIP, 50/50)

Josh Gordon-Levitt (THE WALK, LINCOLN, PREMIUM RUSH, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, INCEPTION)

The saddest of these thirtysomethings is Ethan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who lost his parents in a drunk-driving accident as a teenager. Fourteen years of romantic and creative failures later, he's only rescued from his past each Christmas Eve, when his two best friends abandon their lives to take him out for a wild night in New York City. In contrast to Ethan, token Jew Isaac (Seth Rogen) is terrified of his future, as the impending birth of his first child finds him in the throes of anxiety. Chris (Anthony Mackie), meanwhile, is mired in a complicated present, as a late-breaking NFL star with a major social-media presence and a dark, predictable secret.

This setup, an undeniably clever nod to the ghosts of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (all represented here by a drug dealer played by Michael Shannon, stoner kin to David Johansen's cab driver from *Scrooged*), is coupled with another quest: for the group, on their final Christmas Eve debauch, to finally gain entry to the Nutcracka Ball, the city's most exclusive holiday party. But despite their goal-oriented carousing (complete with individualized holiday sweaters), *The Night Before* is rooted in an antagonism that hampers its attempts to convey camaraderie. Isaac and Chris resent being pulled away

from their family and careers for the sake of coddling Ethan, who cannot overcome his fears of attachment and commitment. Isaac and Ethan, at the same time, are hip to Chris's shady behavior.

It aims to foster a spirit of giddy anarchy in order to tie a ribbon around its shambolic script and rickety pacing.

The mild discord between the friends curdles some moments (a Kanye West cover at FAO Schwartz) and enlivens others, but the film's three leads never quite find their roles, or much chemistry. Rogen, always best as the straight man pretending he's a party guy, overdoes his drug-fueled odyssey, except when the movie seems to forget that he's rolling. Gordon-Levitt brims with mopey rage until the film asks him to become a rom-com lead. Mackie, meanwhile, is hugely charismatic in a tacky, underwritten part where he's reduced to chasing a grinch (Ilana Glazer) around the city's streets and rooftops (while referencing, respectively, *Home Alone 2* and *Die Hard*).



This one will fare as well as **BURNT, JOE DIRT 2, TED 2, AMERICAN ULTRA** and **HOT PURSUIT**.



3/1 2 ROOM DRAMA
\$6 MILL BO 198 SCREENS R 114 MINUTES

Brie Larson (TRAINWRECK, THE GAMBLER, DON JON, THE SPECTACULAR NOW)

Jacob Tremblay (THE SMURF'S 2, BEFORE I WAKE)

Like the novel on which its screenplay is based, Lenny Abrahamson's *Room* is a fictional high-wire act. Filtered through the viewpoint of an intelligent five-year-old boy, a story that might easily have been sensationalized or made saccharine—the imprisonment of a kidnapped, sexually enslaved young woman and the son she bore and is raising in captivity—becomes a tough but tender tribute to the creative power of maternal love.

The vivid metaphors that dot Jack's (Jacob Tremblay) voiceovers ("I zoomed down out of Heaven into Room," he says, recounting the origin story his mother created for him) make a fairy tale of mother and son's captivity, while his habit of anthropomorphizing the objects in the storage shed where he's spent his entire life imbues even small things with great power. The camera adopts his point of view, making the little space feel cozy and warm though glamorous close-ups and by lingering on the routines, games, and stories Jack's mother, Joy (Brie Larson), invents to keep him happily occupied.

On the days when their captor, Old Nick (Sean Bridgers), enters the shed, he's glimpsed at first only in bits and pieces, his face blocked by the slats of the closet where Joy puts Jack during Old Nick's visits. There's never any doubt about what's going on, but all the sex and most of the violence that Joy endures happen off screen, outside of Jack's awareness and understanding. But that blissful ignorance can't last forever. Realizing that her son is getting too old to remain content much longer with their cramped existence, Joy plots a desperate escape. The dangers they face while making that escape are over mercifully soon, but their adjustment to life in the wide world, which comprises the film's second half, is every bit as difficult—and as dangerous.



The film, never sensational or saccharine, is a tough but tender tribute to the creative power of maternal love.

For Jack, who has to wear sunglasses and a surgical mask when he goes outside until his light-starved pupils adjust to sunlight and his immune system gets used to germs, learning about everything from potato chips to stairs is the easy part. The real trick is getting used to the competing demands and possibilities of everyday life, which makes him feel "spread thin all over the place, like butter." And for his mother, the depression and hopelessness that used to consume whole days while she was a captive threatens to engulf her entire life once she's free.

This will rent as well as **DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL, LEARNING TO DRIVE, MISSISSIPPI GRIND, SELF/LESS, SOUTHPAW,** and **TRUE STORY.**



3/1 3 YOUTH DRAMA

\$3 MILL BO 149 SCREENS R 124 MINUTES

Michael Caine (INCEPTION, HARRY BROWN, THE DARK KNIGHT, THE CIDER HOUSE RULES)

Harvey Keitel (LITTLE FOCKERS, MEAN STREETS, PULP FICTION, BE COOL)

Paolo Sorrentino wastes no time announcing his directorial touch in *Youth*, opening on a decentered medium close-up of a singer on a rotating glass platform filled with lights that alternately overexpose her face and leave it in silhouette. It's the kind of virtuosity, pristine and arid, that defines Sorrentino's aesthetic, as well as his ongoing partnership with cinematographer Luca Bigazzi, who favors bold colors and carefully calculated lighting setups for even the most insignificant shots. The pair favor brittle ornamentation, and they use that style to play up the hollow opulence of the Swiss retreat where the action takes place. The hotel and spa is the Restaurant at the End of the Universe, from which the decaying rich of the world can watch the slow immolation of their insular worlds.

Youth focuses on two patrons in particular: retired composer Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine) and Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel), a director struggling to put together a project he considers his "testament," and to the broad indifference of his young writing team, his unseen producers, and the ticket-buying public. Fred and Mick suggest beta-male counterparts of *The Great Beauty's* Dionysian protagonist. They spend their days reminiscing about all the women they never slept with, nostalgic for paths not taken. Their hang-ups stunt them despite their age; the film's title may refer to what the protagonists pine for, but their behavior suggests they never grew out of insecure adolescence.

As ever, Sorrentino ironically cuts the legs out from under his protagonists' wistfulness with grotesquerie. Scenes from around the spa spotlight the flabby, old patrons who shuffle between massage and steam rooms where they sit in fossilized stasis, arranged in grim tableaux vivants as their wrinkled, bloated flesh is heated and rubbed. A few recurring characters stand out, but only as thinly symbolic types: an obese former footballer (Roly Serrano) who sports both a crucifix and a Karl Marx tattoo; an actor, Jimmy Tree (Paul Dano), who resents the blockbuster role that made him famous; an old couple who never say a single word to each other.



Sidestepping at least some of *The Great Beauty's* self-pity, *Youth* has its graceful moments. In one scene, Fred dispenses with his reluctance to compose and seems to conduct nature itself, making literal woodwinds of trees swaying in the breeze and percussion of rustling cowbells. Later, Caine brings a great deal of weariness and shame to Fred's confession of why he can no longer perform, and he's framed in a beautiful shot that places Lena in the background, just out of focus but sufficiently clear to be able to see her look of shock, then grief, as he explains himself.

Nonetheless, the film's narrow range of empathy prevents any capitalization on such moments, and too often *Youth* sympathizes with its characters' worst impulses. The most revealing scene of the movie may be when Mick arranges a meeting with his old muse, Brenda Forel (Jane Fonda), to pitch his movie, only for her to turn him down in favor of a TV role. The impact of this bombshell alters *Youth's* course, and it also permits Sorrentino to expand his list of soft targets to the hackneyed belief that television is the death of cinema. What he cannot fathom is that maybe his own brand of cinema, with its cookie-cutter types arranged to reinforce the genius of his vision, is why actors in general, and women and people of color specifically, have fled to television in the first place, and why audiences more interested in storytelling than self-portrait have followed them.

This should rent as well as **IRRATIONAL MAN, LEARNING TO DRIVE, GRANDMA, 5 FLIGHTS UP and MAGGIE.**



3/8 1 ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: ROAD CHIP
FAMILY \$40 MILL BO 2126 SCREENS PG 92 MINUTES

VOICES OF: Jason Lee, Josh Green

Here's the story of a testy songsmith, who was bringing up three very rowdy boys. All of them were furry and short, unlike their guardian, and sang pop songs real high. Here's the story, of a pretty lady, who was busy with one boy of her own. He was spiteful, and picked on others, and he was all alone.

Whatever Ross Bagdasarian's original strato-falsetto creations may have had going for them in the golden age of the novelty single, their subversive potential tapped out a while ago. That may have actually been for the best when Bagdasarian's son went back to the well in the '80s for a Saturday-morning series and a refreshingly earnest motion-picture outing. But we now live in a still-blossoming brave new world where no cultural artifact is left unexamined, where the most rational thing in the world is to pull back the curtain and reveal the incredibly slow-singing man behind it. (On shaky emotional ground? Cue up the 16 RPM "You Keep Me Hanging On.")

The Road Chip, the fourth film in the cycle, ups the ante by invoking that squarest of square TV archetypes: *The Brady Bunch*. Turns out, Dave Seville (Jason Lee, who now seems to have so lost himself in the role that you actually feel like calling Kevin Smith to stage an intervention) isn't altogether content to forever babysit the creatures whose careers he's been managing, and getting thirstier by the day. A few dates in with Samantha (Kimberly Williams-Paisley), a blandly attractive ER doctor who's constantly forgetting to stash her stethoscope after work, and Dave has invited her to take a trip to Miami with him for an album release party.



It's a rude shock for Alvin, Simon, and Theodore, and less welcomed by Miles (Josh Green), Samantha's tyrant son who seems hell-bent on disproving to the Chipmunks that it gets better. Collectively shuddering at the idea of their families merging, the boys take to the road to prevent an impending proposal.

The Road Chip settles into the safe, slow land quickly, introducing a cartoonish villain in Tony Hale's vengeful air marshal and thereby uniting the 'munks with Miles much sooner than any screenwriter would've recommended. But the far bigger problem is that, beyond the aforementioned and quite extended Mark Ronson-Bruno Mars swipe, the pocket-sized singing superstars aren't given much of a forum to showcase their musical "gifts." In fact, they're portrayed as has-beens against the *American Idol*-recruited Chipettes' rising stars. (And, no, they don't really get to sing much either.) Maybe the filmmakers wanted to spare parents a headache, but they only replaced it with the threat of familial mental atrophy.

This will rent as well as **PIXELS, GOOSEBUMPS, HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 2, INSIDE OUT, VACATION** and **PAUL BLART 2**



3/8 2 IN THE HEART OF THE SEA ADVENTURE
\$25 MILL BO 3103 SCREENS PG-13 122 MINUTES

Chris Hemsworth (AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON, VACATION, THOR: THE DARK WORLD, STAR TREK: INTO THE DARKNESS)

Almost defiantly rudderless, Ron Howard's *In the Heart of the Sea* is a *Moby-Dick* origin story that's bound to frustrate anyone who's ever read the book. Based on Nathaniel Philbrick's nonfiction account of the 1820 sinking of the *Essex* whaleship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Howard's film relates the incident that ostensibly drove Herman Melville (Ben Whishaw) toward his masterpiece of taxonomic and psychological obsession: an 1850 visit to the Nantucket home of Tom Nickerson (Brendan Gleeson), an alcoholic, PTSD-addled sailor who once encountered a great white whale.

"How does one come to know the unknowable?" Melville asks, via narration, at the outset of the film, but with this hokey framing device, screenwriter Charles Leavitt assures us that very little of the story's mild emotional underpinnings will go untitled. Nickerson's wife (Michelle Fairley) pleads for Melville to unburden her husband from 30 years of depression and secrecy. Melville, desperate to realize himself as a great writer, offers Nickerson the equivalent of three months' lodging to solicit his confession.

Nickerson was one of the youngest crewmen on the *Essex*, so his flashback recollections are made to tell the story from the perspective of the ship's first mate, Owen Chase (Chris Hemsworth). Chase is a cocksure and talented seaman with an axe to grind: Expecting to helm the *Essex*, the "landsman" (not bred from seafaring stock) is passed over in favor of George Pollard (Benjamin Walker), a green captain from a prestigious nautical family.

You may think you know where this is going: The brash upstart upstages the tweedy, cerebral elitist, before the pair team up to hunt down a massive sperm whale. You would, inexplicably, be wrong. With every impending storm front, *In the Heart of the Sea* seems to switch subjects. This is a story about a clash of personalities and social classes, only to become one of base survival and, then, an economic parable. Even before the film arrives to a languishing crew stranded in the titular void, the narrative is helplessly adrift, a yarn that extols vague grit and determination with no discernible through line.

The narrative is helplessly adrift, a yarn that extols vague grit and determination.

This title will do as well as **THE VISIT, THE TRANSPORTER REFUELED, MAZE RUNNER: SCORCH TRIALS, THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.,** and **HITMAN:47.**





3/8 1 THE PEANUTS MOVIE FAMILY
\$127 MILL BO 3902 SCREENS G 88 MINUTES

VOICES OF: Noah Schnapp, Bill Melendez

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

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

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

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





3/8 3 VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN DRAMA
\$6 MILL BO 2127 SCREENS PG-13 110 MINUTES

Daniel Radcliffe (TRAINWRECK, HORNS, KILL YOUR DARLINGS, WOMAN IN BLACK, THE HOBBITT MOVIES)
James McAvoy (TRANSE, X-MEN: FIRST CLASS, GNOMEO & JULIET, THE CONSPIRATOR)

As soon as Daniel Radcliffe appears on screen looking like a hunchbacked Victorian Rastafarian in whiteface, it becomes apparent that this umpteenth screen adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is more concerned with the tale's surface grotesqueries than with its timeless ideas concerning the ethical limits of Enlightenment reason. Paul McGuigan's *Victor Frankenstein* is the movie version of a carnival sideshow, all smoke and mirrors, presenting a litany of human freaks and animal monstrosities to distract from the superficiality of its psychological and intellectual concerns.

In Shelley's philosophical novel, Victor Frankenstein is a brooding, sensitive, and paranoid genius, whose monstrous creation is an expression of his personal grief; his megalomania never trumped his relationships with those he held most dear. In McGuigan's film, Victor (James McAvoy) is an angry and arrogant loner, dismissive of all those around him as his intellectual inferiors, only making an exception for Igor (Radcliffe) because of his extraordinary medical skills and comparable zeal for scientific knowledge.

Victor and Igor here are pale imitations of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, respectively. Victor's monomania never truly feels dangerous to himself or those around him, even when it gets him into hot water with his nefarious classmate (Freddie Fox) from medical school or a devoutly Christian police inspector, Turpin (Andrew Scott). Meanwhile, Igor's practical outlook, small stature, and fumbling attempts at heterosexual romance supplies Victor with a comic foil. But this sad clown's tribulations are ultimately too trivial to register either as tragedy or comedy.



Its litany of human freaks and animal monstrosities are meant to distract from the superficiality of its psychological and intellectual concerns.

While the early homoerotic jostling between Victor and Igor is hopeful, suggesting the filmmakers are striving for an intentional level of camp, the film never fully embraces the inherent kitsch of its flamboyant characters and queer subtext. Though there's an extraneous romantic subplot involving Igor and a trapeze artist, Lorelei (Jessica Brown Findlay), the true love story here is the ménage à trois between Victor, Igor, and science, which the filmmakers argue (perhaps unintentionally) is an unnatural state by presenting the fruits engendered by this union as monstrosities, as in a zombie chimpanzee and the Frankenstein monster itself. The monster is a mere afterthought, reduced to only a few minutes of screen time, which is fitting given that he's the aborted love child of the aforementioned love triangle.

This will rent as well as **THE WALK, THE VISIT, SINISTER 2, TOMORROWLAND, EX MACHINA, PROJECT ALMANAC** and **THE PYRAMID**.



3/15 1 CONCUSSION DRAMA
\$25 MILL BO 2841 SCREENS PG-13 123 MINUTES

Will Smith (HITCH, MEN IN BLACK, FOCUS, HANCOCK, ANCHOR MAN 2, THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS)
Alec Baldwin (BEETLEJUICE, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROUGE NATION, THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER, IT'S COMPLICATED)
Albert Brooks (LOST IN MERCA, MEAN STREETS, THE MUSE, THE IN-LAWS)

One of the few truly incendiary revelations to come out of the Sony Pictures Entertainment hacking scandal was the series of emails that suggested the company had “softened” some of the points made by the *Concussion* screenplay against the National Football League. According to Ken Belson of [The New York Times](#), this was to market “the film more as a whistle-blower story, rather than a condemnation of football or the league.” Never mind that a whistle-blower story that doesn’t lean on condemnation seems inherently impossible, on the evidence of what made it to the screen, the NFL unmistakably emerges as the villain in this David-versus-Goliath story, even if the entertainment machine is indeed prodded with kid gloves.

Before a crowded room of fans, Mike Webster (David Morse) reminisces about his time in the NFL. The speech is practically a state of the union address, and as the maudlin strings on the soundtrack make clear, his days are numbered. Indeed, Webster is soon revealed to be living out of his car, estranged from family and friends, and coping with pains that former Steelers physician Dr. Julian Bailes (Alec Baldwin) seems either unable or too frightened to diagnose. Two scenes later and Webster has tasered himself to oblivion. Or, at least, to wherever Ron Howard casting calls are conducted, which is the only possible explanation for why—spoiler alert!—he reappears at film’s end in spectral form, to cloyingly flatter forensic pathologist Bennet Omalu’s (Will Smith) devotion to the belief that “God did not intend for us to play football.”



For a spell, the film does seem as if it’s only interested in indirectly condemning the NFL. Webster is the first of many golden boys of the sport to fall throughout the film, and given the horror-movie music that scores their physical and mental despair and the serrated edge of the film’s cutting, it’s as if these men are succumbing less to a neurodegenerative disease, namely chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), than to some kind of rage virus. The effect is almost perversely avant-garde: to convey the horrific effects of football on the human body as sensorial impressions.

At the center of all this thin gruel is Omalu, the first to publish findings of CTE in American football players. The Nigerian émigré is introduced inside a court room testifying as a witness on a case and, in turn, cutely establishing his bona fides for the audience. The subsequent scene, in which he drives home while sticking his hand out the window and happily soaking in the rays of the sun with Nell-like abandon, sets up the simplistic tenor with which the man is characterized. Later, as he holds up a water-filled mason jar with fruit inside so as to illustrate to his future wife, Prema (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), the effects of blunt-force trauma on the brain, one may be excused for feeling concussed by the film’s almost childish sense of instruction.

Inside the rooms where Omalu performs his autopsies, this God-fearing saint of a man speaks to the corpses that lie before him, asking them to reveal to him the truth about their death. In a way, the careful means by which these autopsies are framed come to mirror the nobly proportioned ways in which Omalu stands up to the NFL. The nefarious agents of the league remain vaporous throughout, at once within the saintly Omalu’s reach and just outside of it. Bennet wins, of course, but only insofar as his voice is finally heard. Just as a better

film would have given fuller shape to his convictions and disillusionments, one understands, too, that a ruder man and film are needed to truly hit the football entertainment machine as hard as it deserve

This will rent as well as **FURIOUS 7, THE MARTIAN, TED 2, SOUTHPAW, MCFARLAND USA,** and **STILL ALICE.**



3/22 2 CAROL DRAMA
\$10 MILL BO 798 SCREENS R 118 MINUTES

Cate Blanchette (THE MONUMENTS MEN, BLUE JASMINE, CINDERELLA, THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON)
Rooney Mara (HER, TRASH, SIDE EFFECTS, THE SOCIAL NETWORK)

Can a film about crushing loneliness and isolation still be what critics used to call a “sumptuous” experience? Todd Haynes’s *Carol* is as prim and curlicued a movie as a Fifth Avenue window display at Christmastime—and ensconced beneath just as much glass. There’s no doubting the film was financed as an awards-season vehicle for the reaffirmation of Cate Blanchett as one of the great doyennes of acting. But beyond the machinations of “how exactly did this downtempo lesbian period piece get made?,” Haynes leaves his audience precious little to figure out for themselves.

Carol’s main draw, then, is to luxuriate in the pining shared by the film’s blueblood namesake (Blanchett) and a bashful clerk from Frankenburg’s named Therese (Rooney Mara)—a pining which, in buttoned-down postwar America, can also look and feel an awful lot like being trapped. The connection doesn’t build laterally toward any long date scene, illicit kiss, or even their inevitable first night in bed together. Haynes and screenwriter Phyllis Nagy largely refuse such facile signposts, preferring to stretch the narrative along Therese’s gaze, forcing viewers to engage both Carol herself and Therese’s at-times vaporous *idea* of Carol.



Their first eye contact is furtive, entrancing, and severed too quickly—and clumsily—to be mistaken for anything else. Carol strikes up a conversation with Therese over what to buy her daughter, Rindy (Kk Heim), for Christmas, “carelessly” dropping her gloves at the department-store checkout counter for the shop girl to return. What follows is lunch, then romance—albeit under sustained, heavy, and, for the most part, un-verbalized duress.

This adaptation attunes itself expertly to the very real dangers staring back at Carol and Therese.

Even if Therese has never before been in love like this, Carol ultimately stands to lose a lot more given the desperate strong-arming of her blustering ex-husband, Harge (Kyle Chandler). Meanwhile, Therese’s boyfriend, Richard (Jake Lacy), appears on screen solely for the purpose of spewing aghast indignation at every step she takes away from their courtship, which Haynes telegraphs as half-hearted and awkward from the jump. Richard’s characterization can’t help but bring to mind 1950s put-downs like “palooka” and “galoot,” but this failure of imagination may be less Lacy’s than the filmmakers’.

Just as Patricia Highsmith saw fit to publish *The Price of Salt* under the pseudonym Claire Morgan, Nagy’s loose adaptation attunes itself expertly to the very real dangers staring back at Carol and Therese. *Carol* isn’t even a love story; it’s a tenuous chronology of two characters striving to get a love story started. If Therese represents a psychic channel for Haynes’s newfound naturalism (wide-eyed underacting as a symptom of an underexplored self), Carol is, at times mannered within inches of self-parody—vampy, even, and at apparent deliberate odds with the considered void surrounding her.

The difference matters less and less as the film reaches its twist ending, because the acting in *those scenes*—the ones they chop up and play back, with a surprisingly committed awkwardness, at Oscar ceremonies—is every bit as show-stopping as the film’s pedigree would have you believe. Stem to stem, *Carol* dares its viewers to consider that—for a couple of hours, at least—even when a thing seems too good to be

true, it might not be. A good film that will rent as well as **IRRATIONAL MAN**, **DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL**, **TIME OUT OF MIND**, **SELF/LESS**, **THE GRIT**, and **GOOD KILL**.



3/22 1 **DADDY'S HOME** COMEDY
\$132 MILL BO 3904 SCREENS PG-13 96 MINUTES

Will Ferrell (EVERYTHING MUST GO, SEMI-PRO, STEP BROTHERS, BLADES OF GLORY)

Mark Wahlberg (ENTOURAGE, TED 2, PAIN & GAIN, BROKEN CITY, THE FIGHTER, DATE NIGHT)

Will Ferrell plays Brad, a man on a mission to win his stepchildren's love. And he seems well on his way to doing so. His stepson is asking him for tips on how to deal with bullies, and his stepdaughter, who initially drew pictures of the family featuring Brad being killed in a variety of rococo ways, has finally invited him to the daddy-daughter dance. Brad's job as a program director at a smooth-jazz radio station affords him a corner office the size of a basketball court, his wife, Sarah (Linda Cardellini), has made her peace with the fact that Brad's accidentally irradiated balls won't give her a third child, and life is good.

Until the kids' biological father, Dusty (Mark Wahlberg), shows up and effectively moves in to reclaim his territory.

Everything Dusty is, Brad isn't. Dusty is rugged, impetuous, confident, and can do one-armed pull-ups without breaking a sweat. Validation-thirsty Brad cries with little warning, runs from conflict, and smothers his family with affection instead of depriving them, as Dusty has done in the past. The funhouse mirrors having been methodically placed against one another, *Daddy's Home* proceeds to episodically debase Brad one psychologically crippling incident after another: motorcycle crashes, electrocutions, public nudity.

The hits from Dusty's corner come so frequently and tactically that it almost seems he's less interested in landing a second chance with his former family and more invested in teaching Brad how to man up. Though Ferrell has made a career out of his own debasement, the film quickly becomes too cruel to generate laughter for anyone who would empathize with him, though *Daddy's Home* offers a new spin on his "tantrum-prone boy in man's body" prototype. Here, he's the man trying to *hide* the scared little boy inside.



This will do as well as **GET HARD**, **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**, **TED 2**, **RUN ALL NIGHT**, **PAUL BLART 2**, and **BURNT**.



3/22 1 THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY 2

ACTION

\$265 MILL BO 3829 SCREENS PG-13 137 MINUTES

**Jennifer Lawrence (X MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST, AMERICAN HUSTLE, SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, WINTER'S BONE)
Donald Sutherland (ORDINARY PEOPLE, ANIMAL HOUSE, EYE OF THE NEEDLE, SPACE COWBOYS)**

By only pulling from the first half of its source novel, Francis Lawrence's *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1* filled its screen time with redundant plot setup that excessively established the two sides of the civil war that rages throughout Panem: the status quo maintained by President Coriolanus Snow (Donald Sutherland), and the rebel faction led by President Alma Coin (Julianne Moore). Caught between them was Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence), ready to kill Snow at a moment's notice, but increasingly uncomfortable with her role as Coin's propaganda symbol. It was an act's worth of conflict stretched over two hours, with only the grim cliffhanger of Peeta's (Josh Hutcherson) brainwashing introducing any significant new drama.

Ideally, the final movie would feature all the action that wasn't shown in its predecessor, yet *Mockingjay - Part 2* opens with so much recapitulation that a full half-hour acts as nothing more than self-summary.

Conversations exude the stiff weariness of duty, reminding audiences of where everything stands before belaboring every single aspect of Coin's plan to take the Capitol from the president. It takes nearly 45 minutes simply to get inside the city, at which point we're told and told again about horrendous, fiendishly imagined booby traps that await Katniss as she and her unit move through the city to hunt down Snow. Traps that, sadly, are too rarely shown.



For all the grandstanding, polemical dialogue, the franchise has always best expressed its politics through the shaken trauma of its characters, who put on brave faces for rebel cameras and their comrades, only to privately gasp and leap at shadows—not from the fear of death, but the pain of survival.

This will be a huge renter like **FURIOUS 7, MAD MAX: FURY ROAD, TED 2, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE : ROGUE NATION, ANT-MAN** and **STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON**.

TINA FEY
AND
AMY POEHLER
in
SISTERS
DECEMBER 30



3/22 1 **SISTERS** COMEDY

\$86 MILL BO 2998 SCREENS R 118 MINUTES

Amy Poehler (TV—SNL, THE AWESOMES, WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER)

Tina Fey (TV---SNL, 30 ROCK)

Judd Apatow may not have had a creative hand in *Sisters*, but with its many drawn-out improvisatory bits, focus on characters in states of arrested development, and mix of raunch and sweetness, Jason Moore's film clearly bears his influence, for better and for worse. In an early scene, the filmmakers cleverly highlight the physical closeness the titular siblings—randy, foul-mouthed Kate (Tina Fey) and straitlaced, awkward Maura (Amy Poehler)—once shared by having them enter through two doorways into what's soon to be revealed the same bedroom. It's a rare moment of visual imagination in a film that generates most of its humor from sex and bathroom jokes.

The sisters reunite when Kate and Maura's parents, Bucky and Deana (James Brolin and Dianne Wiest), decide to sell their family home in Florida. And as the siblings go through their childhood possessions, they find themselves so nostalgic about their high school years, when they were known for throwing large parties, that they opt to throw one final rager in a last-gasp attempt at reliving their younger days. At which point the film promisingly reveals itself as a coming-of-age tale rendered as a chaotic explosion of the id.

But as the film's anarchic side comes fully to the fore, so, too, does a tired message about cleaning up one's act. The house party becomes a grand canvas on which Kate and Maura, in addition to most of their former classmates, gleefully revert to their unfiltered adolescent selves. For Maura, the party represents an opportunity to make up for lost time, living it up in a way she never did in high school. Kate, meanwhile, promises to stay sober for Maura's benefit, until her infinitely more mature daughter, Haley (Madison Davenport), finds out about her partying ways via Facebook, which leads her to break that promise in the wake of her ensuing guilt.



All of this builds to a literally destructive climax that doubles as a metaphorical putting away of childish things, complete with the felling of a precious childhood tree, the sinking of a backyard pool, and the spectacle of Wiest's heretofore gentle Deana cursing up a storm in frustration. Fey and Poehler occasionally give poignant expression to their characters' desperate grasping at their long-lost youth as a means of delaying adult responsibilities, but such nuances are suffocated by the film's more ardent devotion to overextended improv bits and juvenile bawdiness, such as a music box getting lodged up the ass of Maura's potential love interest, James (Ike Barinholtz). In the end, *Sisters* is basically a regurgitation of Apatowian formula, wherein ostensibly edgy humor hides a core of conservative moralizing.

This will be a hot renter just like **GET HARD, NEIGHBORS, THE VISIT, THE MARTIAN,** and **TED 2.**



3/29 1 **BROOKLYN** DRAMA

\$26 MILL B O 947 SCREENS PG-13 111 MINUTES

Emory Cohen (STEALING CARS, THE GAMBLER, THE PLACE BEYOND THE PINES)
Saoirse Ronan (THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL, THE HOST, THE LOVELY BONES)

A sentiment-rich, resolutely life-sized portrait of a relatively unexceptional young woman, director John Crowley's *Brooklyn*, based on the novel by Colm Tóibín, concerns the random twists and turns that can determine the course of an ordinary life. It's also a timely reminder of the fact that a life is shifted off its axis whenever someone is forced to emigrate to a foreign country.

As Eilis Lacey, who heads overseas to join a sea of displaced Irish men and women in post-WWII Brooklyn, Saoirse Ronan holds the screen with a quiet, watchful intensity. Eilis is bright and hardworking, yet she can't find a toehold in the depressed Irish job market. Her older sister, Rose (Fiona Glascott), and their priest have made all the arrangements for her, enlisting the genial Father Flood (Jim Broadbent) in Brooklyn to line up a room in a respectable boarding house and a position as a department store clerk.

At first, it's hard to tell how Eilis feels as she obediently goes along with the plan, but there's no mistaking the homesickness that washes over her as soon as her boat pulls away from the shore. Her first few letters from home land with a resonant thud, restoring the withdrawn young woman to herself while compounding her heartbreak. Complicated and deeply felt emotions like that ground the film when they're allowed to play out, but some plot lines just sputter out, as when the threat of losing her job for failing to chat up the customers dissipates long before Eilis develops a knack for American banter.



Eilis's landlady, the briskly benevolent Mrs. Kehoe (Julie Walters), is a vivid character, as are one or two others. But most of the people in Nick Hornby's script are so thinly sketched they register more as signposts than as characters: the kindly priest, the hovering boss, the other young women in Eilis's boarding house. Even Tony (Emory Cohen), the gallant Italian-American boy who courts her, is a blank slate, defined almost entirely in terms of the unwavering adoration, solid family background, and excellent listening skills that make him the male equivalent of the underwritten girlfriend. It's a timely reminder of the fact that a life is shifted off its axis whenever someone emigrates to a foreign country.

A beautiful film that will rent s well as **A WALK IN THE WOODS, I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS, STILL ALICE, BIG EYES, and ST. VINCENT.**