

**5/2 1 A DOG'S PURPOSE FAMILY \$59 MILL BO**  
2987 SCREENS PG 100 MINUTES DVD/COMBO  
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Dennis Quaid (THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, SILVERADO, THE ALAMO, THE BIG EASY, THE ROOKIE, TRAFFIC)**

The dog's first major manifestation, and the one which defines its titular "purpose," is as Bailey, a spunky golden retriever adopted by Ethan in the 1960s. Played as a young boy by Bryce Gheisar, as a teen by K.J. Apa, and as an adult by Dennis Quaid, Ethan grows up with Bailey by his side as he falls in love with Hannah (Britt Robertson), becomes quarterback of his high school football team, goes to carnivals and drive-ins, and generally embodies the tritest all-American clichés this side of a John Mellencamp song. Ethan suffers setbacks that put an end to his football career and his relationship with Hannah—and while Bailey dies of old age, to be reincarnated as a female police dog, a college student's corgi, and a neglected St. Bernard/Australian shepherd mix, it's clear that fate will eventually bring him back to Ethan..

The film is at its best when it drops its narrative pretenses and simply indulges in puppy porn, as in a completely gratuitous scene of Bailey playing with a small donkey. But more often than not, the film operates in bathetic overdrive, exploiting the genuine affection people feel for their pets for cheap emotionalism: In one scene, Bailey, in his permutation as a K-9 unit, takes a bullet for his police officer.



*A Dog's Purpose* is narrated by Bailey (Josh Gad provides the cloyingly cutesy voice of the dog's interior monologue), who regularly wonders about the meaning of his life, such as why he was put on Earth. The film's answer to such questions is that he exists to make Ethan's life better—to be there for him, to comfort him, and to reunite him with his high school sweetheart (played as an adult by Peggy Lipton). He's not on this planet for his own joy or fulfillment, but rather to serve the needs of his master. The film imbues Bailey with a human-like consciousness and ability to question his own existence, but it does so only to offer comforting reassurances about dogs' natural servility.

This will rent as well as **MIDDLE SCHOOL, STORKS, PETE'S DRAGON, THE LEGEND OF TARZAN and THE BFG.**



5/2 3 THE COMEDIAN DRAMA/COMEDY  
\$3 MILL 672 SCREENS R 120 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

**Robert DeNiro (THE INTERN, DIRTY GRANDPA, GOOD FELLAS, MEAN STREETS, CASINO)**

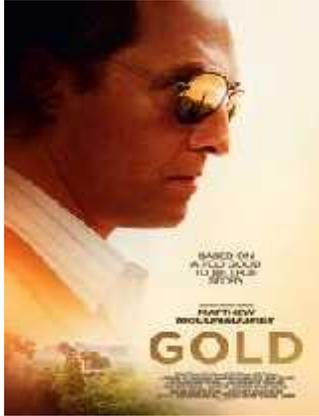
Jackie (De Niro), an insult comic best known for a crappy sitcom he starred in decades earlier and reduced to playing little clubs in uncool zip codes, would be on a fast track to nowhere if it weren't for the fact that he continues to star in viral videos that boost his visibility and win him a whole new demographic. In scenes full of painfully unfunny shtick, he mooches off his brother (Danny DeVito), spars with his sister-in-law, Flo (Patti LuPone), and meets cute with the ironically named Harmony (Leslie Mann), a train wreck of a woman with nearly as much free-floating hostility as Jackie. She also has some major daddy issues, which she offers up, in a typically expository chunk of dialogue, to explain why she's attracted to a man who's old enough to be her father. Though their shared love of acting out also fuels a courtship that consists largely of doing things like getting thrown out of Jackie's niece's wedding while Harmony and Flo exchange full-throated fuck yous.

Jackie's romance isn't the only subplot or situation tainted by late-middle-aged male disgruntlement or wish-fulfillment. His Gary Winograd photo and Art Blakey LP, and the formerly hip NYC locations he's shown visiting, like Café Wha, all seem aimed at establishing his coolness points in unintentionally dated ways. So does the affectionate banter he aims at a lesbian comic (Jessica Kirson, playing herself) and his gay niece, whose wedding gives him an opportunity to prove how "edgy" and ultimately accepting he can be.

His compulsive insults are presented as a kind of authenticity, the camera cutting to "real" people in the room—the bailiffs in a courtroom, the waiters in a fancy restaurant, the CNAs in an assisted living facility—who can't suppress their smiles as Jackie cuts loose with his sometimes scatological, often bullying jokes. Their approval is clearly meant to signal that he's a heroic everyman truth-teller, not the colossal asshole he's so strenuously impersonating. De Niro commits to Jackie's unfunny jokes as ferociously as he did to Jake la Motta's nightclub act in [Raging Bull](#), leaving no doubt as to the fury and frustration that fuels this sadly unfulfilled man. But nearly everything else in this tin-eared comedy is as ersatz as Jackie's rage is real.



This will rent as well as **JACKIE, 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WOMEN, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, and DON'T THINK TWICE.**



5/2 3 GOLD DRAMA

\$9 MILL BO 745 SCREENS R 120 MINUTES  
DVD/BLU RAY

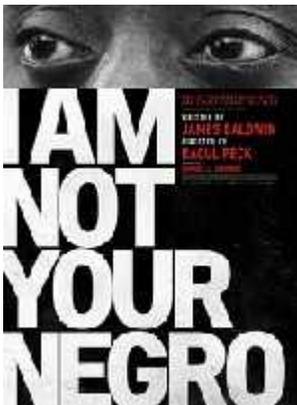
**Matthew McConaughey (FREE STATE OF JONES, THE WOLF OF WALL STREET, INTERSTELLAR, SEA OF TREES)**

If Stephen Gaghan's [Syriana](#), with its multi-stranded plot and handheld-camera style, was obviously modeled after Steven Soderbergh's [Traffic](#), then the filmmaker's latest, *Gold*, appears to take Martin Scorsese's [The Wolf of Wall Street](#) as its source of inspiration. This is evident in the film's based-on-real-events account of prospectors making a killing on the stock market after discovering a gold mine in Indonesia, as well as in the casting of Matthew McConaughey—who made a cameo in Scorsese's film as the stock-market shark who inspired Jordan Belfort blithely debauchurous career path—as the gold-digging Kenny Wells. [The Wolf of Wall Street](#)'s influence can even be seen in the breezy tone Gaghan adopts, one that uses a combination of hyperactive camera movements and a predominantly post-punk and alternative-rock soundtrack to exult in the thrill of the chase, bask in Kenny's newfound privilege as a result of his discovery, and just generally swim in a sense of amorality toward the outright corruption the film depicts.

*Gold* is another standard rise-and-fall account of the American dream, one in which down-in-the-dumps characters believe in little more than making a lot of money in order to be successful, a notion that's eventually disproved in brutal fashion after a temporary period of raging success. Unlike even Belfort, who at least actively participated in the stockbroking he did, Kenny Wells isn't even an honest beneficiary of his own success, only coming up with the idea to venture out into Indonesia to dig for gold, leaving Acosta and plenty of Indonesian natives to do all the hard work while he, at one point, is waylaid by malaria for weeks. Perhaps that's meant to be the subversive joke of Gaghan's film: daring us to celebrate the exploits of a man who barely did anything to achieve the meteoric success he temporarily gains. But McConaughey brings so much of his usual fast-talking energy to the role that the damning irony carries less of a sting than it should.



This will rent as well as **COLLATERAL BEAUTY, MISS SLOANE, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS** and **SNOWDEN**.



5/2 3 I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO DOCUMENTARY

\$7 MILL BO 568 SCREENS PG-13 114 MINUTES  
DVD/BLURAY

**Samuel L. Jackson**

Author James Baldwin's testament to race-based inequality and misunderstood cultural history forms a searing lens of incontrovertible clarity in *I Am Not Your Negro*. The documentary takes as its guiding premise that the United States's endemic racism toward African Americans stems from laws and forms of governance made predominately by white men who unconsciously hate themselves. Director Raoul Peck structures the plot around 30 pages

of notes Baldwin made while planning a book based on his own recollections of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr.—all of whom were assassinated between 1963 and 1968. Samuel L. Jackson reads Baldwin's words in voiceover, deepening his voice into an elegiac monotone that compliments still images and footage from multiple eras. That includes flashes from the 2014 uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, though the film takes the 1960s, when Baldwin was a public intellectual making appearances on such popular programs as *The Dick Cavett Show*, as its central focus.

Baldwin's substantial words function as an entry point for Peck's digging into the depths of the racial oppression that rises up not only in political debates and judicial matters, but in pop culture as well. In fact, the bulk of *I Am Not Your Negro* unfolds within the realm of the public's eye and away from the halls of universities in the ivory tower. If Ava DuVernay's riveting [13th](#), which is also about the systemic oppression of black people, has a weakness, it's that the film's preponderance of information comes from the mouths of experts, albeit with a few notable exceptions. Peck deviates from the conventional tool of the talking head altogether by constructing a parsimonious highlight reel of details that, in toto, depicts the U.S. as a collective cultural monster of fundamental self-delusion and ungoverned paranoia.

Peck peppers additional footage from one of Baldwin's guest spots on *The Dick Cavett Show* throughout the film as a reiteration of how the political instantaneously becomes personal when racial discrimination is the topic of conversation. No political party is categorically absolved of historical guilt when confronting segregation and black equality, though it's plainly evident that the left's misdeeds are largely matters of rhetoric whereas the right's resounding weapon of choice is violence, or at least the threat of it. Archival images of neo-Nazis wielding signs promoting white power are buttressed against footage of Bobby Kennedy promoting the possibility of a black president "within the next 40 years." For Baldwin, who perhaps takes a page from Malcolm X on this point, the supposed hope in Kennedy's statement is but further reinforcement of an unstated privilege and power that requires a black man to be extraordinarily qualified for a position regularly assumed by white men who are the beneficiaries of nepotism and corruption.

One of Baldwin's most caustic critiques is of certain Hollywood productions for their "grotesque appeals to innocence," as Baldwin puts it, in which a recognizable reality is replaced by a fantasized version of agreeable social interaction and romantic engagement. Baldwin cites films starring Gary Cooper and Doris Day as recurring culprits, and pinpoints 1957's *Love in the Afternoon* and 1961's *Lover Come Back* as especially typical iterations of infantilized takes on the demands of being an informed, adult citizen. These indictments extend well into Hollywood's past with 1931's *Dance, Fools, Dance* and also bleed into advertising campaigns, where black faces are regularly made to appear servile or buffoonish. While such evidence alone could suffice as cultural condemnation, Peck consistently routes the film's admonishment through Baldwin's personal recollections. In a particularly revealing moment, Baldwin's words recount how he realized as a child that the slaughtered Native Americans in film westerns were versions of himself; by cheering on the cowboys, he'd been rooting for the bad guys all along.

In tone and insight, Baldwin's notes are reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's writings; both men grandly articulate the collective existential conditions of black people and the isolated occurrences that may steadily chip away at both day-to-day sanity and prolonged resolve. To that end, Peck's construction bridges the often virulent hatred of the 1960s to contemporary, empty expressions of sorrow from politicians and the excessive force used by police officers from a range of notable assaults within the U.S. over the past 25 years.

The mirroring of past and present through montage recalls the opening of Spike Lee's [Malcolm X](#), in which footage of the Rodney King beating is intercut with a burning American flag and one of Malcolm X's most damning speeches on the white man's history of violence. In Lee's film, Malcolm's demand for justice by any means necessary is a cocktail of outrage in the face of insuperable discrimination and a personal reclamation of his own family unit, which had been stolen from him as a child through his father's murder and his mother's institutionalization. On the contrary, Baldwin strove for no such stability through institutions, marriage or otherwise. Never a black Muslim, a member of the Black Panthers, nor affiliated directly with the civil rights movement because of its purported hostility toward homosexuals, Baldwin understood that, as he articulates late into the film, "we are our history." By arranging U.S. history as entirely tainted and polluted by the cancerous stench of racism, *I Am Not Your Negro* makes no concessions about its dissatisfaction with the whole rotten lot of so-called western democracy.



## 5/2 1 RINGS HORROR

\$31 MILL BO 2145 SCREENS PG-13 104 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO

*Rings*, the third film in the American series, arrives 12 years after [The Ring Two](#), and it's unsure as to whether it's a sequel to the other entries or a contemporary reboot. That indecision begets a screenplay that's almost entirely composed of numbing exposition pertaining to Samara (Bonnie Morgan), the pale, black-haired entity that scares to death those who watch the mysterious videotape that contains hints as to the nature of her demise. Samara's mythology

here doesn't quite align with those offered by [The Ring](#) and [The Ring Two](#), though it's close enough to inspire audiences to wonder why yet another film has to be devoted to establishing an origin story that was never that interesting or important to begin with.

*Rings* is unsure as to whether it's a sequel to the other entries in the series or a contemporary reboot. Director F. Javier Gutiérrez adequately but unremarkably apes the aesthetic of the series, which is visually defined by a palette of deep blues and greens, and by actors who're instructed to move through the screen as if they're underwater. The first act has a promising hook: Gabriel (Johnny Galecki) is a hotshot professor who initiates an underground lab/cult so as to study what Samara's tape reveals about the undead, which is actually a pretense to save his own ass by offering his students up as victims to the demon in his place. This is a chilling premise on which to hang a horror film, and Galecki amusingly hams it up as an educator drunk on his own ego.

But American horror films are often neurotically insistent on providing blandly pretty young characters with which their typically young-adult audience can "identify," and so Gabriel is sidelined for Julia (Matilda Lutz) and Holt (Alex Roe), two twentysomethings who unearth Samara's origins, falling multiple times for the bait-and-switch where a villain masks him- or herself as a victim. Instead of the horse ranch of the prior films, the origin of all evil is revealed to be underneath a cemetery, then a church, then the wall in someone's house. Samara's corpse has been moved around so many times that one expects the filmmakers to make an intentional joke out of their convoluted and narrative, yet they never do.



This will rent as well as **THE EDGE OF 17, ASSASSINS CREED, BLAIR WITCH and BEN HUR.**



**5/9 1 FIFTY SHADES DARKER THRILLER**  
\$117 MILL BO 3125 SCREENS R 118 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Dakota Johnson (HOW TO BE SINGLE, BLACK MASS, A BIGGER SPLASH, FIFTY SHADES OF GREY, NEED FOR SPEED)**

If Sam Taylor-Johnson's [Fifty Shades of Grey](#) amounted to little more than an aborted, two-hour contract negotiation, it managed to get there with a notion of wit and luxury, taking its responsibilities as a flukishly iconic bit of intellectual property seriously. The filmmakers convinced Beyoncé to transform "Crazy in Love" into a slow-jam dirge, crafted a visual essay on the state of luxury branding (glider planes, tie drawers), and somehow made space for a genuinely offbeat comic turn by Dakota Johnson as Anastasia Steele, the virginal English major who becomes suddenly besotted with the tortured billionaire Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan, whose stiffness occasionally served his character's warped spin on Victorian chivalry).

*Fifty Shades Darker* takes the [Dark Knight](#) approach to franchise maintenance, taking pains to assure you that its protagonists are serious about their passions. Despite an unexplained, enhanced security presence around his hulking-up, billion-dollar frame, Christian is single-mindedly fixated on Ana. He's days-of-stubble sad, playing Jeff Buckley's "Lover, You Should've Come Over" through his Sonos and mulling over an attempt at a more conventional romance. The bookworm, meanwhile, has a hunky new boss, Jack Hyde (Eric Johnson), and a gig reading manuscripts at an independent press in Seattle. Ana is reluctant to shirk her newfound professional duties to give BDSM another go ("Christian, you know I love working," she says), but a few opulent gifts—including, bafflingly, another Mac laptop—and promises of "vanilla" lovemaking are enough to get her hormones raging.



What little of substance transpires in *Fifty Shades Darker* orbits around Christian's past: his crackhead prostitute mother, a former sub (Bella Heathcote) who can't relinquish her attachment, and Kim Basinger's Elena, the "Mrs. Robinson" who inculcated Christian into bondage as a child. Just as the film's women are defined by their inexplicable devotion to Christian, its men are all defined by habits of rapey dominance. It's inevitable that the franchise will continue to double down on its kinky prudishness, as the screenplay—by Niall Leonard, E.L. James's husband—leaves heaps of sloppy and unmotivated hints that Christian will eventually be excused from reforming himself and will instead have to defend Ana's honor and security.

All of this is unsurprising, but one hopes the series will find a way to reinvigorate its heroine, whose airy skepticism has given way to a demure brand of submission. This is one of many missed opportunities to do anything bold or progressive with *Fifty Shades Darker*, a film in which Christian Grey owns a pommel horse and gives no indication that he wants to have sex on it.

This will rent as well as **NOCTURNAL ANIMALS, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, COLLATERAL BEAUTY, SULLY and FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS.**



5/2 1 **FIST FIGHT** COMEDY

\$31 MILL BO 2794 SCREENS R 91 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Ice Cube (BARBERSHOP THE NEXT CUT, RIDE ALONG, RIDE ALONG 2)**

**Tracy Morgan (TV---SNL, 30 ROCK)**

The road to the inevitable showdown between weak-willed English teacher Andy Campbell (Charlie Day) and hard-ass history instructor Strickland (Ice Cube) is over-plotted from the start. Their dispute arises when Campbell witnesses Strickland take an ax to a student's desk—an incident that causes Strickland to lose his job after Campbell snitches on him. Challenged by Strickland to a fight, Campbell spends the rest of the day attempting increasingly convoluted methods of evading the conflict, all the while dealing with the looming threat of being laid off, a wife who's about to give birth, and that moldiest of clichés: making sure he gets to his child's school recital.

The filmmakers have assembled an unusually deep bench of comic performers, but Keen's busy direction, which relies on a plethora of boisterous music cues and emphatic close-ups to underscore the bloated screenplay's jokes, does the cast no favors. Sometimes, though, a performer's finely honed comedic quirks break through the din by sheer force of will, such as Jillian Bell's inscrutable deadpan or Tracy Morgan's off-kilter line readings. Morgan is so good that he makes a rote reference to [Minions](#) crackle, and in one of the film's most hilarious gags, a cutaway to Ice Cube playing the piano becomes an absurdly prolonged showcase for the actor's intense stare.



In their mad dash to deliver as much plot and as many jokes as possible, like Campbell getting dragged down the hallway by a horse as paint bombs explode in his face, the filmmakers don't give their performers enough room to breathe, seldom allowing the comedic potential of a scene to sufficiently play itself out. Worse, Keen's flat shot-reverse-shot setups, which rarely place more than one actor in the frame at a time, make it almost impossible for any rapport between the characters to ever feel convincing.

The film's bigger-is-better approach to comedy, though, does pay off in the end, as *Fist Fight* makes good on the promise of its title by delivering the most protracted bout of fisticuffs this side of [They Live](#). It's a fine example of the primitive delight in watching two grown men beat the shit out of each other.

Funny movie that will rent as well as **ALMOST CHRISTMAS, OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY, MASTERMINDS, WAR DOGS and SAUSAGE PARTY.**



**5/16 1 RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER**  
SCI FI/HORROR \$31 MILL BO 2798 SCREENS R  
116 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

**Milla Jovovich (ZOLANDER 2, SURVIVOR, RESIDENT EVIL: RETRIBUTION)**

The *Resident Evil* films are so unconcerned with traditional characterization and narrative that they suggest the abstract, fevered brainstorming of a child at play. Series mastermind Paul W.S. Anderson has never been shy about the debt these films owe to other properties, which he gleefully cross-pollinates. In *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, for instance, there's an elaborate and sporadically exhilarating battle sequence that brings to mind portions of [The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers](#) and [Mad Max: Fury Road](#) merged with the frequently quoted bible of Anderson's oeuvre, [Aliens](#). At its best, this blender approach to genre filmmaking can be intoxicatingly unpretentious and even poetic (as in the jewel of this series, [Resident Evil: Retribution](#)), dispensing with expository bloviating and cutting straight to the lurid manna of the material, celebrating the unbridled force of energy for its own sake.

The film's editing has a cumulatively subliminal power though, and many compositions justify one's patience with Anderson's formal excess. The opening shot of a ravaged Washington, D.C. is rife with vividly jagged edges that inform a familiar post-apocalyptic conceit with nerviness. Intense close-ups of wire and broken glass emphasize the quotidian of the end of the world. A stand-off at a bombed-out high-rise between the good guys and a battalion of zombies led by a military tank climaxes with an awesomely biblical shot of fire raining from above, engulfing marauding creatures on the ground floor.

There's something resonant and strangely intense about the Sisyphean nonsense of the *Resident Evil* mythology, which is loosely taken from the video-game franchise of the same name. The protagonist of these films, Alice (Milla Jovovich), is a clone who's convolutedly connected to the evil empire she's trying to stop from destroying the world, because the latter knows that liberals are right about global warming, over-population, and the threats of nuclear proliferation. Rather than use its resources to save the world, this rich corporation destroys it sooner so that they'll have more resources for itself—a notion that's devolved from science fiction to [actual news](#).



Because the series won't end until it ceases to make money (the title means about as much here as it did when applied to the fourth [Friday the 13th](#)), Alice can never save the world, instead restarting her quest again and again, often waking up at the beginning of each film with little idea of where she's been and what she's been doing, so that she can wage war with cyphers who're also clones of clones. This suggestion isn't only poignant for its topicality (suggesting that every progressive action is met with a more severe reaction), but for Jovovich's committed, adamantly un-condescending and intensely physical performances. Alice's work becomes conjoined with Jovovich and Anderson's, as they're grinders who unceremoniously get the job done, doing their part to distract us from our lot as rats in a corporate cage.

This will rent as well as **ASSASSINS CREED, HACKSAW RIDGE, ARRIVAL, INFERNO, and, SUICIDE SQUAD.**



**5/16 2 THE SPACE BETWEEN US SCI FI/COMEDY**  
**\$9 MILL BO PG-13 120 MINUTES DVD/COMBO 28**  
**DAYS BEFORE REDBOX**

**Gary Oldman (CRIMINAL, MAN DOWN, CHILD 44, DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES, ROBO COP)**

Director Peter Chelsom's *The Space Between Us* may not be as majestically loony as David Frankel's [Collateral Beauty](#), which was also scripted by Allan Loeb, but this young-adult, science-fiction romance becomes so overwhelmingly saccharine as it progresses that one almost wishes for a trace of madness to offset its leaden metaphors, cheesy dialogue, and overbearing soundtrack. Instead, *The Space Between Us* is simply disappointing when it isn't trying to browbeat its audience into emotional submission.

There are a few amusing fish-out-of-water gags in *The Space Between Us*'s first half as Gardner tries to get his bearings on Earth: he reacts in horror when he sees dogs and horses for the first time; frequently takes at face value what Tulsa often utters sarcastically; and thanks to multiple viewings of Wim Wenders's [Wings of Desire](#)—an unintentionally hilarious detail, since nowhere else in the film does he evince a taste for cinephilia—he's developed a rather literal conception of what it means to fall in love. One scene in particular, in which Gardner raises his arms heavenward and basks in the heavy rain that falls in front of a hospital entrance, stands out for a different reason: It's the lone instance in which the film is able to ecstatically convey Gardner's wide-eyed sense of wonder at this new world he's entered.

Elsewhere, though, the filmmakers aren't so artfully fixated on conveying Gardner's encounters with Earth's unfamiliar environs. But then, they seem to care less about the story's sci-fi dimensions than they do about triple-underlining its romantic and inspirational clichés. It's not enough for Gardner to display an appealing big-hearted innocence that gradually warms the emotionally guarded Tulsa; Loeb also has to give him a life-threatening condition via an enlarged heart and have characters literally tell him, "You know why you're sick? Your heart's too big." And when Chelsom isn't leaning on Andrew Lockington's wall-to-wall score to emphasize the story's emotional beats, he resorts to using upbeat teenybopper pop songs to remind his audience that this is a romance first and a sci-fi film second.



This bum's rush toward inspiring viewers unsurprisingly sacrifices nuance; throughout, crucial details that should have been filled in leave *The Space Between Us* feeling like a missed opportunity. For one, we never discover how Gardner and Tulsa first encountered each other. And as for Tulsa's interest in playing piano, that quirk seems less organic to her character than an excuse for the filmmakers to include a scene in which she plays a sentimental tune on a piano in a Sam's Club, thus proving Gardner's assertion later on that she's much more of a softie than her world-weary exterior indicates. By that point, the film's sci-fi premise has completely ceased to matter and all that remains is yet another cloying confection about young characters experiencing love for the first time and looking for families they never had.

This will rent as well as **COLLATERAL BEAUTY, BAD SANTA 2, THE EDGE OF 17, THE HOLLARS** and **BRIDGET JONES BABY**.



**5/16 1 XXX: THE RETURN OF XANDER CAGE**  
ACTION \$48 MILL BO 2987 SCREENS PG-13  
104 MINUTES

**Vin Diesel (THE LAST WITCH HUNTER, FURIOUS 7, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, FST AND FURIOUS 6, FAST FIVE, PACIFIER)**

Xander is reluctantly pulled out of hiding in the Dominican Republic when his old NSA recruiter, Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson), is killed by a satellite brought down from orbit by a hacking device known as Pandora's Box, which has been stolen by a highly trained, impossible-to-trace team of criminals. The difference in Xander's demeanor between the first and third film in the series is immediately apparent and says more about the shift in social perspective between 2002 and 2017 than the script's occasional lapses into political commentary. Where [xXx](#) largely endorsed the surveillance state as a necessary reaction to WMDs and global terrorism, this film presents Xander as someone even less eager to work for the man than he was as a punk kid, and his wariness reflects a pervasive distrust of that same security apparatus in the wake of the last 15 years of foreign policy. Many of the film's weakest moments come from drawing too much attention to this fact verbally when Diesel's sardonic interactions with National Security Agency chief Jane Marke (Toni Collette) convey plenty of disgust without being too explicit. The action builds to such a head that even the serious stakes of the film's motivation give way to pleasant vibes.

In classic working-class-hero fashion, Xander immediately, and literally, jettisons the team of elite military soldiers assigned as his backup, opting instead to use his own crew. And what a team it is, resembling a group of people abducted from a Vans Warped Tour in 2004 and cryogenically frozen until they were needed again. Compared to the usual specialist variety



brought to such teams, Xander's crew is more personality-oriented than tactical: Tennyson Torch (Rory McCann), a madman crash enthusiast; Nicks (Kris Wu), a DJ whose talent, as listed in one of the film's many freeze-frame fact sheets for its characters, is being "fun to be around"; Adele Wolff (Ruby Rose), a skilled sniper who's simultaneously the most developed and stereotypical of the group. Adele is a cavalcade of pithy sayings framed by hot-blue, cropped hair—coded as sexually ambiguous in much the same way that you can spot a boat if you stare long enough at a J.M.W. Turner painting.

*Return of Xander Cage's* supporting players don't go in for monologues or backstories—all the better to leave more time for the action scenes. Director D.J. Caruso doesn't adopt a single style for the film's sequences, instead approaching each scene on its own terms. Thus the introduction of Xander skiing and skateboarding down a mountain to effectively steal cable on behalf of a Dominican village has a light-hearted, buoyant energy that's missing in the elegant, coherent, but nonetheless swift choreography of Donnie Yen, who plays villainous ringleader Xiang. (On top of that, compare the longer shots afforded to Yen to the jagged editing that captures MMA star Michael Bisping, as henchman Hawk, nastily beating a guard.) Later sequences involve such highlights as Xander expanding his range of vehicles-as-weapons by fighting with a motorcycle, as well as a skirmish inside a plummeting plane that simulates zero gravity while a full-on battle rages on the ground below.

There are always limitations to this type of film. The dialogue frequently dips into humor at the level of a Roger Moore-era James Bond flick, and sometimes the plot, not to mention shot-to-shot continuity itself, breaks down as Caruso sprints from sequence to sequence. But such quibbles dissipate in the face of the giddiness of the action, which builds to such a relentless head that even the serious stakes of the film's motivation give way to a largely pleasant vibe.

This will rent as well as **HACKSAW RIDGE, ASSASSINS CREED, PASSENGERS, DEEPWATER HORIZON and THE MAGNIFICENT 7.**



**5/16 1 GET OUT HORROR \$83 MILL BO**  
**2987 SCREENS R 104 MINUTES**  
**DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX**

**Daniel Kaluuya (SICARIO, WELCOME TO THE PUNCH, KICK ASS 2)**

Race, as any undergraduate student can tell you, is a social construct, a collective fabrication which cannot be defined by reference to biology alone, and yet at the same time its existence is a brutal, undeniable fact. Or, as socialist activist Brian P. Jones has put it, "It's real in the same way that Wednesday is real. But it's also made up in the same way that Wednesday is made up." Knowing that race is a sham doesn't make it suddenly disappear because race is simply the ideological manifestation of a vast network of interlocking systems, actions, and beliefs known as white supremacy.

Though they're the beneficiaries of this system of racial oppression, the white characters in writer-director Jordan Peele's ambitious, tightly controlled debut feature, *Get Out*, would never consider themselves racists. They're WASP-y upstate liberals who heap much praise on Tiger Woods, and they probably do believe that they'd vote for Obama for a third term if they could. But they're also the sort of people who rarely interact with a black person who's not serving them a drink. They're fascinated by blackness but deeply afraid of it unless it can be controlled, mollified, used to their own ends.

Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) is thrust into this world of white privilege when he travels with his girlfriend, Rose (Allison Williams), to spend the weekend with her parents, Dean and Missy (Bradley Whitford and Catherine Keener), at their home in upstate New York. With its white columns and rocking chairs on the deck, the house has the aura of a plantation, a feeling enhanced by the Armitages' eerily robotic black servants, Georgina (Betty Gabriel) and Walter (Marcus Henderson). The air is thick with unacknowledged racial anxiety. Dean's comments to Chris, while outwardly hospitable, are tinged with unctuous condescension, while Rose's MMA-obsessed brother (Caleb Landry Jones) gets drunkenly aggressive and challenges Chris to a mock fight.



Things get even stranger when, later that night, Chris pops out for a smoke only to find Walter racing across the lawn. When he heads back inside, Missy is waiting for him and draws him into a late-night hypnosis session to cure his smoking habit. It also so happens that Chris is visiting on the weekend of an annual gathering at the Armitages' home, where he's forced to endure the company of even more white people and their patronizing questions and inane comments. After a strange occurrence with the only other black guest at the party, Chris begins to suspect that something more nefarious than simple white cluelessness about race is afoot, and he will be proved correct (though exactly what's going on won't be spoiled here).

Throughout *Get Out*, Peele incisively probes the connection between the racism of the "liberal elite" and good old-fashioned white supremacy, connecting the status and privilege of wealthy white Americans like the Armitages to the use and abuse of black lives, and remarkably does so while balancing a tricky mix of comedy, horror, science-fiction, and satire. The whole thing plays out like an episode of *Black Mirror* as written by Paul Mooney, with Peele looking extraordinarily confident behind the camera, demonstrating a sketch comedian's knack for economy and escalation, while developing a tightly coiled tension that still leaves room for plenty of exasperated laughs.

Though the film is peppered with the occasional jump scare and makes a last-act transition toward all-out horror, Peele is less interested in terrifying us than in carefully heightening the suspense through the meticulous unspooling of his central conceit. The screenplay is essentially structured around a single big idea, an approach which has its limits, rendering the characters as cogs in the screenplay's machinery, with only as much shading and psychological depth as is necessary to serve said big idea. After a certain point, about halfway through the film, it becomes relatively clear what that idea is, at least broadly, but Peele still hooks his audience by persistently forcing us to ponder not just what's happening, but what its meaning might be and how we're implicated in it. And the answers, of course, aren't pretty.

This will rent as well as **OUIJA, INFERNO, THE ACCOUNTANT, MECHANIC 2, DON'T BREATHE, and THE SHALLOWS.**



5/23 1 THE GREAT WALL ACTION  
\$48 MILL BO 2985 SCREENS PG-13 114 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Matt Damon (THE MARTIAN, JASON BOURNE, INTERSTELLAR, THE MOUNTAIN MEN, WE BOUGHT A ZOO, OCEANS THIRTEEN)**

*The Great Wall's* narrative essentially allegorizes its own production scheme, telling a tale of a Westerner, William (Matt Damon), who, after looking to make bank in China by stealing its resources, forgoes his own greed and learns to work with the locals to the mutual benefit of all parties. Casting Damon in the starring role has been criticized as an attempt to graft a white-savior narrative onto a distinctly Asian story, but the actor's presence is central to the film's cross-cultural ambitions, both because a Hollywood superstar like Damon is necessary to sell *The Great Wall* to the masses in America and because his character serves as a symbol of Sino-American cooperation.

William is a mercenary searching for gunpowder along China's Silk Road, who takes refuge from a horde of dragon-like monsters in one of the fortified turrets of the Great Wall. It's there that he finds the Nameless Order, a special army trained to fight creatures—known as Taotie—with catapults, cannons, arrows, and spears. Setting aside William's naturally selfish and cynical inclinations, a pretty, English-speaking officer, Commander Lin (Jing Tian), convinces him to join the Nameless Order in fending off the attacking Taotie.

The film's extensive battle sequences are a showcase for director Zhang Yimou's genius at marshalling an army of extras in beautifully coordinated movement (a skill he exhibited prominently in his opening ceremonies for the 2008 Beijing Olympics). Zhang dresses different regiments of the Nameless Order in wildly exaggerated armor, arranging them in vibrant swatches of color. The combat is fanciful, at times even whimsical; there's an escape via hot-air balloon and a regiment of bungee-jumping female soldiers. Zhang is clearly more invested in visual splendor than kinetic combat or military logic. In the film's best moments, the screen becomes an almost impressionistic swirl of color, fire, man, and monster, as in the finale set in a tower lined with stained glass, which—recalling a visual motif from [The Flowers of War](#)—illuminates the sequence in glistening, kaleidoscopic shafts of light.



Zhang, though, is often hindered by the conventions of large-scale blockbuster filmmaking. The screenplay—by Carlo Bernard, Doug Miro, and Tony Gilroy—is feebly plotted, with stakes that are never properly established and set in a vaguely sketched world that Zhang makes little attempt to sharpen or define. The Taotie are striking, suggesting Chinese ritual bronze art as conceived by H.R. Giger, but they abide by arbitrary rules (for some reason, the creatures are immobilized by magnets), which renders the final victory over them cheap and weightless. The characters are also little more than cardboard cutouts delivering blandly aphoristic dialogue in indeterminate accents, reducing stars from both sides of the Pacific into blank ciphers.

*The Great Wall* finds Zhang struggling to leave his personal stamp on a project that's been designed by a committee intent on balancing the requirements of the Chinese film bureaucracy against the demands of the global box office. In the end, the filmmaker essentially fights this battle to a draw, producing an oftentimes beautiful film that's unmistakably the work of a great director but also a clearly compromised one. If *The Great Wall* was designed to serve as proof of the potential of U.S.-China cinematic collaboration, it ends up doing so in ways the filmmakers likely never intended, demonstrating that this sort of ambitious co-

production can yield a blockbuster every bit as frustrating as the ones Hollywood regularly churns out. As Commander Lin tells William near the film's end, "We are more similar than I thought."

This will rent as well as **JASON BOURNE, HACKSAW RIDGE, THE MAGNIFICENT 7, ASSASSINS CREED, and DOCTOR STRANGE.**



**5/23 2 ROCK DOG FAMILY**  
**\$11 MILL BO 1957 SCREENS PG 90 MINUTES**  
**DVD/ BLU RAY**

**Voices of Luke Wilson, Lewis Black.**

Parents need to know that *Rock Dog* is an animated comedy about a dog named Bodi (voiced by [Luke Wilson](#)) who dreams of being a musician. After a radio literally falls into his life, Bodi leaves his post as a guard dog in the mountains and heads for the big city. There's lots of comic action -- a careening market cart, Bodi fighting a mighty grizzly bear, plus laser beams, bonks, chases, and captures -- as well as some suspenseful sequences in which wolves attack a peaceful village of sheep. For kids who are comfortable with pretend vs. real violence, the mayhem is more slapstick than scary, including the blustery, exaggerated evil of wolf pack leader Linnux ([Lewis Black](#)). Other than the peril/scary parts, there's little iffy content here ("twit" and "stupid" is as strong as the language gets). And the clear messages about perseverance, following your dreams, and teamwork are hard to miss.

Will rent as well as **THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE, THE JUNGLE BOOK, A MONSTER CALLS and STORKS.**





**5/30 2 BEFORE I FALL DRAMA**  
\$13 MILL BO 1939 SCREENS **PG-13** 98 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Zoey Deutch (DIRTY GRAND PA, WHY HIM, EVERYBODY WANTS SOME)**

The similarities between this and *GROUND HOG DAY* films hardly end, though, once Samantha, upon waking up in her bed after she and her friends get into a car accident, realizes the endless loop she's now trapped in. Though Samantha never goes so far as to attempt suicide, as Phil does in *Groundhog Day*, she does reach a nihilistic point on one particular iteration of her day that leads her to say whatever's on her mind, especially to her friend Lindsay (Halston Sage), who she calls out for her shallowness and narcissism while apparently not realizing how much she's really castigating herself for those same qualities. The filmmakers are so flagrant in their homage that even the bar conversation that leads Phil on his path to personal change in Ramis's film is basically repeated here between Samantha and Anna (Liv Hewson) inside a bathroom, with Anna saying that Samantha's description of a life in which everything is the same and nothing matters fits her own to a T.

From there, *Before I Fall* plays out as expected, with Samantha realizing the goodness she suppressed to become popular. And yet, she's less empathetic than self-righteous by film's end, coming off as holier than thou in flaunting her moral superiority to her friends. (If she exhibits more dimensionality than the teen-movie stereotypes that surround her and exist only to enable her path toward atonement, it's only because the film's formula demands that she do so.) *Groundhog Day* certainly never had to strain this hard to be profound.

This will rent as well as **JACKIE, MISS SLOAN, 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WOMEN, THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN.**





**5/30 1 THE SHACK FAMILY \$53 MILL BO**  
**2356 SCREENS PG-13 132 MINUTES DVD/COMBO**  
**28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX**

**Sam Worthington (HACKSAW RIDGE, EVEREST, THE DEBT, MAN ON A LEDGE)**

**Octavia Spencer (HIDDEN FIGURES, ZOOTOPIA, BAD SANTA 2, FRUITVALE STATION, THE HELP)**

Parents need to know that *The Shack* is based on author William P. Young's best-selling (but controversial) faith-based book. Mack Phillips ([Sam Worthington](#)) doubts the existence of God after his daughter is kidnapped and killed, but he ends up having a life-changing experience: He spends the weekend with the Holy Trinity, as personified by three people (including [Octavia Spencer](#)). There's no iffy language, drinking/smoking, or sex, but there are some disturbing scenes. Two children nearly drown while camping -- one requires CPR -- and a young girl goes missing and is presumed dead. The movie has inspiring messages about everything from seeking help/counsel to processing grief in a healthy way to the power of forgiveness. That said, the ideas related to God's role in people's lives will particularly resonate with Christians/those open to faith-based questions.



This will rent as well as **COLLATERAL BEAUTY, LOVING, THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN and THE BFG.**