



**12/3 2 ALL THE BOYS LOVE MANDY LANE**  
HORROR R 90 MINUTES

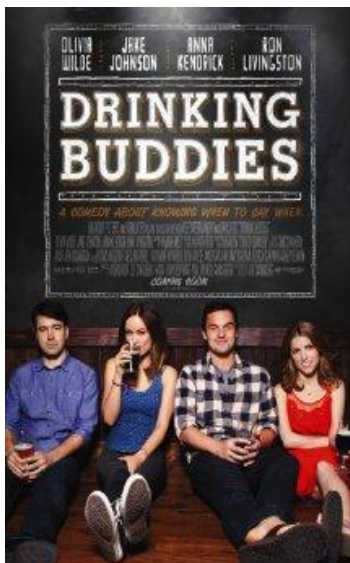
**Amber Heard (ZOMBIELAND, THE RUM DIARY, SYRUP, THE STEPFATHER, DRIVE ANGRY)**  
**Anson Mount( SAFE, STRAW DOGS, POOL HALL JUNKIES, CROSSROADS, CITY BY THE SEA)**

As Mandy Lane ( Heard) walks down her high school hallway, heads turn and mouths drool, as does director Jonathan Levine’s camera, which reduces Mandy to (in this visual order) a big chest, a striking face, and a nice ass. At a pool party held by one of many lustful suitors, Mandy sits aloof while her nerdy best friend Emmet (Michael Welch) eggs on the get-together’s jock host to fatally jump off a roof. Nine months later, Emmet—who is clearly not one of the beautiful people—is still chasing Mandy (around a track, while wearing a Natural Selection t-shirt), who’s now friends with a group of hot, horny idiots who invite her to a weekend getaway at a country ranch. Levine and screenwriter Jacob Forman do a nice job employing sexualized (usually phallic) imagery as a means of suggesting the underlying violence in covetous male desire, at least until the symbolism becomes so rampant and obvious that one can practically see the quotation marks surrounding it. The film’s dreamy, hazy vibe and woozy depiction of laidback drinking and drugging is affected but nonetheless moderately appealing. Yet once its soon-to-be-bloody teens arrive at the ranch, the movie adopts a quite bloody hack-and-slash routine, along the way sprinkling hints about chaste Mandy’s lesbianism and delivering commentary about the consequences of outsider detachment, both of which—because Mandy isn’t a person but merely an emblematic object of erotic obsession—only add up to a rug-pulling finale that’s nonsensical on a practical level and unpersuasive on a thematic one.



Fans that liked **FRIGHT NIGHT 2, LORDS OF SALEM, VHS/2, EVIL DEAD, HANSEL & GRETEL,** and **MAMA** will be happy with this one.

**12/3 2 DRINKING BUDDIES COMEDY**  
\$1 MILL BO 324 SCREENS R 90 MINUTES



**Olivia Wilde (THE INCREDIBLE BURT WONDERSTONE, PEOPLE LIKE US, DEADFALL, THE CHANGE UP)**  
**Jake Johnson (FILM—21 JUMP STREET, SAFETY NOT GUARANTEED, NO STRINGS ATTACHED,--TV—NEW GIRL, CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM)**

Largely set at a Chicago micro-brewery, the film focuses on a few of its employees, who seem to spend most of their free time drinking, a sort of extracurricular research which provides fuel for all manners of interpersonal angst. Most of this trouble centers around bearded jokester Luke (Johnson), who nurses an obvious crush on co-worker Kate (Wilde), the den mother to this loosely run workplace, who makes important-sounding phone calls from an office while the boys tramp around in waders on the brewing floor. Any potential romance between her and Jake is blocked by

their respective partners, Chris (Ron Livingston) and Jill (Anna Kendrick), both seemingly stodgy wet blankets who hold traditional jobs and don't show much interest in post-work boozing.

Setting up the intertwined relationship between two similarly balanced couples, the film seems at first to be pursuing a tried-and-true rom-com scenario, replete with partner swapping and eureka-like realizations of meant-for-each-other-all-along destiny. Instead, this familiarity is used as a launching pad for a more probing examination of interpersonal issues. The two couples come together on a weekend trip to a Michigan lake house, a scenario that most movies would reserve for the climax, but here gets smartly positioned at the start of the second act. This placement is key, pointing toward the film's embedded interest in subverting starry-eyed romantic tropes, pushing the plot toward something more pragmatic and relatable. The focus here ends up being less on the initial sparking of love than the things that have to be done to cultivate it in the long term. One relationship dissolves, while the other edges forward into the unknown, a situation that explores how the qualities that make for initial romantic magnetism aren't always the same that lead to enduring stability.

Here's a little Indie that will appeal to those that enjoyed **DISCONNECT**, **WHAT MAIZIE KNEW**, **GINGER & ROSA**, **UPSIDE DOWN**, **SAFE HAVEN** and **THE INBETWEENERS**.



12/3 1 **THE SMURFS 2** FAMILY  
\$71 MILL BO 3087 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES

### **VOICES OF Hank Azaria, Kate Perry, Christina Ricci, Jonathan Winters**

The film begins with Gargamel (Hank Azaria), nemesis of the happy-go-lucky Smurfs, enjoying a residency at the Paris Opera House as a magician, using his new Sony tablet to map out his evil plans. His latest scheme naturally involves harnessing the power of the Smurfs to ensure world domination, to which Smurfette's (Katy Perry) knowledge of a Smurf-making formula proves integral. So Gargamel sends two "Naughties," pale-toned pre-Smurfs by the name of Vexy and Hackus (Christina Ricci and J.B. Smoove), to kidnap her, which is enough to get Papa Smurf (Jonathan Winters) out of Smurf Village and off to the City of Lights with his B squad.

Fatherhood is the film's major theme: Smurfette feels torn between her creator (Gargamel) and her guardian (Papa Smurf), a predicament that renders her easily suggestible to Vexy's mischievous wishes, while the Smurfs' wartime consigliere, Patrick (Neil Patrick Harris), acts a bit prickly toward his gregarious, corndog-kingpin stepfather, Victor (Brendan Gleeson). Azaria and Gleeson's liveliness helps to power this intensely unoriginal sequel, wherein Gosnell and his *five* scripters praise the importance of family.

The film works well for those that liked **FRANKENWEENIE**, **ROBOT & FRANK**, **PARANORMAN**, **MADAGASCAR 3** and **KUNG FU PANDA 2**.





**12/3 1 THE MORTAL INSTRUMENTS: CITY OF BONES FANTASY**

**\$32 MILL BO 3118 SCREENS PG-13 130 MINUTES**

**Lily Collins (THE ENGLISH TEACHER, THE BLIND SIDE, PRIEST, STUCK IN LOVE)**

**Jamie Campbell Bower (TWILIGHT 1, 2, 3, HARRY POTTER 1 & 2, ANONYMOUS)**

The film is about "Shadowhunters," angel-human hybrids who maintain some sort of global balance, but it also crams in vampires, werewolves, warlocks, and fairies (zombies, one character hilariously observes, "don't exist"). And rather than settling on the typical who-will-she-choose love triangle, *City of Bones* cranks up the gooey romantic volume, introducing a loaded quadrangle that includes a gay character, and, eventually, even the possibility of incest. Once teen heroine Clary (Collins) is being showered by sprinklers while kissing Shadowhunter Jace (Jamie Campbell Bower), then

arguing with Jace and lovelorn geek Simon (Robert Sheehan) about who'll be sharing her bed, it seems impossible that the movie doesn't have its tongue at least partially planted in its cheek.

As it happens, this kooky, apparent self-awareness proves vital. The sheer speed with which *City of Bones* moves from point to harebrained point has its own surreal humor, and if you're not down with the film's out-of-nowhere note that Bach was a Shadowhunter too (as proven by an oil painting that shows the composer bearing telltale tattoos), perhaps you'll dig its unabashed parading of gorgeous, model-esque males, which only ups an already overt wealth of homoeroticism. Beyond the cut-from-marble Adonis-ness of Jace, whom Bower exquisitely plays as someone whose comic relief is uncommonly sophisticated, there's gay Shadowhunter Alec (Kevin Zegers); bisexual, booty-short-rocking warlock Magnus (Godfrey Gao); and a small army of burly bears—or rather, wolves—who look like they may have just stomped out of a leather bar. Too abundant to be ignored, yet too innocuous to potentially offend, these particular bits simply comprise a notable part of the film's all-but-the-kitchen-sink design.



Also reveling in dressing Shadowhunter-in-training Clary in hooker garb, and veering off to devote an alarming amount of energy to exploring another character's random agoraphobia, *City of Bones* blasts by for a while as an odd and busy slice of highly watchable garbage. But none of this fully amends the toll the movie ultimately takes on the viewer, who still has to contend with a great deal of shoddy filmmaking. This is one of those actioners that looks to have been shot and edited during an earthquake, its fight scenes and chase sequences as choppy as they are incoherent (good luck keeping track of who's slaying whom). And while Jace is shown doing some groovy tricks with a portal made out of water, the visual effect is rather—to employ the label given to humans in this world—"mundane."

Fun times here for those that liked **R. I. P. D., THE PURGE, LORDS OF SALEM, THE HOST, EVIL DEAD and WARM BODIES.**





12/3 1 **THE WOLVERINE** ACTION  
\$132 MILL BO 3902 SCREENS PG-13 126 MINUTES

**Hugh Jackman (REAL STEEL, X MEN: THE LAST STAND, DECEPTION, SWORDFISH)**  
**Will Yun Lee (TOTAL RECALL, RED DAWN—TV—HAWAII FIVE-O, BIONIC WOMAN)**

When we first catch up with the titular X-Man (Hugh Jackman) in this one, all shreds of Logan, his civilian persona, have apparently ceased to be. With a matted beard that's grown as wild as his shaggy, shoulder-length hair, Wolverine is in full feral mode, living outdoors in some wintry American wilderness, and sharing the woods with beasts like a massive CG grizzly bear, who pees submissively when his two-legged neighbor saunters by. Harboring heaps of guilt over the death of Jean Grey ([Famke Janssen](#)), whom he killed for

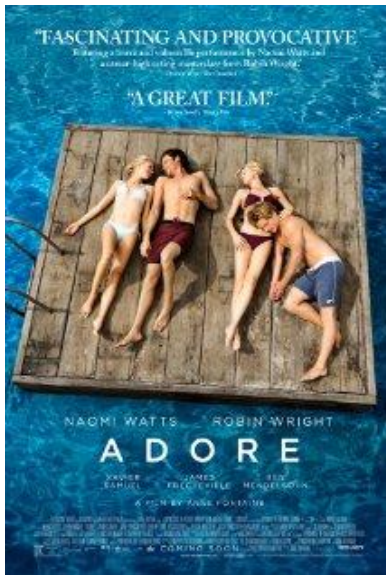
the greater good in *X-Men: The Last Stand*, and who regularly haunts his dreams this time around, the clawed mutant has reverted to animalism, but replaced his rage with regret. He's all set to be tamed, and from the moment scarlet-haired Yukio (Rila Fukushima), a Japanese assassin, intercepts him at a bar, that's precisely what this movie, the sixth in the chronologically unruly X-Men franchise, aims to do.

An associate of dying bigwig Yashida (Hal Yamanouchi), an ex-soldier Wolverine saved when the U.S. bombed Nagasaki, Yukio is tasked to bring our reluctant hero to Tokyo, where Yashida asks him to relinquish and pass along his powers of healing and immortality. Made possible by a suspicious Big Pharma-like company from America, and an even more suspicious doctor type (Svetlana Khodchenkova), the process is one Yashida thinks will appeal to the tormented Wolverine, whom Yashida calls a Ronin ("a samurai without a master"). But as anyone with even a passing knowledge of the X-Universe knows, taming this beast is about as likely as taking Cyclops to the optometrist, and the whole notion of blunting his powers basically fuels criticism of the film. Does it even need to be said that, as a brand-name, would-be blockbuster released in the summer of 2013, **THE WOLVERINE** could have used a bit more sharpening? Luckily, the film establishes an initial brute strength and uniqueness that work wonders to sustain its merit. The film almost entirely isolates its star from his popular cohorts and surroundings, and the benefits are immediately palpable. The first act is a largely muted character study, and when events shift over to Japan, which is presented with a refreshing lack of cultural condescension, there's an invaluable appeal to the exotic locale—a colorful, history-laden, and architecturally varied realm that, for Wolverine, feels both new and natural.



Just as the gruff character soon adopts a sleeker-than-ever hairstyle (he's forcibly groomed upon arriving at Yashida's home), the movie boasts the slickest set pieces ever helmed by Mangold. The director knows just when to ditch the dolly, when to have slain thugs fall into the camera, and when to fluidly follow a fighter as he (or she) leaps across buildings and vehicles (one sequence on the roof of a speeding train is at once ridiculous and spectacular). Furthermore, in what should help the film please martial-arts fans while sating comic-book nuts, the trained actors on screen (including Fukushima and Hiroyuki Sanada) engage in breathless, rivetingly captured swordplay, and always register as bona fide warriors. The same goes for Jackman, whose physical dedication to this role is its own form of heroism. His veins bulging like exposed tree roots, the actor aptly looks almost the same as he did 13 years ago, when Wolverine first met Jean and the gang. The uncanny visual continuity only further grounds the character, and while he goes through motions typical to this genre's protagonists (moral dilemma, emasculation-by-nemesis, acceptance of power, Christ-like exultation), they aren't often glaring deficits. **THE WOLVERINE** may be the year's best superhero movie because, for a sufficient amount of time, it doesn't feel like a superhero movie at all.

The film has it all and will be huge with all that loved **THE HEAT, THE CONJURING, STAR TREK: INTO THE DARKNESS, IRON MAN 3, 42, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, A GOOD DAY TO DIE HARD, SKY FALL** and **R. I. P. D.**



12/10 3 ADORE DRAMA  
\$1 MILL BO 215 SCREENS R 100 MINUTES

**Naomi Watts (J. EDGAR, THE IMPOSSIBLE, 21 GRAMS, THE RING 1 & 2, MULHOLLAND DRIVE)**  
**Robin Wright (MONEY BALL, THE CONSPIRATOR, HOUNDDOG, STATE OF PLAY, THE CONSPIRATOR)**

The setup, as one character eventually realizes, "couldn't be simpler": Lil (Naomi Watts) and Roz (Robin Wright) are lifelong friends and neighbors who've grown uncommonly close, and who each begin drinking from the fountain of youth by sleeping with the other's barely legal son. "They look like young gods," Roz says while gazing out at her son, Tom (James Frecheville), and Lil's boy, Ian (Xavier Samuel), two ripped surf bums with a bond akin to that of their mothers.

The film's two points of interest are the platonic love story between Lil and Roz (who are often questioned about being "lezzos" and briefly ponder the notion themselves), and the specter of time that hovers over the women and the boys who love them. For instance, when Roz's husband, Harold (Ben Mendelsohn), announces he's taking a new job in Sydney, one that would relocate the family, he becomes a kind of pseudo-symbol of menopause—a ticking clock threatening to change Roz's lush and fertile world forever. It's intriguing until Roz suddenly cuts loose her partner of 20 years, and the abruptness of the choice reflects every one of the movie's free-for-all developments. Couplings, injuries, marriages, and even babies come and go with the finesse of a tidal wave, and some of the edits are so hilariously on the nose and grace-deprived that walking out on the film is warranted (one particular cut from Ian ramming Roz against a wall to Lil riding Tom in her bedroom is an irredeemable howler).



This is a little indie worth a look if you liked **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, BEFORE MIDNIGHT, THE ENGLISH TEACHER, BLACK ROCK, THE ORANGES, THE MASTER, and BLUE LIKE JAZZ.**



12/10 1 **DESPICABLE ME 2** FAMILY  
\$364 MILL BO 4007 SCREENS PG 98 MINUTES

**VOICED BY Steve Carell, Russell Brand, Benjamin Bratt, Kristen Wiig**

The erstwhile villain known simply as Gru (Steve Carell) has turned his attentions, and the energies of his mass-produced subordinates, toward making jams and jellies, a fact worked for some comic mileage early into Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud's *Despicable Me 2*. It's another reason to let the unintelligible minions cause trouble, which the film isn't short on, but the sequence where we see Gru's followers stomping fruit and canning jam jars ends with a revealing irony. Dr. Nefario (Russell Brand), Gru's Q-like colleague, creates a jam consisting of every fruit flavor available, but the taste makes everyone sick. It's what passes for a poignant moment in a film that attempts to appeal to every cinematic taste on the spectrum and ultimately offers scant satisfactions in return.

Gru's jam-and-jelly start-up is put on the back burner when he's hired by the Anti-Villain League (AVL) to hunt down a mysterious baddie who flies around in a magnetized ship and who the organization believes works in secret at Gru's local mall. He's paired with AVL agent Lucy Wilde (Kristen Wiig) and something like a romance begins between the pair, though the script shows less than base interest in developing Lucy as anything beyond Gru's Girl Friday. It does, though, give the adorable Agnes (Elsie Kate Fisher), Gru's youngest adopted daughter, reason enough to start dreaming of Lucy as her new mom, and the film latches onto her big-eyed vision of the nuclear family, even if it has nothing interesting, or coherent, to say about this yearning.

To lend even a modicum of nuance or, dare I say it, insight to Agnes's dream shouldn't be a tall order for an animated romp so predisposed with the idea of the family unit. Of course, the film is busy simultaneously attempting to appeal to the zaniness of the pre-adolescent crowd, while also creating a send-up of super-villain signifiers and stirring up a quasi-believable teen romance, so there isn't much room for the courtship of Agnes's adopted father. Screenwriters Ken Daurio and Cinco Paul, who also penned the original film, expedite all character and narrative development to fit in more half-measured subplots (Margo's new boyfriend, Dr. Nefario's resignation), which takes the focus away from the more admirable elements of *Despicable Me* (the gadgets, Gru's struggle with villainy) and make *Despicable Me 2* feel oddly incomplete.

The film gets laughs when it taps into the anarchic spirit of animation, almost entirely embodied by the minions and their shenanigans, and there's something unexpectedly amusing about the fact that Gru's new boss (Steve Coogan) resembles a plump James Fox. There's also a rather funny bit involving El Macho's fake death by riding a shark strapped with dynamite into an active volcano. Such a moment speaks to the imaginative origins of Gru and his brood, which have here been sullied and stifled in a desperate, shallow bid at universal likability.

This will be huge with all that loved **TURBO, BRAVE, PLANES, LORAX, HOP, EPIC** and **HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA**.







12/10 1 **FAST & FURIOUS 6** ACTION  
\$239 MILL BO 3771 SCREENS PG-13 130 MINUTES

**Vin Diesel (FAST FIVE, CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK, THE PACIFIER, A MAN APART, XXX, BOILER ROOM)**  
**Dwayne Johnson (PAIN AND GAIN, THE OTHER GUYS, YOU AGAIN, THE GAME PLAN, GET SMART, DOOM, GRIDIRON GANG)**

Though it's constantly insinuated and alluded to, death comes to no one in the world of *Fast & Furious*—that is, unless someone is heedlessly evil or, well, European. Serious injuries are shrugged off, as the innumerable neck braces and casts would put a damper on the awesomeness at hand. Characters are constantly reincarnated and reintroduced with only a modicum of fanfare and even less logic, and to a degree, this is the entire point. Beginning with the entertaining **THE FAST & FURIOUS** in 2001, the series has become the eminent example of simple-as-stupid action filmmaking, even as the movies themselves have become incrementally less rousing. That the series tries absolutely nothing new is both its perceived chief asset and its increasingly burdensome deadweight.

So, when this one begins with DSS muscle Hobbs (Johnson) tracking down off-the-grid thief Dom Torello (Vin Diesel) to inform him that his thought-deceased ladylove, Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), is alive, in trouble, and suffering from amnesia, it really doesn't come as a surprise. Neither does a lick of the narrative's ensuing gambit, which brings Torello and BFF brother-in-law, Brian O'Connor (Paul Walker), together with their team, overseen by Hobbs and his new partner, Riley (Gina Carano), to take on Shaw (Luke Evans), an international criminal genius who's recruited Letty as part of his team to steal a super-secret something-or-other. Story has never been substantial to this franchise, its reputation having been built on the caliber of the gear (the Charger!) and the heedless pulse of the action sequences. Nevertheless, director Justin Lin, responsible for all but the first two installments, overruns his film(s) with talky stand-offs, forced comedic repartee, and overtly sentimental familial drama, none of which makes use of the essential narrative freedom that the series has, for better or worse, earned at this point. The result is narrative bloat caused by unconvincing dramatic filler that softens the miniscule thrill of what the films have always done right. Lin strives to approximate something like *Ocean's Eleven* for petrosexuals, but testosterone outweighs wit and cleverness at every turn in Chris Morgan's starched script. By ensuring that tongue is incapable of locating cheek, the filmmakers exude a distinct ignorance, as they're not only apparently unaware of how dumb the material is, but also have no sense of how to have full-tilt fun with said stupidity.

To be fair, Lin handles the torqued-up action with admirable energy and competence. Shaw's introductory chase through London, and the excellent climactic set piece on a massive military plane are high-water marks for the series, but these sequences are powered by technical oomph over clarity or tension. Still, they certainly bring out more inventiveness in Lin than the drama, which feels uncertain and strained in its solid placement now as a saga. The cast is outmatched by the heft of the story at this point, and further burdened by the forced seriousness of the film's most disposable elements. Johnson, the best of the film's leads, feels restrained and uninterested; Sung Kang mainly fills out the background, saddled with Han's dull romance with Gisele (Gal Gadot); and Evans brings scant menace to a villain that means to rival an entire team of heroes.

The film has all of the action and excitement the others did which will endear it to all fans of the franchise as well as **THE HEAT, IRON MAN 3, STAR TREK: INTO THE DARKNESS, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, PAIN AND GAIN, IDENTITY THIEF, SKY FALL,** and **PARKER.**





12/10 1 **SIGHTSEERS** COMEDY  
\$1 MILL BO 167 SCREENS NR 88 MINUTES

**Alice Lowe (TV—RUDDY HELL, HORRIBLE HISTORIES, LITTLE BRITAIN)**  
**Steve Oram (TV—HEADING OUT, TITTY BANGBANG, TWSTED LADIES)**

In Ben Wheatley's films, everyone is a murderer. Irritable low-level mobsters, harried suburban hit men, persnickety serial killers—these demented egotists are all homicidal, always full of justifications for their brutal acts, and always ready to dispense them after the hammer has fallen. In this one, a black-comic tale of tourism and slaughter set among the natural beauty and general dullness of northern England, there's no shortage of self-serving rationalizations; one character muses that, as it reduces carbon footprints, murder is actually green.

Yet despite the director's heavy reliance on humor, working from a funny script by stars Alice Lowe and Steve Oram, he remains serious in his fixations, again picking at the nasty scabs that speckle the human soul.

Picking up new girlfriend Tina (Lowe) at the home of her shrill hypochondriac mother, Chris (Oram) intends to show her the simple pleasures of a rural caravanning vacation, with a schedule spanning a ruined monastery, some misty moors, and a museum dedicated to pencils. Arrogant and insecure, Steve also has problems with anger, which means sneakily resorting to surreptitious slayings over the most trivial slights or offenses. This would seem to pose a problem for the seemingly naïve Alice, but her initial bewilderment quickly gives way to a desire to impress her new beau, which means taking to murder with a sloppy, childish glee. Her enthusiasm ends up straining their relationship, not for any ethical reason, but for the differences in their methods; British to his core, Chris has firm, unshakable opinions about the proper methods and validations for dealing death.



The key to Wheatley's aesthetic lies in the utter moral bankruptcy of all his characters. The director uses the ease with which acts of violence are employed to explore the darkness within the shriveled hearts of prickly oddballs, who he further uses to poke fun at the fastidious stodginess of English society. A stylistic jack of all trades, he swerves wildly between genres here once again, and his satire is equally expansive in its modes, skittering from condemnatory cultural critique to good-natured ribbing, while also slotting in moments of actual pathos.

This sardonic depiction of Britain, as a land where a thin veneer of strained politesse and fussy specificity of tastes masks a throbbing heart of darkness, makes for Wheatley's best film yet. Connecting his homicidal couple's current agenda to the looming influence of England's voluminous past, he imagines the extremes of barbaric primitivism and genteel civility as two sides of the same spectrum, with the latter mostly compensating for the continued existence of the former. In doing this, Wheatley locates something deliciously sinister in the remnants of that Victorian personality, brilliantly couching the roots of his film's violence not in psychosis, but in everyday close-mindedness, pinpointing how aggression gets sublimated within the standards of polite behavior.

The butt of this joke is Chris, who frames his killings as acts of civic responsibility: one victim gets run over for littering on a historic tram; later, attempting to justify a hiker's bashed-in skull, the red-bearded butcher comments, "He's not a person, he's a Daily Mail reader." Tina, meanwhile, is random and impulsive in her attacks, and the idea of killing out of desire rather than to enforce a system of obligatory civility flies in the face of Chris's entire meticulous system. By locating the tension here, Wheatley and his writers establish a comedic engine that's also located at the core of the film's ideas.

Terrific acting here able to tell a story that will be liked by fans of **LIKE CRAZY, THE GUARD, THE DEBT, THE TEMPEST, BERNIE, WELCOME TO THE RILEY'S, CYRUS, OUR IDIOT BROTHER** and **NOW YOU SEE ME**.





12/10 3 TOUCHY FEELY DRAMA  
\$1 MILL BO 259 SCREENS DRAMA R 89 MINUTES

**Allison Janney (TV-THE WEST WING, MOM, THE BIG C, IN PLAIN SIGHT—FILM-THE HELP, JUNO, THE ORANGES)**  
**Ellen Page (INCEPTION, THE EAST, JUNO, SMART PEOPLE, X ME: THE LAST STAND)**  
**Rosemary DeWitt (TV-MAD MEN, THE UNITED STATES OF TARA,-FILM-RACHEL GETTING MARRIED, THE COMPANY MEN)**

The title of Lynn Shelton's of this film literally refers to lead character Abby's ( DeWitt) profession as a massage therapist, serves as a guiding metaphor for the film's exploration of human connection and emotional estrangement. As far as ruling metaphors go, it's a rather obvious one, but Shelton overcomes the base literariness of the conceit by crafting a film of astonishingly sustained mood and by tying this beguiling atmosphere to the mental states of her characters.

Chronicling the ups and downs of a Seattle family, Shelton imbues her film with a hushed sense of mystery, present in both the relative quiet of the soundtrack and a visual strategy that simultaneously paints her settings with a lushly colored palette and keeps everything at a cold remove through the sterility of the digital imagery. This is a world where the occurrence of mystical events and small miracles don't feel out of place, but where the biggest miracle is always any kind of true emotional connection between its characters.

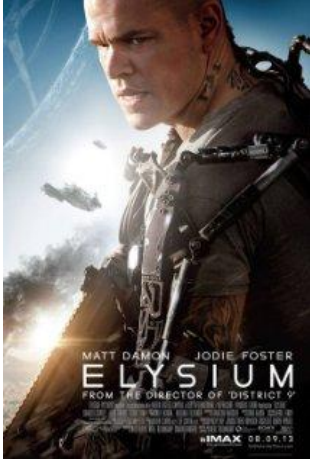
While Abby agrees to move in with her boyfriend (Scoot McNairy) and begins to suffer a mental breakdown which leads her to recoil from human touch, her brother, Paul (Josh Pais), a man so uncomfortable around other people that he seems barely able to communicate in complete sentences, finds his dying dental practice magically transformed after he appears to have acquired a magic healing touch. Meanwhile, his daughter, Jenny (Page), who works as an assistant at his office, longs to break free from his orbit and pursue her own life.



Shelton understands human behavior to be essentially irreducible to easy formulas and the world to be full of inexplicable wonders. Thus she smartly refuses to give any definitive explanation of Abby's breakdown or her brother's acquisition of his newfound powers. But that's not to say that the director isn't interested in observing the intricacies of human interaction, a curiosity that results in a series of encounters between characters whose repeated attempts at achieving intimacy are exactly mapped out in their frequently awkward details by the talented ensemble.

Fitting her aesthetic to her character's moods, Shelton reaches the apogee of her filmmaking late in the movie when she ties a series of loving panning shots of an empty house to Abby's wistful reveries, the image and word literally disconnected, but thematically coherent. Unfortunately, after that scene, the director succumbs to the need to conclude her story along more conventional lines. The result is a rather shockingly hasty resolution, an unsatisfying shortcut in the journeys of Paul and Abby toward recovery and regaining both their literal and symbolic sense of touch.

This is a nice quirky little movie that is also well acted. It will touch the hearts of all that liked **THE WAY WAY BACK, WISH YOU WERE HERE, WHAT MAIZIE KNEW, MUD, SAVE THE DATE, SIDE EFFECTS** and **THE SESSIONS**.



12/17 1 **ELYSIUM** SCI/FI/THRILLER  
\$93 MILL BO 3284 SCREENS R 109 MINUTES

**Matt Damon (COURAGE UNDER FIRE, THE BOURNE LEGACY, CONTAGION, THE INFORMANT, THE DEPARTED)**  
**Jodie Foster (SILENCE OF THE LAMBS, MEAN STREETS, CONTACT, FLIGHTPLAN, THE ACCUSED, BUGSY MALONE)**

This movie begins on a sweet note, with a young boy and girl bonding in the tattered landscape that is Earth in the mid-22nd century. Above them spins the film's eponymous colony, a luxurious haven for the paranoid rich, and the young boy, Max, promises the girl, Frey, that he'll bring her up there one day. It's hard to argue the benefits of getting there, as Elysium is constructed as a vast stretch of mansions equipped with tools that render inhabitants of the colony all but immortal. Of course, it's all completely restricted from those who are earthbound, masses made up of the aimlessly destitute or those who work only to be mistreated by cold, near-demonic employers. Throughout, **DISTRICT 9** wunderkind Neill Blomkamp strides closer to the muscular, subversive genre terrain of John Carpenter and Paul Verhoeven, but the writer-director still continues to lay his pathos on just a bit too thick.

Years after the film's opening, Max (Damon) is an ex-con who gets irradiated while fixing a faulty machine at work and is given a bottle of pills to tide him over for the few days he has left to live. Frey (Alice Braga) is hardly better off, trying to keep her Leukemia-stricken daughter alive while working as a full-time nurse. Max's desperate need for the life-giving machines on Elysium brings him into the service of Spider (Wagner Moura), a resistance leader and criminal who Max went to jail in order to protect. It's Spider who fits him with his exo-skeletal robot suit to power his weakened body, and Blomkamp smartly focuses on the force of mechanically enhanced hand-to-hand combat as much as, if not more than, the story's plethora of bullets and bombs. The film's action is occasionally of the frenzied handcam variety, but the director consistently nails the sense of oomph and the bloody stakes of the messy brand of violence he peddles. Indeed, for those who've hankered this summer-movie season for splattering body explosions, **ELYSIUM** provides a (not exactly) healthy fix.



Most of these detonations occur when Max and his team attempt to kidnap and download financial information from the brain of John Carlyle (William Fichtner), the CEO of Max's former employer. Instead, they download evidence of a coup being planned by Delacourt (a heavily dubbed Jodie Foster), an icy higher-up in the Elysium government. The plot gets even more needlessly twisty from there, but the film never sags, which makes all the difference. Blomkamp keeps the narrative moving quick and acting nasty for the most part, but he only indulges the knowing trashiness of the story up to a point. Max's main nemesis, a bounty hunter named Kruger (Sharlto Copley), serves as a loving throwback to the days of flamboyantly sadistic, impossibly hard-to-kill villains, the types that Stallone, Van Damme, and Schwarzenegger had to tussle with. There are more than a few other touches of hard-boiled frivolity in **ELYSIUM**, but Blomkamp waters down this admirably hard shot of sci-fi nonsense toward the end of his film. Though he selfishly attempts to barter with Delacourt and Kruger, a tactic that doesn't end well, Max remains essentially a polished beacon of innocence and goodness. Damon is more utilized for his physical build than his dramatic ability, but by the time Max gets all martyr-like, tying his fate to and becoming the sudden underdog champion of a little girl dying of Leukemia, any sense of genuine character is washed out anyway by the blinding righteousness he represents.

The purity afforded Max, in stark contrast to the cartoonish evilness represented by Fichtner, Copley, and Foster, dulls the force of Blomkamp's inventive set pieces and gadgetry, which are at the heart of his undeniable talents. His fight scenes are exhilarating, beautifully paced, and impactful, and there are moments, visually, where one can nearly see the Alex Cox dream project lurking underneath the script's earnestly heart-on-sleeve sheen, but it all ultimately feels a bit too safe. This film isn't quite tough or brash enough to sell the cynicism Blomkamp pickles his story in, but his style has tightened, grown fleetier, meaner, and more direct in

the wake of **DISTRICT 9**. A cheekily gruesome and genuinely urgent entertainment, Blomkamp's latest nevertheless can't help but beg the question: Where's Snake Plissken when you need him?

Very entertaining to be sure. Fans of **THIS IS THE END**, **PACIFIC RIM**, **WORLD WAR Z**, **OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN**, **OBLIVION**, **SKY FALL** and **AFTER EARTH** will love this one too.



12/17 1 THE FAMILY DRAMA  
\$38 MILL BO 2432 SCREENS R 111 MINUTES

**Robert DeNiro (THE FAN, STANLEY & IRIS, GOODFELLAS, MEET THE FOCKERS, TAXI DRIVER)**

**Michelle Pfeiffer (THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS, SCARFACE, WOLF, ONE FINE DAY, MARRIED TO THE MOB)**

**Tommy Lee Jones (COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER, THE FUGITIVE, UNDER SEIGE, THE PACKAGE, EYE'S OF LAURA MARS)**

A French/American co-production, Luc Besson's film takes place among the quaint rural villages of Normandy, telling the tale of a supposedly Italian-American family. Opening with a brief scene of a different family, unceremoniously slaughtered by a leather-gloved assassin while eating

dinner, the movie dispenses this initial unit with jarring haste, long before the scene has any chance to establish dramatic logic.

After ratting out his former mafia cohorts, Giovanni Manzoni (Robert De Niro) begins a new life as Fred Blake, sent off with his family to witness protection in France. As we meet them, the Blakes are once again on the move, after being uprooted by some recent nasty business on the Riviera. It's easy to guess what may have transpired, since the response of each of these roughly sketched ciphers is to greet any unpleasant situation with flat, gratuitous violence, resulting in a repetitive series of gags that all follow the same basic formula: A local does something annoying and French, and one our sociopathic heroes strikes back the American way, via ruthless beatings or a well-placed explosive device. The fact that we get no sense of these people beyond the most routine dynamics is a problem, but it's also an inherent condition of the cartoon world they inhabit, one in which predictable stasis wins out over any semblance of character or development.

This is seen specifically in Giovanni, who by writing his memoirs briefly stares down his violent mobster legacy only to realize he's a pretty great guy after all via a dumb whacking montage that serves as another squandered opportunity for visual flair. It's hinted that the Blakes have been in hiding for roughly six years, and it's at first puzzling why their story didn't pick up immediately after their entry into the program.

This may not be DeNiro's best effort but he adds the teeth here. Fans of **REDS 2**, **BULLET TO THE HEAD**, **EMPIRE STATE**, **SNITCH**, **THE CALL**, **STAND UP GUYS**, **EXPENDABLES 2**, **BROKEN CITY**, and **TAKEN 2** will be entertained.







12/17 1 **KICK ASS 2 ACTION**  
\$29 MILL BO 2945 SCREENS R 103 MINUTES

**Chloe Grace (DIARY OF A WIMPY KID, HUGO, DARK SHADOWS, LET ME IN, 500 DAYS OF SUMMER)**  
**Jim Carrey (FUN WITH DICK AND JANE, MR, POPPER'S PENQUINS, ACE VENTURA: PET DETECTIVE, THE MASK)**

The sequel retains the original's blithely manipulative tone, and writer-director Jeff Wadlow barely pads this irritating continuation with new or, heaven forbid, original ideas. His best one is his first one: shifting the narrative focus away from the eponymous homegrown hero, the alter ego of teenager David Lizewski (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), and more toward Mindy, now a high school freshman. Under the guidance of Marcus (Morris Chestnut), her new guardian, she hesitantly attempts to go straight, just as David is getting back into the game. In essence, they both seek and find (unsteady) acceptance, as she joins up with a triptych of bitchy cheerleader types—and Kick-Ass finds himself the new star in a league of masked do-gooders, led by Colonel Stars and Stripes (Jim Carrey), a born-again ex-assassin. The league, which also includes Donald Faison's Dr. Gravity and Lindy Booth's Night Bitch, break up a prostitution ring and foil a few small crimes, but the gauntlet isn't thrown down until Chris D'Amico (Christopher Mintz-Plasse) returns as the Motherfucker. Chris summons his own league of villains, brokered through his family's bodyguard, Javier (John Leguizamo), and starts offing Kick-Ass's loved ones, out of revenge for his late father, but like Mindy, the legacy Chris is burdened with is only of base interest to Wadlow. The director's real joy is in garnishing this wailing tantrum of a movie with misogyny, homophobia, and racism for nothing more than shock value, and that's not even mentioning the "sick stick," a weapon that causes Mindy's would-be besties to simultaneously vomit and shit their pants.

Wadlow would like to see his film as brash and punkish, but it's really just hypocritical. Seeing a female superhero go righteously berserk on the shallow and sexist alike is invigorating, but then Wadlow hangs perversely on a grating dance number by scantily clad Brooke (Claudia Lee). (At one point, X-Factor contestants Union J appear in a doozy of a video-cum-plug that makes a Brooke acolyte, in her words, "soaked," which doesn't particularly help matters.) The film luxuriates in its edginess. The film is stuck in the self-aggrandizing mindset of its most delusional characters, which is in direct opposition to its central premise of what unbridled heroism and evil look like in reality. Ultimately, the film shares less of the identity issues of Kick-Ass or Hit-Girl than of the Motherfucker, a fraudulent, sadistic, and wealthy twerp who's desperate for any kind of attention his audience can provide.

The same campy fun here and will draw fans loving **KICK ASS, R.I.P.D., THE BLING RING, MEAN GIRLS, THE PURGE, WARM BODIES, THE HOST, CABIN IN THE WOODS** and **IMMORTALS**.





12/17 1 THE LONE RANGER ACTION  
\$90 MILL BO 3478 SCREENS PG-13 149 MINUTES

**Johnny Depp (EDWARD SCISSORHANDS, 21 JUMP STREET, BLOW, ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO, BENNY & JOON, DONNIE BRASCO, NICK OF TIME)**  
**Armie Hammer (MIRROR MIRROR, J. EDGAR, THE SOCIAL NETWORK)**

Beginning with a shot that immediately showcases director Verbinski's industrialist themes and filmic references, scanning over an under-construction Golden Gate Bridge and a red balloon released high above a carnival, the movie starts in 1933 San Francisco, where a young boy (Mason Cook) in a Lone Ranger getup enters a circus tent with Wild West exhibits. There, he comes across what looks like a Native American wax figure (cheekily labeled as "The noble savage in his native habitat"), who magically comes to life and begins telling the boy a story (we gather that the man's a decrepit Tonto, with Depp in wrinkly prosthetics). From this framing device, we jump back to Colby, Texas circa 1869, where the railroad has finally come, with, according to tycoon Latham Cole (Tom Wilkinson), the promise of progress. Aboard a train headed toward the town is metropolitan, hopelessly square attorney John Reid (Hammer), as well as prisoners like known killer Butch Cavendish (an unrecognizable William Fichtner) and the ostracized Tonto. As Butch's cronies catch up to the train to free their hair-lipped leader, so begins one of many boisterous, off-the-rails set pieces, with justice-conscious John forced to step up and take action, and the whole thing coming to a dusty, inches-from-death halt after a few million dollars' worth of CGI wreckage.



Verbinski certainly did his western-movie homework, for outside of all the rootin'-tootin' Rube Goldbergian action scenes, the director consciously evokes John Ford with his widescreen vistas of sun-baked deserts (on-location shooting took place in Utah, Texas, and beyond), and his nod to films like *The Searchers* with scenes of near-helpless families under attack in the wilderness. To start, he also makes a haphazard, two-man chain gang of Tonto and John, who go on to become allies when the latter, newly deputized by his Texas-ranger brother (James Badge Dale), is killed by Butch's gang, then inexplicably resurrected. *The Lone Ranger* is undeniably fun in spurts (and features unexplained, offbeat elements like mad cannibal rabbits and a cross-dressing henchman), but it's also another example of its maker's wild propensity for indulgence, clocking in at 149 minutes and featuring its share of ostentatious flourishes, like a joke of a transition that sees a desert scene become a ripply glass of drug-spiked water.

The movie, of course, barrels toward climax upon climax, and while possibly better photographed, the crashes, bangs, and booms. The cowboys-and-Indians nostalgia—which hits its peak when a familiar theme song blares on the soundtrack—seems pleasant from a distance, but reviving this specific type of old-school film gives Disney a free pass to make yet another white-dominated and male-dominated diversion (as a damsel in distress and a brothel-owning femme fatale, respectively, Ruth Wilson and Helena Bonham Carter are barely present). There are plenty of remarks about "stupid white men" from Depp and the actual Native Americans in the cast. After finding that his society is considerably lacking in justice, John opts to remain an outlaw, and if there's a lesson to be learned here, it's that the film biz could use as many outlaws as possible.

A fun film that will appeal to those that liked **2 GUNS, R.I.P.D., THE HEAT, IRON MAN 3, OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN, A GOOD DAY TO DIE HARD, DJANGO UNCHAINED,** and **TAKEN 2.**



**12/17 1 ONE DIRECTION: THIS IS US MUSIC**  
**\$29 MILL BO 2869 SCREENS PG 92 MINUTES**

The appeal of One Direction seems to be that they sing what their rapturous fans want to hear. Like, literally. “They say what I want to hear,” one teen gushes about the boy band. “I know they love me,” insists another.

The Morgan Spurlock-directed concert doc *One Direction: This Is Us* does nothing to dissuade these girls about their superstar crushes, following Liam, Louis, Niall, Zayn and Harry—oh, Harry! (don’t judge: every girl’s got a favorite)—on their 2012-13 Take Me Home Tour across Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. These boys are as big as the Beatles, drawing hordes of screaming, crying fans not only to their concerts but to the hotels, airports and streets they pass through—except, that is, when they’re in *Jackass*-inspired disguises.

None older than 21, these mates bring boyish enthusiasm to even the film’s most manufactured moments. In fact, their very existence was hatched for the 2010 British *X Factor*. When none progressed in the show as a solo act, they were formed into a group under Simon Cowell’s mentorship. They didn’t win the show, but Cowell, a producer on the film, signed them to his label anyway, and since then, they’ve exploded into one of the biggest bands in the world.

To their credit, the boys seem aware of the tenuousness of their situation. They don’t want to be flashes in the pan. They want to endure, like the musicians on their T-shirts: the Doors, Hendrix, the Stones. But if Spurlock’s behind-the-scenes footage is any indication, their fate lies in the hands of others: their songwriters, their choreographers, their wardrobe designers, and their security guys, who wrangle them onto the stage.



**12/17 1 PERCY JACKSON: SEA OF MONSTERS**  
**FAMILY**

**\$67 MILL BO 3380 SCREENS PG 106 MINUTES**

**Logan Lerman (PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER, STUCK IN LOVE, THE THREE MUSKETEERS, 3:10 TO YUMA)**

**Alexandra Daddario (FILM---HALL PASS—TV—NURSE JACKIE, WHITE COLLAR, PARENTHOOD)**

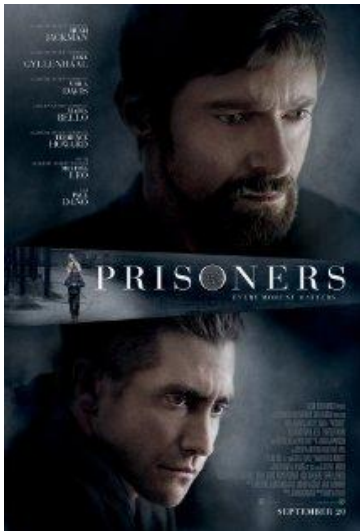


This time around, in order to save their home and thwart Luke's dirty deeds, the trio needs to hunt down the Golden Fleece, carrying out a rogue mission alongside that of Clarisse (Leven Rambin), a cartoonishly hard-nosed go-getter officially put on the case by bigwig Dionysus (Stanley Tucci, who really needs to get the hell out of these degrading paycheck projects). The trouble is, the Fleece is hidden amid the Sea of Monsters, a.k.a. the Bermuda Triangle, which is guarded, not by the ghost of Amelia Earhart, but by a massive, toothed, esophageal whirlpool monster—essentially an aquatic copy of *The Return of the Jedi's* Great Pit of Carkoon.



Tyson goes from belittled outcast to a one-eyed beacon of pride, but there's still the matter of Grover, a black satyr last seen eating cans. It's slightly interesting that, in this world, otherness is relative, and even amid a bunch of half-human teens with freaky powers, a cyclops is still relegated to the loser's table. But even if you're able to entertain the minor intrigue that element holds, it too is dashed out by boneheaded lines, such as when Percy preaches to Annabeth, "I know this sounds insane, but part of my dyslexia lets me see map lines on the water." Forget the fact that the uninitiated would know nothing of Percy's dyslexia; why would Annabeth, daughter of a deity, find any insanity in the radar-like abilities of a boy who can control the sea? I'll tell you what's insane: the probability that folks will go easy on this dreck because it's aimed at younger viewers, who are being distressingly trained to expect little from their art.

Well, fans of **THE CROODS**, **AFTER EARTH**, **SCARY MOVIE 5**, **GI JOE: RETALIATION**, **FRANKENWEENIE**, **ICE AGE: CONTINENTAL DRIFT**, and **PARANORMAN** will find things to like here.



**12/17 1 PRISONERS THRILLER**  
**\$58 MILL BO 2907 SCREENS R 153 MINUTES**

**Hugh Jackman (THE PRESTIGE, X MEN , DECEPTION, RISE OF THE GUARDIANS, )**

**Paul Dano (LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE, RUBY SPARKS, COWBOYS & ALIENS, LOOPER)**

**Jake Gyllenhaal (MOONLIGHT MILE, THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, END OF WATCH, OCTOBER SKY, CITY SLICKERS)**

Running a little over two-and-a-half hours, the movie solemnly observes the repercussions of a kidnapping in a Pennsylvania community. Keller ( Jackman), a religious man well-stocked for any possible emergency—his basement is filled with supplies, including gas masks—gets understandably alarmed when his young daughter, Anna (Erin Gerasimovich), goes missing near the end of Thanksgiving, along with her friend, Joy (Kyla Drew Simmons). His suspicions lead him to believe that a mentally slow weirdo named Alex Jones ( Dano) abducted them—they were playing around his RV earlier in the day—but Loki ( Gyllenhaal), the smart, dedicated detective investigating the disappearance, is convinced that Alex doesn't have the intellectual faculties to pull off this crime. Keller's white-hot anger blinds him to Loki's logic, however, and soon he's pursuing Alex on his own, boarding him up in an abandoned building and torturing him in an effort to force him to reveal where Anna and Joy are.

Frustrated that the cops haven't taken his accusations seriously enough, Keller believes he can beat the truth out of the scared, quiet outsider. Joy's parents (played by Viola Davis and Terrence Howard) are initially aghast at Keller's actions, but after one of them eventually offers tacit approval by not speaking out, we're meant to be shocked by the revelation concerning what some people would be willing to do to protect their children.

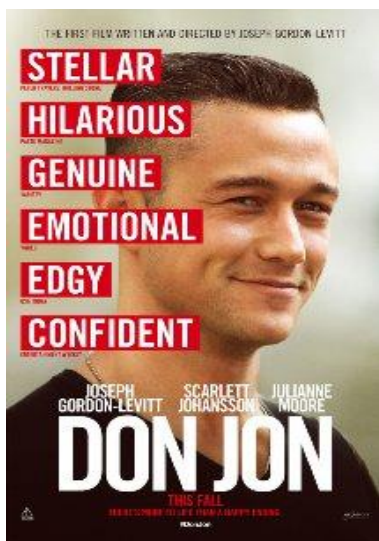
The problem is that Alex smells like a red herring from the start. Forced to wear unsightly creepy and unfashionable oversized glasses, Dano plays Alex as a one-note simpleton whose unkempt hair and ineffectual speaking style (when he speaks at all) fits our collective image of a sniveling pedophile. But with such an

obvious setup, it becomes progressively more difficult to believe that Alex is the culprit, making Keller's increasing abuse of the man more and more pointless. Maybe that's the point.

With that said, though, the film's aura of misery and tension is coldly effective. Working with longtime Coen brothers cinematographer Roger Deakins, Villeneuve has transformed this Pennsylvania town into a land of endless rain and overcast skies—there's a sense of decay always seeping into the corners of the frame. More so than some of the characters' actions, the movie's atmosphere suggests a modern world in which we no longer feel safe, always prepared for the next bit of gloomy news to come our way. In such an environment, **PRISONERS'** dread is allowed to run free, and Villeneuve is at his best letting his slightly convoluted tale slowly uncoil as Loki tries to get to the bottom of these missing girls' whereabouts.

Suffused with glumness, the cast members come across as different vivid shades of grey. Jackman is wholly convincing as this angry, haunted man, although better (but less flashy) is Gyllenhaal playing a detective who is emotionally invested in the crime but for other reasons: He's never failed to solve a case. Throughout, *Prisoners* is filled with meaty performances, everyone marching to the same desperate, disillusioned beat. It's a punishing experience and a rewarding one.

All fans of **PARANOIA, REDS 2, WHITE HOUSE DOWN, EMPIRE STATE, 42, SNITCH,** and **PARKER** will have a great time with this one.



12/31 1 DON JON COMEDY  
\$23 MILL BO R 90 MINUTES

**Joseph Gordon-Levitt (INCEPTION, 50/50, THE BLOOM BROTHERS, THE DARK KNIGHT RISES, 500 DAYS OF SUMMER)**

**Julianne Moore (BEING FLYNN, THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT, WHAT MAIZIE KNEW, CHILDREN OF MEN, LAWS OF ATTRACTION, FREEDOMLAND)**

**Scarlett Johanson (LOST IN TRANSLATION, THE NANNY DIARIES, THE PRESTIGE, THE HORSE WHISPERER, THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE)**

Joseph Gordon-Levitt's directorial debut, **DON JON**, does for porn-dependence what **SHAME** did for sex addiction by offering a surface-level look at the effects of its specific pathology on its lead male character. But while Steve McQueen's film made no effort to explain its upper-crust hero's inability to stop fucking, Gordon-Levitt attempts to situate his own lead character's porn obsession within a very specific context: a working-class Italian New Jersey home life whose patriarchal structure perpetuates the view that women are little more than objects of desire and a media environment that echoes these same ideas.

As such, the film is both blunt in its portrayal of a stereotypical Italian family. Beginning with a credit sequence that functions as a montage of sexy televisual images from throughout the years, presumably representing the "education" of Jon Martello (Gordon-Levitt), the film then goes on to introduce via raunchy, allegedly comical voiceover the predicament of its protagonist. "Don" Jon, as his friends call him, has little difficulty picking up attractive women at the club. But while he regularly indulges in this practice, no sexual experience can compare for him to the pleasures of porn, a world of pure fantasy where women do things they won't do in real life.

Things change when he begins dating the gorgeous, elusive Barbara Sugarman (Johansson), who declares Jon's porn habit "disgusting" and forbids him from looking at any of his online skin flicks. The introduction of Barbara serves several purposes. It allows the viewer to see the other side of Catholic-boy Jon's virgin-whore fixation, as he continually refers to her as a "beautiful thing," an object to be worshipped. The couple's visit to Jon's parent's home also hammers home the harmful effects of his family's traditional ways of thinking. While Jon's father, Jon Sr. (Tony Danza), leers perpetually at Barbara and is moved to wax "poetic" about the time he first met his own wife and mentally declared, in what he views misguidedly as a bit of romanticism, "That's mine," Jon's mother, Angela (Glenn Headly), is simply thrilled that he's found someone who can provide her with grandchildren.

Finally, Barbara's role is to provide an unforgivable stereotype of the material-obsessed Joisey princess who symbolically castrates our hero, bossing him around and pushing him to get a better job than his current bartender gig, not because she cares about his well-being, but because she doesn't want to be with someone in the "service industry." While things don't last long with Barbara, she's a central enough figure in the film for her to help Gordon-Levitt undermine his own point. If she's the representative "real-life" woman, then isn't everything Jon thinks about women and about the superiority of porn justified?

Fortunately, both for Jon and the movie, Gordon-Levitt introduces another character, an older woman that Jon meets at a college class he's taking. Played by a game Julianne Moore, the only person in the film who doesn't talk as if she's never left New Jersey in her life, Esther sets about schooling Jon in the realities of sexual behavior. As such, she's both a refreshing presence in the movie, someone who talks and acts like an actual adult, and a character thanklessly tasked with delivering the film's blunt message about porn. Ultimately, she teaches Jon that porn isn't "real" sex and that the reason he's dissatisfied in the sack is because he never takes the actual presence of his partner into account, treating her strictly as a living masturbatory aid. Hardly revelatory stuff, though it clearly is for Jon and apparently for

Gordon-Levitt too. But in the end, the discovery by one New Jersey meathead about how to have good sex is no more remarkable than the non-lesson delivered to Michael Fassbender's affluent Manhattanite, Jon's cinematic counterpoint, about his own uncontrollable sexual habits.

The film contains a lot of explicit talk and some nudity. The acting is quite good and adept at telling such a story helping it to appeal to all that liked **WE'RE THE MILLERS**, **21 AND OVER**, **THE DETAILS**, **BLUE LIKE JAZZ**, **WANDERLUST**, **SHAME**, and **BEGINNERS**.



12/31 1 **INSIDIOUS 2** HORROR

\$80 MILL BO 3209 SCREENS PG-13 106 MINUTES

**Patrick Wilson (THE CONJURING, THE LEDGE, INSIDIOUS, PROMETHEUS)**

**Barbara Hershey (BLACK SWAN, THE NATURAL, THE RIGHT STUFF, THE STUNT MAN)**

A group of paranormal investigators have broken into the long abandoned home of a deceased serial killer. One of them slowly approaches a dusty chest latched shut in a creaky corner, arms outstretched to open the mysterious storage unit. That's when a lady in the audience shouted, "That's probably not a good idea!" That made me laugh, mostly because of her qualifying the statement with a "probably." It's most definitely a bad idea



to do anything in the long abandoned home of a deceased serial killer, especially if you're in a horror movie. It's the kind of movie that, when a flutter of white fabric flits through a doorway deep in the background and Barbara Hershey nervously calls out "Renai?" you can be completely and totally sure that that's not Renai at the end of the hall.

As the pre-credit jump scare at the end of **INSIDIOUS** implied, after rescuing one of their sons (Ty Simpkins) from the clutches of an evil ghost in a shadowy spirit world, Renai (Rose Byrne) suspects her husband Josh (Patrick Wilson) returned with a possessive evil clinging to him. *Chapter 2* picks up shortly thereafter, as Josh tries to convince his wife that moving into his childhood home with his mother (Hershey) will help them move on. She's not buying it, especially as ghosts appear frequently in ways she recognizes from the first time.

There are mysterious noises, startling apparitions, slamming doors, bleats of punctuating orchestration, portentous dreams, a return of the bumbling tech-head ghost hunters (Whannell and Angus Sampson), and loud, sudden ghostly activity.

After getting his first big break with the inventive, but icky for icky's sake, 2004 feature **SAW** Wan has slowly but surely become a confident horror director. He plays on fears by foregrounding what's inside and outside of the frame, moving the camera in sometimes-masterful ways to reveal scares and withhold jolts until the tension of not getting a shock is almost unbearable. But here he's putting his talents to use with awfully thin material, cheaply repetitive and recycled, not just from its own predecessor, but from a whole host of horror tropes. The whole thing is shivery.

Horror fans, especially those that liked **THE HOST**, **THE CONJURING**, **VHS/S**, **THE LAST EXORCISM 2**, **MAMA**, **DARK SKIES**, and **APOLLO 18**.

