In covering war, do we really make a difference?” asks war correspondent Marie Colvin (Rosamund Pike) in director Matthew Heineman’s *A Private War*, which is set near the beginning of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. That this moment of existential self-doubt is framed as ominous—her words are heard over a low-angle shot of women trudging along a road in burqas—offers some indication of how seriously the filmmakers take the ethics of field reporting on atrocities. Based on Marie Brenner’s *Vanity Fair* article about the real-life Colvin, *A Private War* ultimately sides with the late journalist’s assertion that the whos and whys of war matter far less in journalism than finding the right human-interest angle to hook an audience.

Colvin’s obsessive desire to get the most dangerous, exciting story she can is positioned as a kind of feedback loop in which her inability to cope with the trauma of what she’s seen compels her to pursue ever-more harrowing subject matter, which in turn further compounds her trauma. That insight is certainly keen, but the film clumsily falls back on the clichés of war being hell and akin to a drug, and often leans on dismal dialogue to bluntly spell out Colvin’s issues. In one exchange, her sister, Rita (Nikki Amuka-Bird), hesitantly asks, “Do you think you have post-traumatic stress disorder?” To which Colvin brashly responds: “PTSD is what soldiers get.” Elsewhere, Colvin neatly lays out all of her fears to her photographer, Paul Conroy (Jamie Dornan), tritely stating that she keeps a strict diet in order to stay fit but that she also eats gregariously because she’s seen so much starvation in the world.

At its best, *A Private War* puts Colvin’s cynicism under an interrogation lamp, digging into the extreme careerism that undergirds her drive to report the truth. This can be most plainly seen in the naked greed of her editor, Sean (Tom Hollander), a figure of almost Mephistophelean dimensions. The man, aware of the prestige that Colvin’s work brings to *The Times*, constantly and successfully goads his star reporter back into the field, even if it means putting her sanity at risk. But Sean, like every other aspect of Colvin’s life depicted on screen, is ultimately softened with a sentimental brushstroke, as in the way his manipulations are recast as awestruck appreciation for Colvin’s singular ability to infiltrate and report on some of the most dangerous places on Earth. The film’s final moments show how her compulsive inability to drop a story directly informed her death, and the framing of her single-minded obsession as heroic rather than tragic only simplifies her life’s work.

This will rent as well as *THE WIFE, COLETTE, BLINDSPOTTING, LEAVE NO TRACE, WINCHESTER.*
The slick, cool thriller “The Girl in the Spider’s Web” provides the perfect escapism for adults. The film, based on David Lagercrantz’s novel, is as dreary and sordid as its source material. But this film is well written and acted, and Fede Alvarez’s skillful direction keeps things fresh and interesting until the end.

Claire Foy steps into the role of Lisbeth Salander, a badass computer hacker with a taste for women and thirst for blood. Salander fancies herself the righter of wrongs, especially when it comes to taking revenge on men who abuse women. She’s a sort of feminist anti-hero, and Foy has the acting chops as well as the somber magnetism to pull it off. This reboot has her taking over the role from Rooney Mara and Noomi Rapace, and she’s the perfect fit.

The film centers around a scheme to steal a computer program that can access codes for nuclear weapons worldwide. The plot is full of the usual spy games and takes a few ridiculous twists and turns, but the story is compelling enough — especially when paired with lots of flashy action sequences.

This edgy tale of female empowerment may be just what we need right now in this age of the “Me Too” movement. I wouldn’t call this movie fun, but it certainly seduced me.

This one will rent as nicely as HUNTER KILLER, EQUALIZER 2, BLINDSPOTTING, PEPPERMINT, THE MEG, and SKYSCRAPER.
What makes this version of the Grinch different is that it is very wholesome and sweet. The last version of the Grinch starring Jim Carey was much more crude and gritty than this version. It is undoubtedly the softer and more adorable version of the Grinch. The Grinch himself is much more tame. Instead of cruel, he tends to be a bit playful. From Max, the adorable dog who the Grinch so obviously loves, to the little Who children, the animation is just made to be appealing to young children. Also, the Grinch tends to be a little milder in his hatred and habits, even having a pseudo-friend in his neighbor, Bricklebaum played by Kenan Thompson.

The Grinch (Benedict Cumberbatch, center) gets more than he bargained for after he captures a lackadaisical reindeer named Fred (left) to help pull his sleigh, and learns that Fred would much rather snuggle with the Grinch and dog Max (right) in "Dr. Seuss' The Grinch" from Illumination.

The children in the film, having a smaller part, are quite entertaining. In animated films, I think that the creators tend to minimize the children and make their humor not as appealing for the whole audience. In this version, the kids are actually really funny and provide a lot of humor in the script with their off the wall comments that feel much older than ones that should be coming from kids. Cindy Lou and her friends, Groopert, Izzy, Ozzy, and Axl are very close and are a great mix of different types of kids, from troublemakers to extremely organized and logical.

This version of the Grinch is delightful and sure to win over children and adults the world over. Benedict Cumberbatch was the perfect choice for the role, bringing both the curmudgeon and the outcast aspect to the character. His voice is perfect for both parts of the Grinch. The story, which we know and love, takes a little bit of a different spin in this version but reminds us of the essential things in life: love, family, and togetherness. The Grinch is the perfect film to kick off the holiday season right, spreading joy, happiness, and magic to everyone, even those with a heart two sizes too small.

This will rent as well as TRANSYLVANIA 3, INCREDIBLES 2, RAMPAGE, SHERLOCK Gnomes, and PADDINGTON 2.
Keira Knightley (COLLATERAL BEAUTY, COLETTE, JACK RYAN: SHADOW RECRUIT, THE IMITATION GAME)

The latest in a long line of fantastical, classic fairy tales, Clara (Mackenzie Foy), an aristocratic teenager who finds herself transported into a magical kingdom during a Christmas party and stuck in the midst of a great conflict between several mystical forces. Naturally, upon arriving in the other world, Clara discovers that its denizens, all fairies and animated toys, regard her as a princess—and the heir apparent to their imaginative fantasyland, which was created and once ruled by her mother.

Visually, the film compensates for the two-dimensionality of its writing and acting. Disney’s fantasy extravaganzas of late have looked shockingly dated, boasting waxen computer animation that recalls the more primitive-looking CGI-addled productions of the early aughts. But the filmmakers here frequently turn that weakness into a strength; taking cues from its balletic inspiration, The Nutcracker and the Four Realms emphasizes the slightly plastic sheen and painterly colors of the animated toys. Costumes burst with color, from Sugar Plum’s wispy, cotton candy-colored hair to the blood-red splashes of the military dress that Clara wears in the film’s second half.

There are also impressive set pieces, as in the depiction of the dilapidated, mice-infested Realm of Amusements, a seceded area run by Mother Ginger (Helen Mirren). This dominion suggests a post-Chernobyl Pripyat, blanketed with a thick fog that obscures the rusting metal of various abandoned carnival rides. Within the region, Clara ends up confronted by Mother Ginger’s chief henchmen, a collection of matryoshka-doll clowns who disturbingly pop out of each other with the sickest of giggles. Unfortunately, the film succumbs to the predictability of Disney relying on war as a means of providing an ostensibly exciting narrative backbone to its contemporary fantasies, and, as a result, the beauty of such details is lost amid the grinding spectacle of toy soldiers sent in waves against Mother Ginger’s armies of mice and clowns.

Infinitely more rewarding is a sequence about a third of the way into the film in which Sugar Plum, while showing Clara around the kingdom, takes her to an effectively streamlined performance of Tchaikovsky’s two-act ballet. And for a few minutes, The Nutcracker and the Four Realms gives over to a performance that recalls The Red Shoes in its combination of well-choreographed dance, theatrical art direction, and the free possibilities of cinema.

Throughout the performance, backdrops raise around the ballerina (Misty Copeland), and the dancing is exemplary (of particular note are the dancers playing mice, who move in slinking, almost liquid, rolling motions that are punctuated by the jolts of angular limbs), with wild changes in lighting and animated flourishes—such as flowers that seem to bud within the stage floor—that mix the tactile with the impressionistic. There’s even a nod to Fantasia in a shot of the orchestra backlit into silhouette by reddish yellow light. The complete sequence cannot be more than six or seven minutes, but what it captures is so thrilling, imaginative, and technically impressive that one may wish that the entire film had restaged the entirety of Tchaikovsky’s ballet.

This will rent as well as HOUSE WITH A CLOCK IN IT’S WALLS, TRANSYLVANIA 3, MAMMA MIA 2, UNCLE DREW, and SHERLOCK GNOMES.
As are many classic Westerns, this is a tale of pursuit and patience involving a long journey and threats known and unknown. There will also be blood, of course, vast changes of fortune and the decisive matters of chance, daring and luck. *The Sisters Brothers* possesses all of the above, in addition to the curiosity of a filmmaker who has clearly taken great relish in exploring a country that is both familiar (via countless movies) and now quite distant.

As with most Westerns, the story is simple: A big shot named The Commodor (Rutger Hauer) wants a foreign outsider prospector by the name of Herman Kermit Warm (Riz Ahmed) to be killed for stealing. To this end he engages a brother assassin act by the unlikely name of Eli and Charlie Sisters (Reilly and Joaquin Phoenix).

Alert to the danger, Warm takes on protection in the form of lawman/detective John Morris (Jake Gyllenhaal), setting off a pursuit of untold miles and time. This set-up naturally provides excuses to cover vast tracts of unspoiled land, just what any Western needs, as the tale moves from heavily wooded Oregon down along the California coast to San Francisco in high Gold Rush dudgeon.

The two parties are a study in contrasts. Warm is something seemingly new in Westerns, a Middle Eastern prospector, a dentist by profession, while Gyllenhaal's lawman is unusually eloquent, perhaps a victim of over-education. The Sisters boys are of a notably lower status, rougher and gruffer but not without a rollicking appeal.

The film works up an only moderate sense of momentum over the first hour at least, with the greatest pleasures emanating from the variety of landscapes (Spanish and Romanian locations pass impressively as the Far West) and the feints and jabs of the four men, both in the direction of opponents and one another. Unlike many Westerns of yore, these are not men of few words; they’re idiosyncratic, even highly articulate at times, which goes hand in hand with the invigorating stores of intelligence with which the writers have endowed the four men.

It’s hard to tell how long the pursuit goes on, but at the film’s halfway point the Sisters arrive at the Pacific (reminding at one point of the unforgettable Oceanside interlude in *One-Eyed Jacks*), and shortly thereafter at San Francisco, in the instant splendor and madness of its Gold Rush heyday. “This place is Babylon,” one of the brothers exclaims, as they indulge in a fancy hotel and get a load of flush toilets and gold-trimmed restaurants.

It’s during this spell by the Bay that the Sisters, and the film, take a fateful turn, as Eli proposes ditching the Commodore, thinking they can do better on their own. “We have a chance to get out,” he insists to his unconvinced brother, creating a rift that leads the tale to its inevitable rendezvous with violence. What eventually comes to pass is both unsettling and, finally, quite satisfying.

This will rent as well as **RIDER, THOROUGHBREDS, THE WIFE, OLD MAN AND THE GUN, and BAD TIMES AT ELMONTE.**
This opening culminates in a genuine shock when police catch up to the thieves and riddle their van with bullets, igniting an explosion and killing everyone inside. It’s then that the film shifts its focus to Veronica and the other women widowed by this tragedy as they quickly realize just how precarious their fast-living spouses’ finances were and try to make ends meet: Linda’s (Michelle Rodriguez) clothing store is seized by bookies to whom her husband owed money, while Alice (Elizabeth Debicki) is encouraged by her mother (Jacki Weaver) to join an escort service that caters to wealthy men.

McQueen and Gillian Flynn’s screenplay inundates us with expository detail, introducing not only these characters but a network of acquaintances and local politicians that’s large enough to fill an ensemble TV series. And all this setup culminates with the introduction of Jamal Manning (Brian Tyree Henry), a crime lord seeking to go legit by running for political office, arriving at Veronica’s home to inform her that Harry’s crew robbed his campaign fund and that she has one month to pay back the stolen, now vaporized, $2 million. In her desperation, Veronica finds one of Harry’s notebooks detailing a planned heist and decides to recruit her fellow widows to pull off the job.

As ever, McQueen assembles a powerhouse cast, only to treat some of them as models to act out a limited range of expressions while being posed, just so, for his exacting compositions. As the threatening Veronica, Davis is well within her wheelhouse as a cool, collected leader, but too often she’s stiffly arranged in tableaux of suffering. Numerous shots see her standing against glass and staring mournfully as Harry’s ghost materializes and comforts her. Elsewhere, Daniel Kaluuya is underserved as Jatemme, Jamal’s brother and chief enforcer. The actor’s sharp features and penetrating stare lend themselves to mystery, so it’s disappointing that he’s at the heart of the film’s two most ostentatious and hollow set pieces, both involving a single take that revolves around Jatemme as he either commits violence or oversees a killing occurring just out of frame. These scenes exist only to wallow in their own bravura sense of composition and movement, reducing Jatemme to a glorified prop.

Others, however, are significantly more fleshed out. Alice is initially presented as little more than a skittish, bewildered victim of circumstance, but Debicki carefully modulates her character’s rapidly evolving confidence and competence at gathering intel for the heist to effectively render Alice’s emotional maturation believable. Elsewhere, Belle (Cynthia Erivo), a babysitter who’s gradually brought into Veronica’s crew, attends to other people’s children rather than her own. The zeal with which she takes any and all jobs exemplifies just how out of whack her work-life balance is, and exudes an anxiety that’s befitting of those reliant on the gig economy.

This will rent as well as EQUALIZER 2, PEPPERMINT, SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, PROUD MARY, BREAKING IN and GAME NIGHT.
Bradley Cooper (WAR DOGS, THE HANGOVER, AMERICAN HUSTLE, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK, AMERICAN SNIPER)

Don’t futz with a good formula. That’s the main thing the latest remake of the 1937 golden-era Hollywood melodrama A Star Is Born does spectacularly right. Whether you’re wedded to the original William Wellman production starring Janet Gaynor and Frederic March, or to the subsequent two versions from 1954 (starring Judy Garland and James Mason) and 1976 (starring Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson), you’ll see that the bones of this tragic love story are unabashedly the same. And familiarity, in the case of Bradley Cooper’s A Star Is Born, shouldn’t breed contempt.

It starts, as it must, with a fateful meeting, here between Jackson Maine (Cooper), an adored but fading country rocker, and Ally (Lady Gaga), a waitress by day and singer by night whose star is on the rise. Jackson is an addict who uses booze and drugs to combat an ever-encroaching case of tinnitus. While searching for a pub, any pub at all, after one of his gigs, he stumbles into a drag bar where Ally is the sole female performer. She emerges on stage in full Edith Piaf finery, crooning the signature tune, “La Vie en Rose,” of the singer many have referred to as the French equivalent of Judy Garland.

Jackson shuffles around like a hirsute little boy lost and speaks in a mock-Sam Elliott drawl, which is appropriate since Elliott plays the character’s much older brother, Bobby, and the siblings’ vocal similarities come to be an emotionally potent plot point. Jackson is a walking parody of virile masculinity, so having his and Ally’s crucial meet-cute take place in a drag bar counteracts any domineering, male-oriented silliness that might occur. Machismo is just another pose in the film; everyone’s wearing what they believe to be their best face, though that doesn’t mean it actually is.

Regardless, when Jackson and Ally lock eyes for the first time—Gaga swoons backward on the bar and turns her gaze toward the camera, letting Cooper’s baby blues do the rest—it’s positively electric. Who knew that Will Tippin from Alias and Mother Monster had this much spark between them? From there it’s a smooth ride into increasingly rough waters. Jackson senses Ally has talent and slowly coaxes her out of her shell. Soon enough they’re co-performers. Then the bigwigs come calling, mainly in the form of a supercilious British music manager, Rez (Rafi Gavron). Jealousy, marriage, success, failure, public embarrassment, reconciliation, and tragedy soon follow. And Ally, of course, has to have one transcendent final moment in which she memorializes her tempestuous love for all of eternity before a giant assembly.

Elliott’s character sums up the film’s thematic thrust in a scene in which he talks about Jackson’s love of the 12-note octave. Once you get past one octave, Bobby says, the notes repeat. It’s each individual artist’s job to use those same notes in a different way. As a meta justification for the existence of yet another A Star Is Born, the observation is trite and shamelessly on the nose. But as delivered by Elliott, in his uniquely sage and world-weary tones, the platitude becomes profound. Cooper understands that a message is only as resonant as its messenger, so he surrounds himself with collaborators, old and new, who can sell even the hoariest cliché.

This will be a huge renter just as MAMMA MIA 2, THE MEG, ANT MAN AND THE WASP, OCEAN’S 8, DEAD POOL 2 and JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE were.
Here's what's interesting about director Bryan Singer’s Queen biopic “Bohemian Rhapsody”: it’s a film made by a fan for fans, critics be damned. This isn’t an insightful, in-depth look at the band and its superstar lead singer Freddie Mercury (Rami Malek), but rather a foot-stomping celebration of greatest hits that will keep music lovers rocking along in their seats.

Queen was a band comprised of outsiders for outsiders, a group of four men who defied stereotypes and shattered convention to become one of the most beloved groups on the planet. When portraying such legends on screen, the casting needs to be perfect: and it is, from Malek down to core band members Brian May (Gwilym Lee), Roger Taylor (Ben Hardy), and John Deacon (Joseph Mazzello).

There’s a serious criticism of Malek’s performance, which is as warranted as it isn’t. As brilliant an actor as he is, the entire film feels like it’s a long imitation of a famous dead person and his signature mannerisms. I have no intention of diminishing Malek’s screen presence (it is star making in the greatest sense, and he is phenomenal here), but even his impassioned lip syncing comes across as a bit disheartening when you consider the legend he’s impersonating.

There are plenty of problems, from the overall saccharine portrayal of Mercury and his inner circle to the sanitized, play-it-safe attitude that fills every frame. This becomes the main issue with the film: flashy musical performances are interspersed with dramatic moments that overshadow the story grounding the project.

Many of Queen’s more infamous milestones are addressed, from their unabashed creativity in the studio while recording their 1975 masterpiece “A Night At the Opera” to their legendary parting of ways with EMI that’s “re-imagined” into a single record executive character called Ray Foster (Mike Myers). Other tidbits of Queen’s history are presented through a filter or entirely dramatized so much that you’ll be ready to hit Wikipedia as soon as the credits roll. There are many aspects of Mercury’s life that are left on the chopping block too. Early criticism that his homosexuality isn’t addressed in this film is pure bollocks. The film carefully presents his escapades in a tasteful way that keeps the film rated PG-13.

This will rent as well as A STAR IS BORN, HALLOWEEN, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: FALLOUT, CRAZY RICH ASIANS, SKYSCRAPER and DEAD POOL 2.
Jason Reitman’s *The Front Runner* opens with an Altmanesque long take that weaves through a massive crowd of reporters, political strategists, and campaign workers as they discuss the intricacies of the 1984 Democratic primary just prior to Gary Hart (Hugh Jackman) conceding to Walter Mondale. Between the roving camerawork and overlapping dialogue, the film promises a prismatic view of American political campaigning. But as soon as it jumps ahead to 1988, with Hart standing as the clear Democratic frontrunner in the upcoming presidential election, the film quickly reveals that the only angle it’s interested in is the one that most sympathizes with the Colorado senator. Hart may have been a womanizer, but the filmmakers make no bones about their support of his belief in the sanctity of privacy for public servants, presenting Hart not as a victim of his own libido, but of an increasingly ruthless and combative press. When Ben Bradlee (Alfred Molina), executive editor of *The Washington Post*, later recalls President Lyndon B. Johnson telling a handful of elite reporters that lots of women will be entering and leaving his hotel room and that he expects the same courtesy of privacy given to President John F. Kennedy, one senses that Reitman and co-writers Matt Bai and Jay Carson are mourning the pre-#MeToo era when the path for Great Men was unimpeded by outspoken women and intrepid reporters. Hart’s infidelity, poor judgment, and unwillingness to navigate a rapidly shifting media landscape are all glossed over in favor of highlighting him as the charismatic beacon of light primed to rejuvenate a waning Democratic Party near the end of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Instead of plumbing the complexities and contradictions of Hart’s character, the film doubles down on its seething contempt for the press and their increasingly invasive tactics. Indeed, *The Front Runner* portrays Tom Fielder (Steve Zissis) and Pete Murphy (Bill Burr), two reporters from the *Miami Herald*, as second-rate gumshoes, reducing them to scheming rats as they scurry through back alleys late at night in order to accost Hart and barrage him with questions of his marital infidelity with his mistress, Donna Rice (Sara Paxton).

Reitman does eventually pay lip service to the two women most adversely affected by Hart’s affair: Donna and Hart’s wife, Lee (Vera Farmiga). But in both cases, the endless hounding of intrusive reporters takes the brunt of the film’s criticism. While Donna is over-protective of Hart and simply wants for Hart’s campaign manager, Bill Dixon (J.K. Simmons), to let her go home, Lee and her daughter, Andrea (Kaitlyn Dever), are surrounded in their home by desperate reporters who circle like sharks. Though Hart’s irresponsible behavior plays a large part in both women’s suffering, the film can’t help but repeatedly shift the blame away from Hart, who’s primarily seen as calm, resolute, and just in the face of relentless, unfair invasions of his privacy.

This will rent as well as *Blind Spotting*, *Leave No Trace*, *Rider*, *Traffick*, *Love, Simon* and *Colette*. 
I was unexpectedly delighted by “Nobody’s Fool,” cinema powerhouse Tyler Perry’s recent foray into the R-rated, raunchy romantic comedy market. It wasn’t the film I expected but I laughed — a lot — at some truly inspired gags. This film is an all-over-the-place mess, but at least it’s a charming one.

When wild child Tanya (Tiffany Haddish) is released from prison after serving a 5 year sentence, she seeks out her uptight advertising honcho sister Danica (Tika Sumpter) to help get her back on track. Tanya moves in, and their polar opposite personalities soon collide with disastrous — and often very funny — results. But when Danica begins to reveal more details about her long distance boyfriend, her sister thinks she’s being catfished and sets out to prove her mysterious dream man is a big phony.

The film is at its best when Haddish and Sumpter are together, playing off each other with a yin and yang balance of heart and humor. Haddish lights up every scene she’s in (which isn’t nearly enough), and delivers some of the film’s funniest one-liners. Once the film quickly changes course into a by-the-book romantic comedy.

I laughed a lot at the jokes, which are mostly terrific, and the expert line delivery from the entire cast. Whoopi Goldberg hilariously steals every scene she’s in as a stoner mama, and the comedically talented Haddish delivers another strong dose of what she does best. It’s a blast to see her doing more bawdy comedy a’la “Girls Trip.” The supporting cast, including Omari Hardwick, and Amber Riley, are strong too. These are characters you’d love to hang out with in real life.

It becomes obvious from the film’s abrupt finale that Perry couldn’t figure out how to end the story, but it doesn’t matter much. This is a delightful romantic comedy with a few lively surprises and hearty laughs. This will rent as well as GIRLS TRIP, THE HATE U GIVE, A SIMPLE FAVOR, BLACKKKKLANSMAN, SORRY TO BoTHER YOU and OCEAN’S 8.

For those of you who still only know Melissa McCarthy from her “fatty fall down” empty-headed comedy films, please go see “Can You Ever Forgive Me?” so you’ll learn once and for all that she’s a phenomenal dramatic actress. It’s not that she isn’t funny, but McCarthy isn’t often given roles that showcase her serious acting chops. But when she is, she always hits a home run.

To this role McCarthy brings a dejected picture of the human nature of loneliness, with an uncanny ability to create sympathy for the complex, difficult, and disgraced best-selling author, Lee Israel. She also nails a likeable-yet-not sarcasm that comes from her character thinking everyone else is a complete idiot.

The film tells the true story of celebrity biographer Israel (McCarthy), a woman who had her writing heyday during the 1970s and 80s. When the appetite of readers changed from nonfiction to fiction in the early 90s, Lee found herself unable to get published. Facing eviction from her apartment and unable to afford medical care for her sick cat, she turned her art form into deception by penning fake letters she claimed were written by historical figures. Abetted by her loyal friend Jack (Richard E. Grant), the duo sold hundreds of forgeries to dealers in New York City before eventually having to face the music — and the FBI.

It’s a fascinating story that makes for an equally intriguing caper. Director Marielle Heller creates a drama with just the right amount of dark humor that sets a cynical, shrewd tone. The misery and heartbreak (exemplified by a particularly affecting scene in a restaurant) are overshadowed by the warmth and authenticity of Lee and Jack’s friendship. Grant is ever the scene stealer with his boy-toy escapades and self-destructive charm. His performance is balanced by McCarthy’s nuanced sorrow of self-imposed solitude in the soul-crushing city. Both are worthy of awards consideration this year, and I hope they get it.

Screenwriters Nicole Holofcener and Jeff Whitty, who adapted the story from Lee’s memoirs, give a touch of caustic wit to the screenplay. It would’ve been too easy to strip all warmth from these characters, both quite the a-holes in their own right, but instead there’s a warmth that draws you closer rather than pushes you away. The same can be said for Heller’s direction. There’s a bonafide personal air of melancholy to her deeply human filmmaking.

This will rent as well as THE WIFE, FIRST MAN, HEARTS BEAT LOUD, TULLY, THOROUGHBREDS, and THE POST.
“Forget history,” Friar Tuck (Tim Minchin) urges us during the opening narration of Otto Bathurst’s *Robin Hood*, and one would be wise to heed that advice. While technically set in something vaguely resembling medieval England, the film attempts to update the legend of Robin Hood for contemporary audiences in hilariously bald-faced fashion. Bathurst has recast the roguish folk hero as an urban revolutionary, a street warrior in a black hoodie and bandana facemask who ultimately leads an army of angry, young Molotov cocktail-toting rebels against the rich and powerful of Nottingham.

Which is to say that this film’s Robin of Locksley (Taron Egerton) is essentially a modern-day conservative’s worst nightmare. Though born into a wealthy family, he’s radicalized by his stint in the military fighting a bloody imperialist crusade in the Middle East. Upon his return to England, he’s trained in the art of thievery and street warfare by a black Muslim immigrant (Jamie Foxx, grinning, grimacing, and savoring his exaggerated African accent). Robin is a class traitor, stealing from the rich, giving to the poor, and rallying Nottingham’s underclass with explicit calls for socialism—“Who’s up for a little redistribution of wealth!”—and much to the chagrin of the town’s power-hungry sheriff (a scenery-devouring Ben Mendelsohn).

*Robin Hood* is an unapologetic B movie. The acting is hammy, the CGI is chintzy, and some of the city sets look like they were left over from Paul W.S. Anderson’s *Pompeii*. There’s something oddly charming about the film’s embrace of its tackiness, particularly the way it mashes up the modern and the medieval with un-self-conscious glee. This is evident in the over-the-top battle sequences, during which British soldiers, decked out in what looks like modern-day body armor and desert camo, battle Arabs who fire jacked-up, shoulder-mounted crossbows that rattle off arrows with the force and frequency of a machine gun. Then there’s the hilariously gaudy masquerade ball, which looks more like an outtake from Baz Luhrman’s *The Great Gatsby* than anything one would expect to find in a Robin Hood film. It’s all in good fun.

This will rent as well as *EQ2, HOUSE WITH A CLOCK IN IT’S WALLS, CHRISTOPHER ROBIN, MAMMA MIA 2, OCEAN’S 8 and DEAD POOL 2*. 
Sometimes the sequel is better than the original, and that is the case with “Ralph Breaks the Internet,” Disney’s follow-up to 2012’s “Wreck-It Ralph.” In a sharp contrast from this year’s lame cash grab “Incredibles 2,” this charming sequel is a creative, sweet adventure tale of loyalty and friendship that will delight adults and kids alike.

When an overenthusiastic patron breaks the Sugar Rush video game, Ralph (John C. Reilly) and his buddy Vanellope (Sarah Silverman) must risk it all and travel into the world wide web to find a replacement part to save Vanellope’s home. The duo meet all sorts of citizens of the internet to help navigate their way, including trendy online entrepreneur Yesss (Taraji P. Henson), egghead know-it-all KnowsMore (Alan Tudyk), and the tough as nails Shank (Gal Gadot). The simple story serves the film well and although basic, it never feels like a throwaway sequel plot. It’s a film that can stand on its own.

This is a film that feels crafted for 40 year olds fans of the Mouse. Hardcore Disney devotees will be greatly rewarded in the form of vintage Easter eggs and if you “get” the references, you’ll have a much better time. There are a couple of scenes that feature cameos from classic Disney princesses, and they are absolutely hilarious if you’re a fan. There are still plenty of generic, dumb parent jokes and slapstick humor for the kiddos, but the best gags are the inspired ones (like the inspirational musical number in a Grand Theft Auto style video game).

The animation is bright and colorful, and the film looks like it is designed for 3D. It falls apart a bit towards the end with a too noisy and too busy climactic action scene, and the film’s extended ad for eBay feels dated, but overall this is a solid animated winner for Disney.

A HUGE renter, just like GOOSEBUMPS 2, INCREDIBLES 2, ANTMAN AND THE WASP, UNCLE DREW, and COCO.
In theory, putting “possession” in the title of a horror movie should add to its box-office allure. But it probably won’t take long for word to trickle out that “The Possession of Hannah Grace,” after the first five minutes, is not an exorcism movie. Rather, it’s about the corpse of a girl who dies during an exorcism (in New Canaan, Conn.), so technically speaking you could say that it qualifies. But viewers hooked on the spectacle of demonic possession tend to like their satanic tropes served neat. “The Possession of Hannah Grace” serves them sloppy, if not without a certain random soupçon of grisly style.

Just about the entire film is set in a morgue. And though it stars Shay Mitchell, from “Pretty Little Liars,” it has her playing a character with almost no personality: Megan, an ex-cop and (barely) recovering alcoholic who lands a job working the graveyard shift as a morgue intake assistant at Boston Metro Hospital. Most movie morgues look like overbright kitchens in which you can just about smell the formaldehyde. In “The Possession of Hannah Grace,” the hospital interior is all handsomely streaked slate-gray concrete walls, like some architectural cousin to the dance school in the new version of “Suspiria.” It’s the morgue as Ian Schrager hotel.

This may not exactly be a setting to bring out the popcorn munchers, but “The Possession of Hannah Grace” does have one ghoulish hook to it, if you can call it that: The cadavers are extremely realistic-looking, all veiny marbled skin and blackened decomposing limbs. You might say, “Who would want to see that?” And maybe you don’t. But the director, Diederik Van Rooijen, who was born in the Netherlands, is banking on the fact that years of ever more gradually explicit forensic cop shows have inured us to this stuff, and that the savage gross-out realism he offers can now play as graphic macabre cool. The opening credits look like they were taken from a serial killer’s Polaroid scrapbook, and the special effects serve up a smorgasbord of fleshy decay.

Megan gets taught how to photograph the incoming corpses and take their fingerprints, and this allows the film to linger on them with a slightly icky voyeurism, especially when the body of Hannah Grace arrives. She’s got a decomposing arm, and brutal slash marks on her neck and abdomen, along with a banged-up face with one open eye of startlingly bright sapphire. Even dead, she’s practically communing with us. And sure enough, Hannah, who is played by Kirby Johnson, soon comes alive, escaping from her refrigerator vault and moving around the place with herky-jerky spectral energy. Is she a zombie? Not exactly. She’s more of an undead spirit who begins to heal her wounds by killing people.

This will rent as well as THE NUN, THE PREDATOR, THE MEG, FIRST PURGE and UNFRIENDED: DARK WEB.