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In Date Night, Tina Fey and Steve Carell get a lot more than the quiet evening they initially bargained for

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BY STEWART SCHLEY



Date Night (PG-13)

Old-school screwball comedy played brilliantly by two of this generation's best comic actors. Phil and Claire Foster (Steve Carell and Tina Fey), an ordinary married couple from Jersey, get more than they bargain for when an evening in Manhattan turns sinister and the innocent duo becomes embroiled in a case of mistaken identity with some seriously bad bad guys. The plot offers up predictable predicaments, but a non-stop stream of hilarious banter, sharp timing, and absurdly comic sight gags produces laugh-out-loud mayhem set off by a wonderful romantic chemistry. Somewhere in all its frantic hilarity, *Date Night* somehow manages to make an ordinary suburban marriage seem like the stuff of magic.

FUN FACTS: Fey managed to sneak a University of Virginia T-shirt into a scene where she's preparing for bed – a nod to her alma mater. Also, listen for a nicely timed inclusion of the Ramones' classic rave-up "Blitzkrieg Bop."



Robin Hood (R)

Oscar winner Russell Crowe is well cast as archer Robin Longstride, aka Robin Hood, in this meticulously constructed retelling of the legendary story. It's hardly new cinematic ground, but the re-pairing of Crowe and director Ridley Scott (*Gladiator*, among others) offers hope for something special, and this latest interpretation delivers big with thunderous battle scenes and a dense backdrop of the politics behind Longstride's ascension. Cate Blanchett is understated – and beautiful – as Marian, and the cinematography is breathtaking.

FUN FACTS: The Tower of London was created digitally, but you wouldn't know it. Down to a stone-by-stone detail, it looks convincingly epic. Crowe, according to the Internet Movie Database, is the oldest actor yet – he's 45 – to play Robin Hood. Sean Connery was 44 in the 1976 film *Robin and Marian*.



A KIWIS AND AN AUSSIE PLAYING BRITS?

Why not? The traditional appeal of Robin Hood is the story of an Everyman – a yeoman, to be precise – rising up against tyranny for justice and liberty. It's as British as it is American as it is universal. Take heart: While Russell Crowe (far left) may call Wellington, New Zealand, home, and Kate Blanchette (left) hails from Melbourne, Australia, director Sir Ridley Scott came up in the decidedly British-sounding town of South Shields in county Tyne-and-Wear.



THE HERO AND HIS QUARRY:

Record company newbie Aaron Green (played by Jonah Hill, right) is tasked with rustling up unwieldy client Aldous Snow (played by Russell Brand, above) in *Get Him to the Greek*.



Get Him to the Greek (R)

Russell Brand channels his inner Rod Stewart as an outlandish British rocker with perfect hair and poor behavior. But it's the straight-faced earnestness of sad-sack Jonah Hill (*The Invention of Lying*, *Superbad*) that makes this farcical, breakneck (and deservedly R-rated) romp work. As record company assignee Aaron Green, Hill plays a well-intentioned peon whose task sounds simple enough: Escort self-indulgent British rocker Aldous Snow to a gig in Los Angeles for what's billed as a career-comeback concert. The mess thus triggered involves three cities, lots of debauchery, and some deft cliché-piercing. But like all good comedies, *Greek* gets its real punch from two well-drawn characters and their repartee. Rapster Sean Combs is hilarious as an overbearing record executive.

FUN FACTS: Clad in leather pants and claiming to have found spiritual peace, Brand's Aldous Snow appeared first as a bit role in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, nearly stealing the movie. Hill also appeared in *Sarah Marshall* as a nerdy waiter. *Greek* director Nicholas Stoller helmed both films.



Letters to Juliet (PG)

A shimmering performance by 73-year-old Vanessa Redgrave gives depth and texture to what could have been a syrupy love comedy.

Amanda Seyfried plays a magazine researcher who comes across a note dropped off decades before at the Verona, Italy, courtyard where Shakespeare's Romeo supposedly wooed a certain Juliet. Entranced by the letter, Seyfried's Sophie sets out to find the woman who wrote it, and to help her reunite with a long-ago lover. It's a movie about love longed for, lost and rediscovered, but in more ways than one, as Redgrave comes to develop a motherly affection for the incandescent Seyfried. Terrific performances (and, as you'd imagine, delicious scenes of Tuscany) make it irresistible.

FUN FACTS: In the film, Redgrave's character sets out in search of a lost lover, Lorenzo, played by Franco Nero. In real life, the two had a son in the mid-1970s, and four years ago, they (finally) got married. Now that's symmetry.



Amanda Seyfried stars in *Letters to Juliet*



MacGruber's lineup:
Ryan Phillippe,
Will Forte and
Kristen Wiig



MacGruber (R)

Oh no! It's international bad guy Dieter Von Cunth (Val Kilmer), and he's after our nuclear weapons! Only one man can possibly stop him, and he, of course, would be the mulleted, Purple Heart-earning, Congressional Medal of Honor-adorned, unceasingly khaki-clad MacGruber (Will Forte). Coming out of a 10-year, self-imposed retirement, MacGruber fields a dream team of operatives to thwart the evil Von Cunth and restore order to the land. Born from a *Saturday Night Live* bit and featuring familiar faces (Kristen Wiig) from the show, MacGruber delivers exactly what you'd expect: explosions, international intrigue, elongated speechifying and general lunacy. It's all dressed up in a to-the-letter 1980s action-flick motif, and Kilmer's hilarious bad-guy routine alone is worth the price of admission.

FUN FACTS: The music backdrop is classic, overwrought 1980s rock, with aspiring anthems like Toto's "Rosanna" and Quarterflash's "Harden My Heart" (a perfect choice) keeping the backbeat going. Oh, and six (count 'em: six) professional WWE wrestlers are part of the cast.



A Prophet (R, Subtitled)

This gripping, *Godfather*-esque prison drama generated major buzz at May's Cannes Film Festival thanks to French filmmaker Jacques Audiard's authoritative blend of uncompromising characters, graphic bursts of violence, and unexpected surreal imagery. *A Prophet* tells a sort of coming-of-age story of a young Arab man, Malik El Djebena, who arrives at a French prison to serve a six-year sentence and is quickly immersed into a labyrinth of exploitation and politics played out among dastardly criminals. Critics have praised the performance of Tahar Rahim, a relative innocent in a literal den of thieves, who comes to understand and in some ways master the cultivation of power.

FUN FACTS: Audiard, known for an exhausting insistence on realism, hired a team of ex-convicts as on-set advisers and extras. He was inspired to make *A Prophet* after hosting a screening of an earlier film at a prison.



Solitary Man (R)

A stirring portrayal of a man in crisis. As the once-prominent and now-fading New York auto dealer Ben Kalman, Michael Douglas salves the conjoined wounds of aging and professional disaster by seducing younger women even as he spirals more deeply into decline. The narrative occurs over a few days as Douglas follows his girlfriend's daughter along for a college-admission interview. It's a dark story, but Douglas is brilliantly convincing as a weak man who yearns to escape from the charming, glad-handing persona he has created for himself. With Mary-Louise Parker and the sturdy-as-ever Danny DeVito as Kalman's one remaining friend.

FUN FACTS: Douglas continues to build a resume populated with some of the more iconic characters of modern American cinema, from the money-lusting Gordon Gekko of *Wall Street* to the disagreeable Oliver Rose in *War of the Roses*. For our money, though, nothing beats the oddly endearing Prof. Grady Tripp of *Wonder Boys*. ■

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