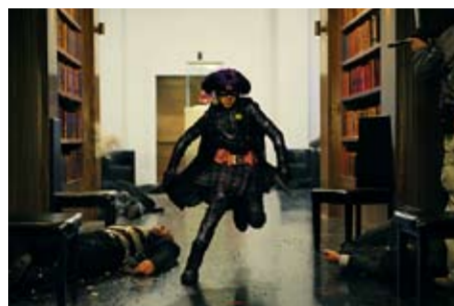


## FILM REVIEW

## OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW



# Revenge of the nerd

The superhero in 'Kick-Ass' doesn't fly, but the movie does

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

If you've had enough of the earnestness of Tobey Maguire's Spiderman or Hugh Jackman's Wolverine, relief is at hand. Aaron Johnson is Kick-Ass, aka Dave Lizewski. As a nerdy high school student, his main superpower is his invisibility to girls. He can't fly, he can't leap tall buildings, he doesn't do kung fu. He has lots of good intentions, but these mostly serve to earn him a good kicking.

What he does as part of the ensemble of *Kick-Ass* is to incorporate the sex-deprived high school nerd movie into the superhero movie. The superhero element is provided by Chloe Moretz, the 11-year-old actress who plays Hit-Girl, the daughter of discredited cop Damon Macready (Nicolas Cage), who wants to get revenge on the mobsters who set him up.

The two story lines join up when Kick-Ass inadvertently becomes a celebrity after a video of him getting beaten up by a bunch of thugs goes viral on the

Internet. He is the voice of the city's conscience despite his almost complete inability to fight crime. Hit-Girl and her dad come to his rescue after he has taken on more, yet again, than he can chew.

More by accident than design, Kick-Ass is targeted by a drug syndicate headed by Frank D'Amico (Mark Stong), whose son Chris (Christopher Mintz-Plasse) uses a superhero persona to lure Kick-Ass out into the open. The boys are all comic book fanatics, so there is plenty of opportunity to reference a wide range of superhero stories. It plays knowingly off these references, spoofing the heroes, but in the manner of the *Scream* franchise, which tackles the horror genre, *Kick-Ass* makes fun, while also showing respect, and a genuine interest, in the genre.

It is also quite clear that *Kick-Ass* has gone out of its way to shock, and exploits Chloe Moretz's youth perhaps a trifle cynically. Although only 11, she uses the taboo "C" word once and the "F" word repeatedly, but does so with



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CATCHPLAY

such a wonderful mix of posing and innocence that it is hard to resist laughing out loud in delight. After all, it's not as if we really believe that 11-year-olds don't know such language. She also gets to shoot a number of mafia goons

in the head. The truly remarkable thing is that in the hands of director Matthew Vaughn, Moretz manages to still come across as an appealing little girl.

And indeed, Dave Lizewski, for all his fantasizing about his English teacher's breasts and Internet porn proclivities, is, in fact, something of a superhero — he wants to go out there and make a difference, something that sets him apart from almost everyone else he knows. Vaughn has managed to incorporate the world of MySpace and online news in a very sophisticated fashion, passing judgment on a public that has become totally voyeuristic and indiscriminating in its eagerness to watch the latest clip on YouTube.

Vaughn has forced together a number of very incongruous elements. There are plenty of plot holes, but that is never really the point. The narrative is ridiculous, but *Kick-Ass* has such enthusiasm for what it is doing that it is hard to quibble over such minor faults. The director creates an energy that pulses through the film,

jumping startlingly yet rhythmically from toilet humor to tight action sequences, from superhero 101 and military hardware fetishism to *Superbad*-esque adolescent sexual exploration. It is quite a ride.

## Film Notes

### KICK-ASS

DIRECTED BY:  
MATTHEW VAUGHN

STARRING:  
AARON JOHNSON (DAVE LIZEWSKI/  
KICK-ASS), LYNDSY FONSECA (KATIE  
DEAUXMA), NICOLAS CAGE (DAMON  
MACREADY/BIG DADDY), CHLOE  
MORETZ (MINDY MACREADY/HIT-  
GIRL), CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE  
(CHRIS D'AMICO/RED MIST)

RUNNING TIME:  
117 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY

### Legion

God is fed up with mankind and has sent his angels to destroy the world in an apocalypse that takes its cue from horror fantasy rather than the Book of Genesis. Paul Bettany is Michael, an angel who sees the good in mankind and comes to its aid. Firearms training must be part of the drill up in Paradise, as Michael proves himself very able with an Uzi. Though the plot is full of comic and horror potential, *Legion* has wings of lead. The zombies that attack a diner in the Mojave desert where the main action takes place are not very frightening, and every horror device seems to have been lifted from another film. When the angels go at it in silver armor and maces, the whole thing descends into camp, but without the benefit of humor.



### The Runaways

A musical biopic that harks back to the exciting, dangerous days of rock 'n' roll just before the dawn of punk, giving us the story of Joan Jett and The Runaways. The stars, Dakota Fanning, as Cherie Currie, and Kristen Stewart as Joan Jett, tackle the project with enormous commitment, and director Floria Sigismondi, in her feature debut, shows a sharp awareness of period detail that gives *The Runaways* its historical heft. Critics have commented that the focus shifts rather uncertainly between the two female leads and that the predictable rock 'n' roll struggle to find fame story arc is just a tad too predictable. There is all the glamour of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, but the darker side of exploitation and self-destruction are a reminder that fame has always has a price.



### Clownfish (小丑魚)

Taiwan's attempt to get on the 3D bandwagon promises to show off local technical skills, but the story of an inept salaryman who dreams of becoming a circus clown and fantasizes about meeting a mermaid princess doesn't exactly get the blood pumping. Directed by Charlie Chu (曲全立), who is billed as Taiwan's foremost 3D director and who has extensive experience in high-definition digital and 3D production, mostly of nature programs, *Clownfish* should prove an interesting glimpse into what a local director can do with the new technology in a feature film format.



### Prayers for Bobby

A made-for-TV drama dripping with social concern and sentiment that nevertheless features solid performances. Based on a true story, *Prayers for Bobby* has Sigourney Weaver in the lead as Mary Griffith, a devout Christian who takes the hard line with her gay son and loses him to suicide. She subsequently becomes a vocal gay rights crusader. Weaver's performance as a loving mother whose religious faith is tested against her love for her son and the long and painful journey that is needed to alter entrenched belief are well portrayed by a capable cast, and the film combines heartstring-tugging and the social context of 1980s Middle America with some skill. But this is probably something that doesn't need to be seen on the big screen.



### Don't Look Back (Ne Te Retourne Pas)

French psychological drama of a sort regularly described in the trade press as "a formal exercise" — in other words, the director is trying to be very clever. In the case of *Don't Look Back*, Jacques Akchoti plays with a doppelganger effect on slightly depressed though ever so beautiful Sophie Marceau. Half way through the film she turns into Monica Bellucci, and somehow everyone on screen believes this is the same person. It didn't work for the primarily festival audiences who have seen the film.



## FILM REVIEW

# The game of life is hard to play

'The Father of My Children' is an existential meditation on the aftermath of suicide as experienced by a loving family

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

The aftermath of a death for friends and family is a topic ripe for pop psychology and easy tears. The response to suicide allows still more room for anguished browbeating and blame. Mia Hansen-Love's *The Father of My Children* (Le Pere de Mes Enfants) does not succumb to these temptations, and reaches for a more profound wisdom that offers a deeper comfort but no answers about why a person should decide to take his or her own life. While loosely based on real people in the writer-director's own circle, this is not so much a biopic but an existential meditation.

We are introduced to Gregoire Canvel, a busy film producer, in a long tracking sequence in which he walks and drives from Paris to his home in the country, almost

continually on the phone, dealing, solving problems, even telling a white lie to his wife. He gets home to a family that he clearly loves, and which clearly loves him ... but work continues to intrude.

Unhurriedly, even as Canvel tackles the tasks of running a small but busy production house, we realize that his business is in trouble. Too much money is going out. We also learn about his love of cinema and his determination to support directors he believes in, whatever their commercial track record.

Canvel is a man comfortable in his professional skin, and it is easy for him to hide the mounting pressure from friends and family. Finally, almost suddenly, it becomes too much. He takes his own life.

The second half of the film deals with the fallout of this



act, both professionally and personally. Everyone is appalled at the death, but this is balanced with personal feelings of those left behind, not least staff at his company who find themselves out of a job virtually overnight. The

recrimination and anger that a husband and father could act in so selfish a manner are worked through by his wife and daughter, even as they figure out what to do with the production company that represented such an important



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SMALL WINGS FILMS

*The Father of My Children* takes a philosophical approach to an intensely emotional issue.

part of Canvel's life. In both halves of the film, *The Father of My Children* never forgets that life is not just about emotions, but also about money, reputation and memory.

Canvel is portrayed as a man greedy for life, who lived it to the full both as a professional and

a family man. At the core was a certain self-belief that drives all of us through the daily ups and downs of life, but when he felt that this had been irreparably hurt, he could find no way out. As his wife tells his angry and grieving children, daddy was so sad he forgot about us just for a moment. But in that moment, the whole world changed.

While *The Father of My Children* focuses on a single act of suicide, it is a film that is fiercely, almost defiantly, about life. Life with all its mundane business that shapes the person. It leads us not so much to sorrow over the misfortunes of others, but to reflect on what we value in life and how we might respond if it were taken away. While sensitive to the fate of its characters, the questions it poses are more philosophical than emotional.

## Film Notes

### THE FATHER OF MY CHILDREN (LE PERE DE MES ENFANTS)

DIRECTED BY:  
MIA HANSEN-LOVE

STARRING:  
LOUIS-DO DE LENCQUESAING  
(GREGOIRE CANVEL), CHIARA  
CASELLI (SYLVIA CANVEL), ALICE  
DE LENCQUESAING (CLEMENCE  
CANVEL), ALICE GAUTIER (VALENTINE  
CANVEL), IGOR HANSEN-LOVE  
(ARTHUR MALKAVIAN)

RUNNING TIME:  
110 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE:  
TODAY