

Tristan Wilds, Nate Parker, and David Oyelowo

Red Tails

STARRING Nate Parker, Terrence Howard
DIRECTED BY Anthony Hemingway
PG-13, 2 HRS.

By Owen Gleiberman

It's been 26 years since *Top Gun*, but the dogfights in that absurdly entertaining Reagan-era classic have lost none of their speed-demon zap. That said, *Top Gun* lets you know that you're basically watching a videogame with actors. Not so with *Red Tails*, a lavishly square historical drama about the Tuskegee Airmen, the very first African-American military pilots, who served in segregated units during World War II. The movie has potent sequences of aerial combat that recall Tom Cruise and his flyboys bombarding evil out of the air. Here, though, the planes zoom close to the ground, with the tree-lined hills of Italy looming up behind them. The actors really appear to be flying, and that gives the Airmen's brushes with the enemy—even when they're just providing "escort" cover for white pilots—a heart-in-the-throat, you-are-there quality. Plus, they do get to bomb a few Nazi planes.

As long as it stays in the air, *Red Tails*, a George Lucas production written by John Ridley (*U Turn*) and directed by Anthony Hemingway (a veteran of *The Wire* and *CSI: NY*), is a compelling sky-war pageant of a movie. On the ground, it's a far shakier experience: dutiful and prosaic, with thinly scripted episodes that don't add up to a satisfying story. The scenes of racial conflict, like one set at a white officers' club, are vivid

illustrations of what the Airmen were up against, and Terrence Howard, as the colonel who argues for the right of the 99th Fighter Squadron to see combat, is defiant in an enjoyably savvy high-command way. David Oyelowo, in the Cruise-ian role of Joe "Lightning" Little—the daredevil who must learn to fly in support of his team—makes cocky bravado desperate and human. But just about everyone else in the cast achieves one or two eager dimensions rather than three. **B-**

As long as it stays in the air, *Red Tails* is a compelling sky-war pageant of a movie. On the ground, it's a far shakier experience: dutiful and prosaic, with thinly scripted episodes that don't add up to a satisfying story.

EW MORE ON EW.COM *Underworld Awakening*, in theaters Jan. 20, did not screen for critics, but you can find our review on EW.com

Critical Mass

A sampling of critics from across the country grade 10 current releases.

	TY BURR <i>The Boston Globe</i>	ROGER EBERT <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>	LISA KENNEDY <i>The Denver Post</i>	MICK LASALLE <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	KARINA LONGWORTH <i>LA Weekly</i>	CLAUDIA PUIG <i>USA Today</i>	RENE RODRIGUEZ <i>The Miami Herald</i>	BETSY SHARKEY <i>Los Angeles Times</i>	ALYNDIA WHEAT <i>Provo</i>	STEPHANIE ZACHAREK <i>Moviewatch.com</i>	ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY	EW READERS*	CRITICS AVERAGE
ALBERT NOBBS	B	-	B	B	C	C+	-	C	B+	C-	B-	B	B-
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 3D	-	-	B	-	-	A	A	A-	A-	-	B+	A-	A-
CONTRABAND	B-	C-	-	B-	-	C	B-	C+	C	C	B	C+	C+
EXTREMELY LOUD &...	B	B-	A	C	D	B-	D	A-	A	D+	B-	B	B-
THE GIRL WITH THE...	B	B	B+	A	B	B+	A-	A-	A-	A-	A	A-	B+
IN THE LAND OF BLOOD...	C+	C+	C+	C-	B-	B-	-	C-	B	-	C+	B-	C+
THE IRON LADY	B-	B-	B	B-	C-	B-	C	B-	B+	C-	B	C+	B-
↑ JOYFUL NOISE	C+	D	C+	-	-	C	C	C-	C-	C	B-	C+	C
MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE...	B+	A-	-	B	-	A-	A-	B	B+	C	A	A-	B+
WAR HORSE	B	B+	B+	B	B-	B	A	C	B+	B+	A-	B+	B

*EW READER GRADES come from the Front Row, EW's online reader panel. If you'd like to join, go to frontrowpanel.com/join.



Miss Bala
 Stephanie Sigman
R, 1 HR., 53 MINS.

After getting caught in a Mexican nightclub shoot-out, a naive aspiring Miss Baja beauty queen (Stephanie Sigman) finds her fate hitched to that of a drug lord. And each step she, her captors, the local cops, and federal agents take only ups the danger and hopelessness of her situation. (*Bala* is Spanish for "bullet.") Loosely based on real events, this harrowing, superbly made drama by fast-rising filmmaker Gerardo Naranjo (*I'm Gonna Explode*) is Mexico's 2012 submission for Best Foreign Language Film—rightfully so. **A** —Lisa Schwarzbaum



Ultrasuede: In Search of Halston
NOT RATED, 1 HR., 29 MINS.

This film has a grander trajectory than just about any other fashion doc. Halston, looking like a sunglassesed cross between Henry Fonda and Richard E. Grant, leads a couture revolution when his sleek, draped designs take American women into a new era. The film's darkly bedazzled view of the '70s is spurred by great dish from André Leon Talley, Liza Minnelli, and Nile Rodgers, who set the stage for Halston's triumphs—and his jaw-dropping fall when, high on fame (among other things), he sells his name to JC Penney and his empire collapses. **A-** —Owen Gleiberman



The Front Line
 Shin Ha-kyun, Ko Soo
NOT RATED, 2 HRS., 13 MINS.

South Korea's official Oscar submission for Best Foreign Language Film is set in the early 1950s, toward the end of the Korean War, on the eastern front, where fighting continues despite a shaky cease-fire. This strong, assured *Band of Brothers*-style drama from director Jang Hun makes universal points about bonding, misery, loyalty, and the senselessness of war through a portfolio of soldiers. For them, north and south are porous concepts: The men share rice wine, cigarettes, and even a sentimental song. **B+** —Lisa Schwarzbaum



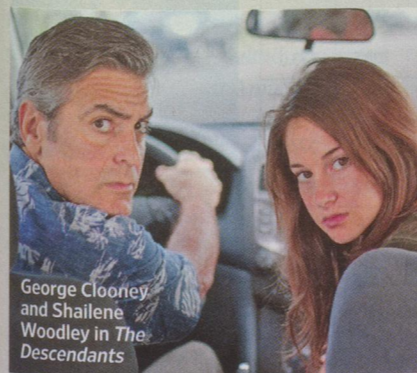
Loosies
 Peter Facinelli, Vincent Gallo
PG-13, 1 HR., 28 MINS.

A harmless crime caper. It stars Peter Facinelli (*Nurse Jackie*, the *Twilight* series), who also wrote the script, shaping the movie to his facile, unlayered charm. He plays Bobby, a pickpocket who's really a criminal saint (he steals because his daddy left him half a million dollars in debt). When an ex-lover (Jaimie Alexander) tells him she's pregnant, his path to redemption begins. It's watchable piffle, but the only real note of surprise comes from Vincent Gallo, who plays Bobby's screw-tightening boss with ruffled conviction. (Also available on VOD) **C+** —Owen Gleiberman

YOU KNOW WHO'S COOL?

Descendants Screenwriter Jim Rash

By day, he's *Community*'s goofy, uninhibited Dean Pelton. By night, he's a screenwriter who may just snag an Oscar nomination. —BENJAMIN WOOD



George Clooney and Shailene Woodley in *The Descendants*

Fans of NBC's *Community* know Jim Rash as the geekily flamboyant Dean Pelton. But thanks to his script for *The Descendants*, which he adapted from the novel of the same name with Nat Faxon and director Alexander Payne, the comic might be adding "Oscar-Nominated Screenwriter" to his résumé soon. "It's so weird," Rash says of the awards attention. "Recently, I was in drag all day at *Community*, then I was at [the Critics' Choice Awards]. I was like, 'This is the perfect day.'" Rash, a vet of L.A.'s Groundlings troupe, got the *Descendants* gig through *The Way, Way*

Back, a coming-of-age road-trip comedy that he wrote with Faxon. The movie never got made, but "it got us into meetings," Rash says. "One of those was with Alexander Payne's production company." Now the pair are writing a comedy about a dysfunctional family for Fox Searchlight and plan to direct *The Way, Way Back* themselves this summer. As for his day job, *Community* fans can breathe easy. Rash has no plans to give up acting for writing. "My lit agents want us to write more, but I love performing," he says. "It's really just been the best of both worlds to me."



Jim Rash