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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: August 20, 2010 03:38 PM

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DVD: Is Steve Carell a Movie Star?

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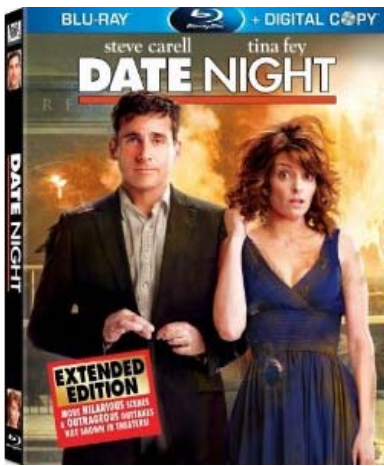
You bet he is. For me, actors can get on a roll and make good, popular films. But the true sign of a movie star is when they can pull audiences into movies that aren't very good. Steve Carell has been doing that in spades. His animated film *Despicable Me* struck me as bland and predictable. But word of mouth has been good and it's turned into a \$225 million blockbuster. Even *Dinner For Schmucks*, co-starring the always appealing Paul Rudd, has pulled them in, despite terrible reviews. And then there's *Date Night*.

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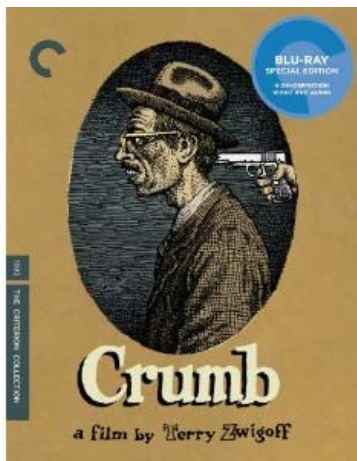
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The story of a couple who "steal" a table at a fancy restaurant when they take someone else's reservation, *Date Night* (\$29.98 regular or \$39.99 BluRay; Fox) is an *After Hours* romp where one bit of misunderstanding plunges a suburban husband and wife into dangerous waters. Carell and Tina Fey have nice chemistry as the couple but *Date Night* is so witless and unimaginative, it's hard to believe the film actually had legs and grossed about \$100 million in the US alone. Mark Wahlberg has a supporting role as a client of Fey's who is a muscled god and never wears his shirt. Three different scenes and that's the entire joke: he's in shape and he doesn't wear a shirt. And that's one of the more amusing moments in the film, which is filled with stupid chase scenes and an absurd finale.

As in all these movies, Carell is appealing as an Everyman who just wants to put a spark back into his marriage. In *The 40 Year Old Virgin* and *Little Miss Sunshine* he proved he had range and an awkward charm, even if his legacy may still be *The Office* (and who wouldn't be proud of that?). But *Evan Almighty*, *Dan In Real Life*, *Get Smart* and this latest trio show Carell may lack the one crucial ingredient of a movie star: the ability to pick good scripts. Here's hoping he pulls it together before audiences tire of him.



CRUMB (\$39.95 regular or BluRay; Criterion) -- Still one of the most jaw-dropping documentaries ever made, Terry Zwigoff's masterpiece is two films rolled into one: an appreciation of Robert Crumb, a major artist in the world of comix, as well as a depiction of a startlingly odd family. It's essential viewing for anyone who loves the movies, very funny and with a twist or two that is genuinely shocking. Several moments are lodged into my brain and will never leave: the one brother who sleeps on a bed of nails and cleanses himself by feeding a very long piece of string into his mouth and out the other end, a glimpse at the private journal of the other even sadder brother and Crumb himself on a couch remembering old times with his mother and saying defiantly, "Well, somebody gave us enemas!" As a tribute to the film, I keep a copy of the 1950 Disney version of *Treasure Island* always on my DVR. If someone spots it and laughs, I know we're going to get along just fine. Also out is Zwigoff's earlier film *Louie Bluie* (\$24.95; Criterion), an hour long look at the wildly entertaining musician and raconteur Howard Armstrong that serves as an excuse for telling the history of traveling jug bands in their 1930s heyday. Obviously, this is the film that probably gave Crumb the confidence to let Zwigoff into his life so these two films are forever linked in the best possible way.

To Rielle Hunter
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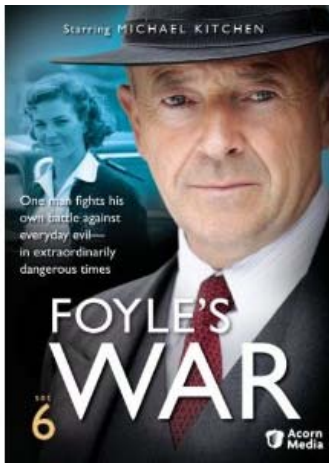
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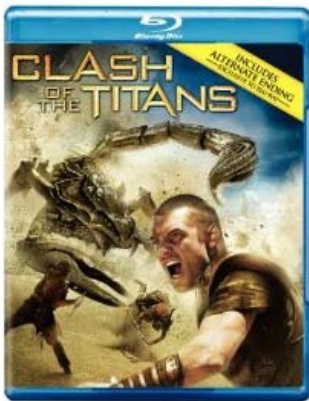
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Lea Michele's Diva



FOYLE'S WAR SET 6 (\$49.99; Acorn) -- I'm a huge fan of encouraging TV shows to stop while they're still on top creatively, something very very few series ever manage to do. And *Foyle's War* was always conceived as concluding the same time as WWII. But here it is, the war is winding down and Foyle -- a brilliant, terse Detective Chief Inspector -- is back on the job. And I'm glad. It's no fun when the "team" -- Foyle, his sidekick Paul Milner and the irrepressible Sam (played by the brilliantly named Honeysuckle Weeks) -- isn't together. And that's what we get off and on for these three new movies. But Michael Kitchen is so good as Foyle that I can't help being pleased at seeing him again. And it's certainly a good sign that the three movies get better and better, with the third hinting that Foyle might just be headed for America. Fine, but for heaven's sake, book Honeysuckle on the same voyage. Also out from Acorn is the latest in an endless stream of Poirot movies. Set 5 (\$49.99; Acorn) with three stand-alone features has the temerity to tackle *Murder On The Orient Express* and while I won't forget the movie anytime soon, Barbara Hershey and Eileen Atkins are a treat alongside David Suchet's definitive characterization. Finally, there's *Touching Evil The Complete Collection* (\$79.99; Acorn) stars Robson Green as the prototypical crime fighter who can instinctively get into the mind of the baddies. It's far less well known in the US than it should be, so dive in to the series, which has eight movie-length adventures.



CLASH OF THE TITANS (\$28.98 regular DVD or \$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- Finally we can put aside all the brouhaha about the rushed 3-D (which was pretty bad) and the weekend to weekend box office analysis (ultimately, the movie grossed \$490 million worldwide and there will be a sequel) and just deal with the movie on its own terms. And on its own terms, unfortunately, it's awful. But then, so was the original (\$34.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.), so it shouldn't be that much of a surprise when they hadn't rethought the movie so much as just reshot it. Sam Worthington has been in this and *Avatar* and he needs to get himself into a good role real fast or he's going to be having lunch with Gerard Butler soon where they try to figure out exactly where it all went wrong.



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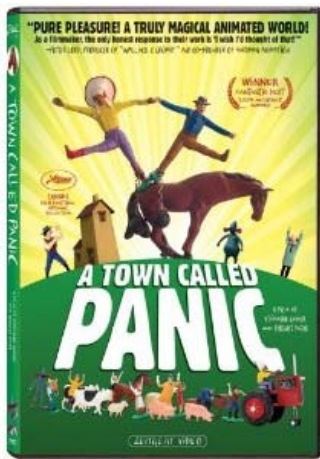


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HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES





A TOWN CALLED PANIC (\$29.99; Zeitgeist) -- This goofily silly stop-motion animated movie tells the anarchic story of Cowboy, Indian, and Horse, three roommates in a sprawling home who bicker and fight and team together to deal with invading aliens, neighbors, and an extraordinary number of bricks. Based on a Belgian children's TV show, this is a stop-motion animated film about the lives of Cowboy, Indian and Horse, three friends who live together in a house next door to a very loud, boisterous farmer. Horse loves the local music teacher but is too shy to admit it. Cowboy and Indian order bricks online to build a BBQ pit for Horse's birthday but accidentally get 50 million bricks instead of just 50. The bricks become a problem, of course. The hyper voices of the characters like the Postman and the Policeman are very winning and the occasional "bastard" and "merde" shows the tone is slightly more adult than the series presumably is. It feels stretched out even at 76 minutes but it does make one long to watch the TV series it sprang from. Twenty two minutes an episode with these guys sounds like a blast.



MOTHER (\$26.98; Magnolia) -- Bong Joon Ho's *The Host* -- the best monster movie in years -- was so much fun I can't help being a bit let down by his new film, even though it has merit. A mentally challenged young man is railroaded by the police into confessing to the murder of a high school girl that has shocked the community. He was seen in the area where the body was found, drinking and flirting with another high school girl just hours earlier. Finding a golf ball with his name on it near the body didn't help his case either. What's to investigate? But the young man's determined mother wants to clear his name. She starts by hiring the most expensive attorney in town but he's too dismissive. So Mother starts investigating on her own, discovering that the murdered girl was famously promiscuous and had a cell phone with pictures of all the men that slept with her. Wouldn't any loving mother hide in the homes of thugs to get evidence, hire people to beat up potential witnesses and get information or do just about anything to free her son? Both the mother and her son are well-acted, but after the fifth or so shocking revelation, the story becomes both more far fetched and more predictable. That doesn't take away from the central appeal of the revenge/justice engine that drives the film. But it's ultimately more of a melodrama than a gripping portrayal of what love can drive people to do.

Death & Dying

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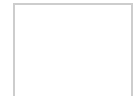
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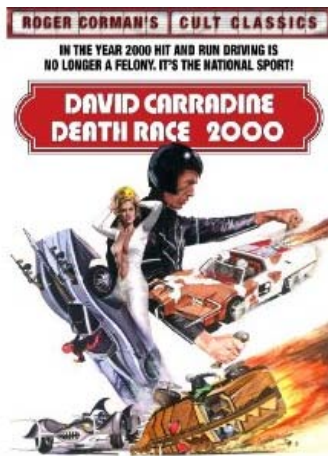


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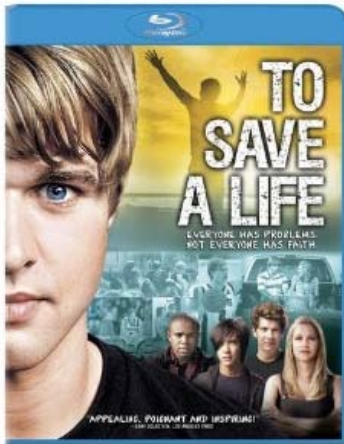
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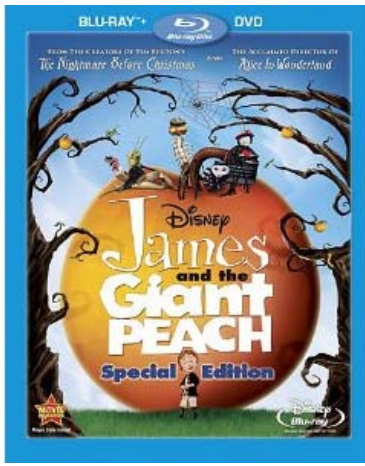




DEATH RACE 2000 (\$19.98 regular or \$26.97 BluRay; Shout) -- Shout Factory has been lovingly presenting a string of Roger Corman B movies with loads of extras and with the best picture quality they've probably ever enjoyed. But this is the one I've been waiting for: *Death Race 2000* is pure popcorn trash, a C or D movie that "satirizes" society's lust for sex and violence while it serves up plenty of sex (or at least glimpses of breasty women) and violence. David Carradine stars as the most successful competitor in Death Race, a competition where you score points for injuring and killing bystanders. The bad guys, hilariously, are not the heads of state feeding bread and circuses to the masses but the protesters who want to stop it. Sylvester Stallone co-stars and they would all go on to better work. It's by no means a good movie, but it's drive-in heaven and really does offer up just about every bonus (even including chats with the composer and the costume designer) you could hope for.



TO SAVE A LIFE (\$24.96 regular or \$34.95 BluRay; Sony) -- Unless you're a born-again Christian, you probably aren't aware of *To Save A Life* and the home movie trend it represents. In essence, some megachurches decided a great way to witness was to make a movie. In a "hey kids, let's put on a show" spirit, they funded their own very independent films and used local talent. Then wisely, they would release the film in community after community, with busloads of local churchgoers making a day of it and literally rang up millions in grosses. It was remarkably effective on every level...except the creative one. But with time, these movies have improved a bit and even wisely cast genuine actors in lead roles to carry the heavy lifting. That's the case with *To Save A Life*, a better than most example of this micro-indie trend. It stars ready for CW handsome actor Randy Wayne as Jake Taylor. He's a kid sucked into the whirl of the popular kids at his high school, even turning his back on his best friend. And don't forget, his best friend is one of the few black kids at school and has a permanent disability because he threw himself in front of a car to save Jake's life. Jake's new friends aren't just cool, of course, they're basically complete jerks. And when his former best pal commits suicide, Jake has a crisis of conscience, accepts Jesus into his heart and uses his skills to turn the heartfelt Christians into the coolest (and most welcoming) clique on campus. *To Save A Life* does a pretty good job of showing genuine temptation (sex is on everyone's mind), though clearly the deck is stacked against the loser non-evangelicals. (Really, does everyone who's not born again have to be such idiots?) And the lame-brained finale throws common sense out the window just to give our hero a cathartic moment. But if these movies keep improving, they might soon make one that's both good and good at what they want to accomplish. At the moment, it's hard to imagine *To Save A Life* doing more than entertaining the kids who've already bought into its message.



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH SPECIAL EDITION (\$39.99 BluRay; Disney) -- You know, Pixar isn't the only game in town when it comes to great animated films. Surely Henry Selick deserves more accolades for his terrific string of films: *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the live-action animated cult film *Monkeybone* with Brendan Fraser, instant classic *Coraline* (which has the best use of 3-D by any movie, period) and *James and the Giant Peach*. Based on the only book by Roald Dahl that I really like, it captures the black humor of Dahl as James inadvertently crushes his guardians and then heads off on a lark with Miss Spider, Grasshopper, Lady Bug and the rest. No small reason for its excellence is the top-notch score by Randy Newman (one of his best). It's a great reminder that Selick is one of the best talents working in movies today.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available free on iTunes](#). Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also [available for free on iTunes](#). [Link to him on Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Michael Mora 08:21 PM on 8/24/2010

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Carrell and Will Ferrel are both guilty of this. Pathetic attempts at humor. Jim Carrey was doing these schlocky roles for a while. Ashame they won't release Phillip Morris with him.

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Marklar 12:30 PM on 8/24/2010

41 Fans

"The Host -- the best monster movie in years"

You just lost your credibility. The Host is one of the most overrated movies in years. I heard all this great stuff...and it didn't live up. I thought it was novel for the first 30 minutes...the rest of the movie was so boring. I thought it was going a really cool direction...then just went down the beaten path. Lame.

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BigShotBob 11:24 AM on 8/23/2010

34 Fans

Steve Carrell's version of comedy is like a good Saturday Night Live skit: very funny in small doses, but does not translate well (read: becomes downright excruciating in very short order) when drawn out for more than a single scene. His best work was Anchorman.

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Chaling 10:20 AM on 8/23/2010

49 Fans

Only movie I have seen on this list was Date Night, and enjoyed it very much. Not a particular Carel fan, he has good stuff and not-so-good-stuff(The Office, which I cannot stand), but this was a fun movie. Tina Fey as well may have helped but think he could have made Date Night fun with another actress, or Tina Fey could have made it with a different actor.

Fun movie at any rate.

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Random2cents 03:04 AM on 8/22/2010

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It is my opinion that his films do well because of the ensemble cast in these films who for the most part have been very talented comedic men and women actors. Don't forget for the most part it's the writing as well. At the end of the day the demographic of folks that see his films really don't want some grandiose dramatic plot to ponder through on a Friday or Saturday they want a 90+ minute comedic diversion of the potpourri of issues they have to deal with on a daily basis.

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Michael Giltz 07:41 PM on 8/22/2010

59 Fans



I agree with you about the good casts. And I'm certainly not waiting for Carell to do Hamlet (though he was fine in a somewhat serious turn in Little Miss Sunshine). I'm happy to see him do light comedy; I personally haven't found most of the comedies he's done very good, unfortunately.

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SteveSFM 10:57 PM on 8/21/2010
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You're right. Death Race 2000 is not a good movie.

It's an AWESOME movie.

I'll be picking that baby up.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER
goodgravy 11:59 AM on 8/21/2010
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i am still waiting for steve carell to make me laugh instead of wince.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER
Kendall Hawley 11:53 AM on 8/21/2010
38 Fans



I wouldn't ignore the draw of Tina Fey for Date Night in addition to Steve Carell. I haven't seen the film yet, purely because of bad timing, and I know the reviews are pretty lukewarm, but I am still so excited to see this movie because it's two of my favorite actors together.

I disagree about Mother. I saw The Host and was totally turned of by the corniness, so I was less-than excited to see this, but the performance by the lead actress (as the mother) blew me away. I was so drawn in by what she was doing and why. There are also some interesting elements to the style that I hated in The Host but totally worked for me in this film. It's not perfect but better than most and I have a feeling it really depends on the person watching it.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER
Michael Giltz 07:39 PM on 8/22/2010
59 Fans



I wouldn't want to ignore Fey's drawing power either. Of course, she's been so busy with 30 Rock she hasn't made a lot of movies yet. Wrote and a supporting role in Mean Girls, her one big comedy Baby Mama and now this. Plus she'll have her own animated film -- Megamind -- to score with soon. As far as leading roles, she's two for two and just getting going. Glad you enjoyed Mother. It has stayed with me and many critics agree with you and are more positive about the film than I.

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Halsey 04:47 PM on 8/20/2010
258 Fans



Um..call me confused. I thought this was an article about Steve Carell; yet 75% was made up of reviews and (the shame) pricing of other movies? Is this a new tab I need to beware of?

I go off topic a lot, but I'm an anonymous poster, NOT the author of an article with a TITLE. Oh well, guess no one died.

Re Carell. I am so sad to admit I'm sick of him. Liked The Office, liked Virgin, LOVED him as the weatherman in Ron Burgundy where I believe he peaked (I love lamp; a classic). Steve is reminding me a bit of Ben Stiller now (who I cannot stand on screen). He (Steve) needs to slow down, unless he is truly just banking the money for when (soon) he is no longer a box office draw. What does it say about the intellect of the average movie goer that Steve IS a movie star? Shall we compare him to Robert Mitchum or Marlon Brando (or Steve Martin once he sold out?)

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iamsamh2 06:41 PM on 8/20/2010
49 Fans

Agree with you on Stiller, but not Carell. Not yet anyway. Marlon Brando and Robert Mitchum are hardly fair comparisons. Between the two of them they've made about 150 films and you can count the comedies on one hand.

"Anchorman" and "40 Year Old Virgin" put Steve on the movie-map and they're only 5-6 years old. Stiller's been showing up in bad movies for 20 years. Like all actors, there's going to be some poor choices, or movies picked based on \$\$\$\$. I think Carell will bank at the box office for a long time to come.

By comparison, I think Will Ferrell's moment has come and gone. He's made a string of box office losers recently. Carell's only had one poor showing so far (money-wise)- "Evan Almighty".

But we can respectfully agree to disagree.

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Michael Giltz 11:22 AM on 8/21/2010
59 Fans



Thanks for reading and your comments. Halsey, I run a DVD review column most weeks and tag it "DVD: ++++++" Just listing the titles doesn't draw in as many people as making the first item more of a focused essay. Not meant to be misleading, just more interesting. So now you know and hopefully won't feel there's any bait and switch going on.

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noodlesnake 01:57 PM on 8/21/2010

0 Fans

Let's not forget that Stiller made the fantastic Tropic Thunder a mere two years ago which brought back elements of his great 90's work and Zoolander (a classic imo). Stiller was also in Greenberg recently which I haven't seen yet but that has had great reviews. I'm sure Carell's movie career, which has only been going on for 6 years, has plenty of time to star in movies within the creative, the independent, the funny, and the generally boring box-office fare. I personally would like to see Sean Penn in a comedic movie. Does he always have to be so damn serious?? hahaha

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Halsey 08:05 PM on 8/22/2010

258 Fans



Noodle (love the moniker); I actually enjoyed Tropic in SPITE of Stiller being the star. Zoolander just left me irked that I couldn't get that 95ish minutes of my life back. I acknowledge(sp?) that some people, be they actors or co-workers just rub "me" the wrong way. I DO love the idea of Penn in a comedy, but please please, not a for the paycheck like the once great DeNiro and Hoffman playing of Fokker films or Analyze this or that tripe.

For fun, "if" you could put Penn in a GOOD, solid comedy, which would you pick?

I could see him (almost) in a kind of Nicholson role in As Good as It Gets, or even Something's gotta give; i.e., something still with teeth for an actor, but in a kitschy kinda way. It would be way cool to see if he could actually pull it off! (kudos for the idea!).

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