

Movie Reviews

by Tony Medley, MSPE



Relay

(9/10)

Netflix, Prime, Disney+

112 minutes

R



(photo by Bleeker Street)

Sarah Grant (played by Lily James), a biotech scientist, has been fired from her job because she has discovered that her company's genetically modified crops contain life-threatening side effects. She says she purloined damaging documents and intended to disclose them, but the company discovered the theft and is threatening her. Now she wants to return the documents. So, she goes to Ash (Riz Ahmed), a secretive fixer, to make a deal with the government, allowing her to return the documents and live the rest of her life in ease. Ash operates mysteriously through a "takeout," a relay operator, so they

never meet nor personally talk. And Ash remains totally anonymous. All the while, the company's operatives, led by Dawson (Sam Worthington), are trying to get the documents back and, in the process, to find out who and where Ash is.

Ash has specific directions that Sarah must follow, to the letter, or he will drop the project; and he takes enormous measures to protect his identity and location.

The way the story is set up is dazzling. This is a compelling, tense drama—a chase picture with Sarah hiding out, Ash trying to protect her, and Dawson and his team desperately trying to break the relay and find her and Ash.

The acting is superb. James is believably upset and scared. Ahmed gives a fine performance as one who should be a stoic professional but is slowly becoming emotionally involved with his client.

Brilliantly directed by David Mackenzie from a script by Justin Piasecki, this movie has all a thrill-seeker wants: danger, an ingenious plot, and a convoluted denouement. The nice thing about reviewing a good film is that one need not say much more than, "It's a good, well-done movie that works and will hold the viewers' attention until the end."

Anatomy of a Scandal

(9/10)

Netflix

Six 45-minute episodes

TV-MA



(press kit photo)

The British do these dramatizations well. This series is so good I wish I had first read the book (by Sarah Vaughan)—although then I would have known how it works out, so it would probably have spoiled this series which has apparently been around since 2022.

To start off, Siena Miller, who plays the lead of Sophie Whitehouse, is paired with Rupert Friend in the role as her husband, James, a top politician in the British government. James is appropriately arrogant, slimy, and untrustworthy-looking. Both Miller and Friend give award-quality performances.

Apparently happily married with two children, James is accused of rape by a subordinate, Olivia Lytton (Naomi Scott), with whom he had had a steamy affair. Prosecuting the case is Kate Woodcroft (Michelle Dockery, in another outstanding performance), who is a dogged prosecutor for reasons that become clearer near the end of the series.

The question is consent. Did Lytton consent or did she not? Mysteriously, Lytton's appearances are mostly limited to testimony in court. Her character is a mere cipher. I would have liked to have known a bit more about her. The series certainly

had enough time to flesh out her character a little, given that the series goes on for six episodes.

The series flashes back and forth between the university days of Sophie and James and the present day, slowly bringing James's character into focus. But it's not only James and his marriage that are on trial. James is the best friend and college chum of the British Prime Minister, Tom Southern (Geoffrey Streatfeild); and they secretly shared some wild experiences in their past. If the truth were known, the government could fall.

Directed by S. J. Clarkson from a script by David E. Kelley, this is a captivating tale without a slow point that takes twists and turns.

Caught Stealing

(8/10)

In theaters

107 minutes

R



(press kit photo)

Hank (Austin Butler) is a bartender, a big fan of the San Francisco Giants, and an ex-baseball player whose bright future was terminated after an auto accident (an event that is played and replayed throughout the film). He's got a loving girlfriend, Yvonne (Zoë Kravitz), who really cares more about him than he cares about himself.

After spending time with Yvonne, Hank goes back to his own apartment where his punk neighbor, Russ (Matt Smith), entices Hank to care for his cat while Russ goes to visit his dying father. Hank

doesn't like cats, but he's got a good heart and so agrees.

Later, Hank enters his apartment building and comes upon two bad guys trying to get in touch with Russ. In the process, they beat the living daylight out of Hank, costing him a kidney.

Hank's luck keeps getting worse, and he gets involved with two murderous Orthodox Jewish mobsters (Vincent D'Onofrio and Liev Schreiber, both unrecognizable) and a detective, Roman (Regina King), all of whom are after poor Hank. They all want something from Russ and think that Hank can get it for them. The result is a lot of running, hiding, and graphic violence as Hank tries to fend them off, all while having no idea what they are after.

This is an action-packed film directed by Darren Aronofsky from a script by Charlie Huston, with fine performances that keep the tension going through to the end.

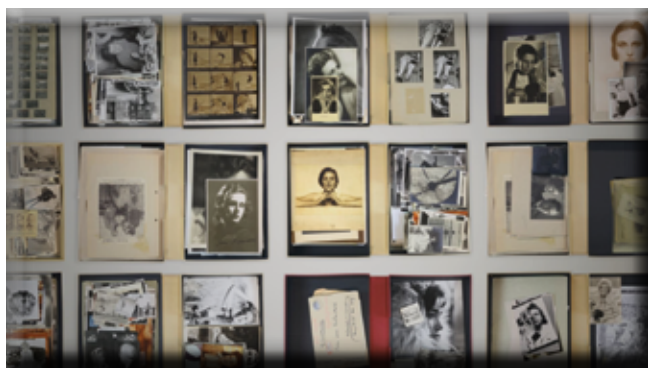
Riefenstahl

(9/10)

In theaters

119 minutes

NR



(press kit photo)

This story of Nazi cinematographer Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003) has been masterfully put together by writer/director Andres Veiel, who was given unprecedented access to Leni's files and records. It took Veiel more than five years to go over all the material and assemble this captivating

story of such an enigmatic woman. Was Leni a collaborative Nazi or just a filmmaker?

The film has a narrator, but it is mostly Leni telling her own story via her first diary from 1948; recordings of private phone calls with people, such as Albert Speer; a collection of unpublished photos and 8 mm footage from the '30s; and drafts of her memoirs among a treasure trove of memorabilia.

Cuts from a 1976 TV talk show begin the movie, with Leni being interviewed by *Ein Gespräch*. During the interview, Leni is challenged by a contemporary woman, Elfriede Kretschmer, who castigates her for not speaking up. Apparently, Leni was inundated with letters of support after that show aired.

Although Veiel found evidence that Leni was an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis as early as 1932, she maintained that she was just a filmmaker and was unaware of the atrocities of the Nazi regime, a claim which she repeated over and over and over.

When she was in her 60s, Leni began a relationship with Horst Keppler—a man 40 years her junior—which continued the rest of her life. Abused by her father, Leni had been an actress during the late '20s, before she became a filmmaker. Leni was also an accomplished skier, and there are shots of her skiing both as a young woman and in her later years.

This movie also shares clips from Leni's films—most notably, *Olympia* (1938), about the 1936 Olympics—and many of the shots, especially of the high divers, are almost lyrical, highlighted by the unusual angles from which the shots were taken. *Riefenstahl* also contains propaganda shots of Nazi gatherings and huge crowds of supporting Germans, clips which were taken from Leni's 1935 film, *Triumph of the Will*. There is no denying Leni's talent for cinematography.

Riefenstahl is a fascinating film about a woman of whom many have heard; but few have known her.

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