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National Geographic Channel
PARIS — A slew of past Palme d’Or winners and a strong Asian presence mark this year’s Official Selection for the 66th annual Festival de Cannes, unveiled Thursday morning by president Gilles Jacob and artistic director Thierry Fremaux against a big-screen backdrop of this year’s official poster at a Champs Elysees theater.

The Competition lineup includes Croisette regulars Steven Soderbergh and brothers Joel and Ethan Coen, as well as Roman Polanski, who will also bring a special screening to this year’s festival, set to run May 15-26.

Soderbergh will present his Liberace biopic Beyond the Candelabra, starring Michael Douglas and Matt Damon, the Coens will bring Inside Llewyn Davis, starring Carey Mulligan and Justin Timberlake. This year’s Competition slate at Cannes will include the Coen brothers’ drama Inside Llewyn Davis, starring Carey Mulligan and Justin Timberlake.

Llewyn Davis, starring Carey Mulligan, Justin Timberlake and John Goodman, and Polanski will bring Venus in Fur to the Competition.

They are joined by the likes of Nicolas Winding Refn’s Only God Forgives, which reunites the director with his Drive star Ryan Gosling; Alexander Payne’s Nebraska; French favorite Arnaud Desplechin’s U.S.-set Jimmy P. (Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian) with Benicio Del Toro; and Iranian helmer Asghar Farhadi’s French production The Past, starring Berenice Bejo. Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi, who will screen Un Chateau en Italie, is the only female Cannes Vets Among Official Selection Lineup

By Rhonda Richford

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The Competition and Un Certain Regard sidebar line-ups do not include a single British or German film, but show a strong Asian presence. During the press conference, Fremaux highlighted the importance of exposing directors from less established filmmaking countries, such as Chad, which is in competition for the first time. He also said 1,858 films were submitted to the fest’s selection committee this year.

Also screening in Cannes, but Out-of-Competition, are J.C. Chandor’s ocean drama All Is Lost, starring Robert Redford, and Guillaume Canet’s Blood Ties.

The Un Certain Regard sidebar will include such films as Flora Lau’s Bends, James Franco’s As I Lay Dying, Mohammad Rasoulof’s Anonymous, Claire Denis’ Les Salauds, Ryan Coogler’s Fruitvale Station, Hany Abu-Assad’s Omar and Adolfo Alix Jr.’s Death March.

The international media has been buzzing about this year’s lineup since Baz Luhrmann’s The Great Gatsby was announced as the opening film after a few low-key years. The selection is guaranteed to bring Hollywood glamor to the Croisette, with Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire and Mulligan set to walk the red carpet.

The titles to be shown at Cannes in special screenings are: Polanski’s Weekend of a Champion, Jerry Lewis tribute Max Rose from Daniel Noah, Muhammad Ali’s Greatest Fight from Stephen Frears, Roberto Minervini’s Stop the Pounding Heart and Cannes exploration Seduced and Abandoned from James Toback, which was shot during last year’s festival.

A special session honoring India, this year’s special guest country, will show Bombay Talkies, from Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Zoya Akhtar and Karan Johar.

Meanwhile, Amit Kumar’s Monsoon Shootout and Johnnie To’s Blind Detective will get midnight screenings.

Also previously revealed, South Africa-set thriller Zulu starring Orlando Bloom and Forest Whitaker will be the closing-night film. French actress Audrey Tautou will host both the opening and closing evenings as the mistress of ceremonies.

“As is tradition, it was late into the night before we finished the selection,” Fremaux tweeted before Thursday’s press conference. “And, as is tradition, we have a mix of auteurs, new discoveries, surprises and stars.”

Steven Spielberg is set to preside over the jury, while Palme d’Or winner Jane Campion will oversee the short film competition category. Danish helmer Thomas Vinterberg will lead the jury for the popular Un Certain Regard sidebar of the festival, which will be opened by Sofia Coppola’s The Bling Ring.

At the end of the conference, Fremaux hinted that more announcements will come next week. The remaining jurors have yet to be announced, and he is known for making last-minute additions to the lineup.

Click here to see the full lineup.

OBLIVION EYEING $30 MILLION-PLUS OPENING WEEKEND

By Pamela McClintock
LAS VEGAS — Tom Cruise’s Oblivion is poised to win the weekend box-office race with a $30 million-plus debut, marking one of the actor’s better openings in recent times.

Adult males are expected to fuel the sci-fi epic, which cost Universal and Elliott Inc. $120 million to produce. The pic, which opened last weekend offshore, has already earned north of $77 million at the foreign box office, where Cruise remains a major draw.

Directed by Joseph Kosinski (Tron), Oblivion co-stars Morgan Freeman, Olga Kurylenko, Andrea Riseborough, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau and Melissa Leo.

Peter Chernin and Dylan Clark produced.

Cruise’s track record domestically has been mixed. Jack Reacher debuted to $15.2 million last December on its way to tallying a so-so $80 million in North American.

Sci-fi epic Oblivion, starring Tom Cruise, has already earned north of $77 million overseas. Conversely, Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol, opening to $29.6 million in December 2011, turned into a box-office monster, taking in nearly $700 million worldwide.

Sci-fi is a familiar genre for Cruise, who starred in 2002’s Minority Report and 2005’s War of the Worlds, both directed by Steven Spielberg.

Set in 2077, 60 years after Earth was destroyed by aliens, Oblivion follows one of the last humans stationed on the planet as he uncovers a troubling secret. Kosinski’s script is adapted from his graphic novel of the same name.

Universal decided to get a jump on the beginning of the crowded summer box-office by opening Oblivion now. The studio has gone aggressively after males by advertising on major sports events, such as the March Madness college basketball tournament.

Oblivion opens in another seven international markets this weekend.

THR AT TRIBECA

As part of the film festival’s Tribeca Talks series, The Hollywood Reporter’s David Rooney chats with Whoopi Goldberg at SVA Theater 1 in New York following Monday’s 6 p.m. screening of her directorial debut, I Got Somethin’ to Tell You, a documentary about the late comedian Moms Mabley. Click here for more information.
Expanding nationwide into more than 1,500 theaters this weekend is Derek Cianfrance’s indie drama *The Place Beyond the Pines*, starring Bradley Cooper and Ryan Gosling. The pic, from Focus Features, began its limited run late last month has earned north of $6 million to date.

**Cassidy set to join Clooney in Tomorrowland**

By Borys Kit

**Raffey Cassidy, the** English actress who played a young Snow White in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, is set to star opposite George Clooney in *Tomorrowland*, Disney’s top-secret feature project being directed by Brad Bird.

The plot of the script is under lock and key, though it has been described as being in the vein of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Steven Spielberg’s 1978 film about a man searching for extraterrestrials on Earth. Cassidy will play a young girl robot who has been around for decades. Also a key factor: She knows several fighting styles. She has a previous relationship with Clooney’s character, a bitter inventor.

Hugh Laurie is the pic’s antagonist.

Lost co-creator Damon Lindelof co-wrote the script with Jeff Jensen, an editor at *Entertainment Weekly*.

The pedigree of Bird and Lindelof, their standing in the geek community and the force field of secrecy enveloping the project have put *Tomorrowland* under the microscope in the fandom community.

The casting is a huge coup for Cassidy, who came out on top of a worldwide search. In addition to her *Huntsman* appearance as a young Kristen Stewart, she also played a young Eva Green in last year’s *Dark Shadows*. Cassidy also appears in the British TV series *Mr. Selfridge* and plays the title character in the indie *Molly Moon: The Incredible Hypnotist*.

She is repped by Gersh, Luber Roklin and McKuin Frankel Whitehead, and Shepherd Management in the U.K.

**THR, Fandango partner to sell movie tickets**

**Staff report**

*The Hollywood Reporter* has teamed with Fandango, the nation’s leading moviegoer destination, to provide consumers with the ability to buy movie tickets through the *THR* website and mobile app starting May 2.

Visitors to THR.com and users of the app will be able to purchase tickets for the movies they read about in the entertainment industry’s flagship news media brand. The new functionality will give users one-click access to purchase tickets for any theater in the Fandango network, up to 45 days in advance of a film’s opening.

“As The Hollywood Reporter’s traffic continues to grow to a more consumer-facing audience — comScore now cites nearly 8 million domestic unique — enabling our movie fans with the ability to buy tickets through Fandango right from our editorial pages adds tremendous value to our readers,” said *THR* senior vp and publisher Lynne Segall.

Added Fandango president Paul Yanover: “The *Hollywood Reporter*’s influential readership is both highly involved and engaged in the entertainment industry, and they share our passion for moviegoing. With Fandango now serving close to 75 percent of all movie screens across the country, we are very pleased to help meet the ticketing needs of The *Hollywood Reporter*’s savvy audience with our many moviegoer conveniences.”

The deal was announced Thursday at CinemaCon in Las Vegas, following news of Fandango’s five-year renewal of its long-term partnership with Regal Cinemas and the addition of 500 new screens from four new exhibitors, bringing Fandango’s nationwide theater reach to more than 21,000 screens.
FX Picks Up Lopez Comedy in 10/90 Deal

By Lacey Rose

George Lopez is heading to FX.

The News Corp.-owned network has landed his ensemble comedy, titled Saint George, which will revolve around the chaotic life of a recently divorced working-class Mexican-American who becomes a successful entrepreneur. Lopez is set to portray a man who struggles to balance his demanding ex-wife, his 11-year-old son, his overbearing mother who just moved in and his uncle as well as his new role as a philanthropist “giving back” by teaching history once a week at a night school.

The multicamera series will follow the Anger Management model of a straight-to-series 10-episode order. If the latter hits a certain ratings threshold, 90 more episodes automatically will be ordered, allowing it to sell into syndication on an expedited timeline.

Roseanne creator Matt Williams signed on to run the half-hour project in mid-February. At that time, Lopez, who starred on his eponymous ABC sitcom for six seasons, had been attached to the Lionsgate effort for about a year, as the executives at Lionsgate and studio-owned distributor Debmar-Mercury searched for a show-runner. Once hired, Lopez and Williams, along with his Wind Dancer Films partner David McFadzean, collectively mapped out the series and then began shopping it to networks.

“The 10/90 model requires a unique individual who has the ability to pull off this kind of daunting schedule — George is that guy, and we couldn’t be happier that he chose FX as the home for his new project,” said FX Networks executive vp Chuck Saftler in a statement. “We’ve had a great experience working with Kevin Beggs and his team at Lionsgate as well as with Mort Marcus and Ira Bernstein at Debmar-Mercury and are thrilled to expand that relationship.”

Added Marcus and Bernstein: “Our business model is all about finding unique talent and broad concepts that have the best chance of succeeding both on networks and later in off-net syndication. George Lopez’s broad appeal and strong following from the rapidly growing Hispanic audience — combined with the unmatched experience and track record of Matt and David — makes us extremely confident they can deliver our next big hit.”

Saint George was co-created by Lopez, Williams and McFadzean, with the three-some set to co-write the first episode. The trio, along with 3 Arts’ Michael Rotenberg (It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia), Dete Meserve and Judd Payne, will serve as executive producers on the project, which is set to begin production in August. Lionsgate TV is set to produce in association with Wind Dancer Films, Travieso Productions and 3 Arts Entertainment.

“In the tradition of George’s frank and fearless stand-up comedy, Saint George will reflect his no-holds-barred comedic take on the tensions surrounding race, class, sex and family life in Los Angeles through the eyes of a man straddling two separate cultures,” said Beggs, president of Lionsgate TV Group.

While Anger Management has failed to lure sky-high ratings in recent months or the kind of glowing reviews to which FX has grown accustomed, the acquisition still is widely perceived as a savvy investment inside the halls of News Corp. After all, the network paid only $600,000 per episode to license the series — significantly less than it traditionally would shell out for original or off-net fare — and was able to sell it to Madison Avenue at the highest CPM rates the network has ever seen for a first-year series.

What’s more, FX quickly will accumulate enough episodes to start stacking them on the schedule the way it does its syndicated programs. “When you look at all of the off-net product that’s gone for well over $1 million — if not closer to $2 million [in the case of Modern Family and The Big Bang Theory repeats] — per episode, I feel very, very good about the business proposition we made here,” Saftler said in an interview with The Hollywood Reporter earlier this year. In the case of Lopez, his ABC series performed particularly well in off-net syndication.

The Lopez acquisition comes as FX is looking to bulk up its offerings in anticipation of FXX, a soon-to-be rebranded network that will begin as a destination for comedy. The younger-skewing net, which launches in 74 million homes in September, will join flagship FX and movie-centric FXM; collectively, the trio of channels will ramp up FX’s development and pilot-production slate, more than doubling its current entries to feature 25 scripted original series across the networks during the next three years.

To be sure, Anger Management’s success — broader than that of Tyler Perry’s House of Payne or Ice Cube’s Are We There Yet? — has given way to other opportunities. Particularly appealing is the ability not only to remove the wait time and guesswork but also to cash in on success. Charlie Sheen, who is a partner in Anger Management, is poised to make as much as $200 million off of his FX comedy. Lionsgate and Debmar recently locked down Bob Boyett and
FROM PAGE 6

Robert Horn to executive produce the company’s next 10/90 effort, an oddball comedy starring Kelsey Grammer and Martin Lawrence. Although that project has yet to be shopped, multiple broadcast networks are said to have expressed interest. To date, the 10/90 entries have landed exclusively on basic cable.

RIBISI IN FOR DEXER ON FOX COMEDY DADS

By Lesley Goldberg

Fox’s upcoming Dads series is staging a Ted reunion. Giovanni Ribisi has been tapped to replace Tommy Dewey as the star of the comedy from Seth MacFarlane and the creative team behind Ted, The Hollywood Reporter has confirmed.

The comedy — from Ted writers Alec Sulkin, Wellesley Wild and executive producer MacFarlane — revolves around two successful guys (Ribisi and Seth Green) in their 30s who have their lives turned upside down when their nightmare dads unexpectedly move in with them.

Following the pilot taping last week, the role is being reimagined, and it made the most sense to recast the part. Ribisi will take over the role of Warner, co-owner of a successful video game company and a family man with a wife and two young children. Martin Mull will play Warner’s father.

The casting reunites Ribisi with Sulkin, Wild and MacFarlane after he co-starred as Ted’s kidnapper, Donny, in the 2012 Mark Wahlberg feature. The primarily feature actor also lent his voice to an episode of MacFarlane’s Family Guy this season.

On the TV side, Ribisi’s credits include Entourage and Friends. He also is attached to reunite with the trio for their upcoming Western comedy feature A Million Ways to Die in the West.

Ribisi marks the second role recast in the series; Vanessa Lachey was recast for the part of Warner’s wife (previously played by Erin Pineda) following the table read. Brenda Song, Peter Riegert and Tonita Castro co-star on the 20th Television and Fuzzy Door multicamera comedy that was picked up straight to series earlier this pilot season.

Ribisi is repped by CAA and Management 360.

IT’S OFFICIAL: DEXTER TO END AFTER SEASON 8

By Lesley Goldberg

Showtime has made it official: Dexter’s upcoming eighth season will be its last.

In a new clip with two minutes of footage from the serial killer drama, Showtime confirmed the Michael C. Hall and Jennifer Carpenter drama will end after this season.

In the clip, Deb (Carpenter) is avoiding her brother — she hasn’t talked to him in weeks and skipped LaGuerta’s memorial — and is shutting everyone out as she claims to be working a case.

“My life is none of your business,” she tells him.

“What do you want to know why I’m not returning your calls? It’s because I don’t want to talk to you and I really don’t want to fucking see you. Why? Because you made me compromise everything about myself that I care about. And I hate you for it. I shot the wrong person in that trailer.”

News of Dexter’s final season comes after CBS Corp. chief Leslie Moonves, who oversees corporate sibling Showtime, told investors in March that Dexter would end its run this year. Showtime execs had been mum on what destiny held for Dexter, declining to comment on the show’s future — until now.

“We are absolutely writing it with an end in sight, but if we get told otherwise somewhere along the way, we’ll take it in a different direction,” executive producer Scott Buck told The Hollywood Reporter in December following the shocking season-seven finale in which Deb kills LaGuerta. “But we are definitely working toward the finale of the series. We are indeed, yes.”

“When it debuted in 2006, Dexter redefined the genre by taking the anti-hero to new heights and pushing the boundaries of the television landscape,” Showtime chairman and CEO Matt Blank said Thursday. “Dexter paved the way for the next generation of award-winning hit Showtime series, and its cultural impact will be felt for years to come.”

Added Showtime president of entertainment David Nevins: “Dexter is a landmark franchise for our network, and we cannot wait to unveil the conclusion of this series as we know it to the millions of passionate fans who have supported the show season after season. We’d like to thank Michael, Jennifer and Dexter’s indomitable cast, executive producers, writers and crew for eight incredible seasons.”

Showtime will use Dexter, which was renewed a year ago for seasons seven and eight, as a launching pad for Ray Donovan, moving up its premiere from fall to summer for the first time come June. Season eight — which will include the return of Yvonne Strahovski as Hannah — is set to bow June 30.

During its run, Dexter has been nominated for 25 Emmys, including four for outstanding drama series. Hall picked up five nominations for lead actor in a drama five years in a row (from 2008-2012) and has picked up 10 Golden Globe noms. It has won four Emmys and two Golden Globes.

Dexter ranks as Showtime’s No. 1-rated series (tied with Homeland). Its seventh-season finale drew 6.2 million weekly viewers — its highest-rated season yet. The news comes a year after the pay cable net wrapped Mary-Louise Parker comedy Weeds, which like Dexter was an early awards-season magnet for Showtime as it ramped up its original scripted fare.
Judge Again Rules for YouTube in Viacom Suit

By Eriq Gardner

NEW YORK — Viacom has been hit with a devastating legal loss.

For the second time in three years, U.S. District Judge Louis Stanton has granted YouTube summary judgment in a huge copyright lawsuit.

The decision comes after the Second Circuit Court of Appeals revived the lawsuit last April. In that opinion, the appeals court agreed with YouTube that internet service providers must be aware of infringements before becoming liable for infringements, but also determined that the federal judge hadn’t properly considered whether YouTube may have had actual knowledge of specific infringing clips or whether YouTube might have essentially willfully blinded itself from having that knowledge.

Since then, the parties have been fighting over whose responsibility it was to demonstrate YouTube’s knowledge.

On Thursday, Stanton ruled that YouTube is protected by the safe harbor provisions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

Saying that Viacom was making “ingenious” arguments that amounted to “an anachronistic, pre-Digital Millennium Copyright Act” view of the law, the judge wrote, “The burden of showing that YouTube knew or was aware of the specific infringements of the works in suit cannot be shifted to YouTube to disprove.”

The lawsuit was filed in New York federal court in 2007. It was alleged that YouTube, later acquired by Google, had built its business by hosting without authorization thousands of copyright-infringing videos such as The Daily Show and SpongeBob SquarePants.

In 2010, Stanton first ruled in YouTube’s favor.

At issue is section 512(c) of the DMCA, which affords safe harbor for websites responding expeditiously to takedown demands. Despite Viacom’s arguments that YouTube ignored red flags and refused to institute protocol to filter copyright-infringing works, the judge said that statutory protections required more on Viacom’s end.

Viacom appealed the case to the 2nd Circuit.

In deciding to revive the suit and remand it back to Stanton, the appeals judges noted that that 75 percent-80 percent of all YouTube streams contained copyrighted material in the period at issue, and that suggested “that the defendants were conscious that significant quantities of material on the YouTube website were infringing.”

The judges at the appellate court, though, said a service provider needs “awareness of specific infringing material” before being held liable.

In coming to Thursday’s decision, Stanton noted Viacom’s acknowledgement in its summary judgment papers that it lacks “the kind of evidence that would allow a clip-by-clip assessment of actual knowledge.”

This is a demonstration, according to the judge, that “plaintiffs lack proof that YouTube had knowledge or awareness of any specific infringements of clips-in-suit.”

Stanton next turned to the question of equivalents — whether YouTube willfully blinded itself or had the right and ability to control infringing activity.

On the first, the judge wrote “the examples proffered by plaintiffs (to which they claim YouTube was willfully blind) give at most information that infringements were occurring with particular works, and occasional indications of promising areas to locate and remove them. The specific locations of infringements are not supplied: at most, an area of search is identified, and YouTube is left to find the infringing clip.”

After referring to some legal precedent, the judge pointed to a failure on Viacom’s part to identify specific clips, saying that the DMCA excuses YouTube from doing that search, and that the plaintiff comes up short in producing the kind of knowledge that would show willful blindness.

Judge Stanton also turned to the issue of whether YouTube, even without knowledge of specific infringing activity, may have influenced activity while at the same time gaining a financial benefit, so as to lose its safe harbor from copyright liability.

In analyzing the “right and ability to control” infringing activity, the Second Circuit ruled the safe harbor provisions “requires something more than the ability to remove or block access to materials posted on a service provider’s website.”

Viacom said that “something more” was established by YouTube’s willingness to allow its services to be used to infringe, that the UGC site exercised judgment on deciding to remove some but not all clips and that YouTube organized and facilitated searches of videos. Viacom also pointed to internal emails from YouTube execs on how to monitor copyrighted works on the system and how the defendant had at one point disabled community flagging of material on the service.

But Stanton didn’t buy it.

He wrote, “YouTube’s decisions to restrict its monitoring efforts to certain groups of infringing clips ... do not exclude it from the safe harbor, regardless of their motivation. Plaintiffs’ remaining evidence of control goes no further than the normal functioning of any service provider, and shows neither participation in, nor coercion of, user infringement activity.”
By Todd McCarthy

A sort of The Eternal Return played out in the ruins of a post-apocalyptic planet Earth, Joseph Kosinski’s Oblivion is an absolutely gorgeous film dramatically caught between its aspirations for poetic romanticism and the demands of heavy sci-fi action. After a captivating beginning brimming with mystery and evident ambition, the air gradually seeps out of the balloon that keeps this thinly populated tale aloft, leaving the ultimate impression of a nice try that falls somewhat short of the mark. There’s enough futuristic eye candy and battle scenes to lure the genre boys, while the presence of three important female characters, as well as Tom Cruise in good form, could attract more women than usual for this sort of fare, resulting in mostly robust, but not great, returns worldwide.

The Universal release bowed last week in most international territories, while it opens domestically today.

To those who might wish to avoid a film by the maker of Tron: Legacy, it should be stressed that Oblivion is a more interesting work by a good distance, an imaginative speculative piece set some six decades hence that always engages serious attention, even if it doesn’t convincingly jell. In mood, a certain delicacy and the sense of isolation both on a depopulated Earth and somewhere above it, the recent film that this pic most strongly recalls is WALL-E, except with violence and without the humor and charm of the Pixar classic.

There have been many films set on an Earth depleted of humans, but few as visually enthralling as this one. Shot by Claudio Miranda (Life of Pi), Oblivion shares that pic’s lovely light, nuanced coloration and virtually seamless meshing of live photography and effects. In neither film is it always possible to be entirely sure of what is real and what’s computer-generated, but the result is beautiful however it breaks down.

After what appear to be memory flashes of a previous life back in an early 21st century New York City on the part of Cruise’s Jack Harper, he and his partner Vika (Andrea Riseborough) wake up in what can only take the prize as the ultimate loft space, circa 2077, a perch that’s the last word in minimalist chic. It also affords unobstructed views of what’s been left behind after the catastrophe that saw the moon blown into pieces, which in turn resulted in earthly ruin and a subsequent evacuation of survivors to Saturn’s planet Titan.

Jack (Cruise’s second use of the name in a row, after Jack Reacher) takes daily spins down to Earth in a bladeless, mosquito-like helicopter, while the British Vika tracks his movements and coordinates with headquarters, personified on a screen by the friendly, Southern-accented Sally (Melissa Leo). The self-described “mop-up crew,” Jack and Sally, who get on well, have only two weeks to go before they finish up and head for Titan.

On the ground, Jack looks for any signs of Scavengers, or Scavs, who, apparently, were defeated in the great war but still provoke worries with their desperate ambushes. He also must avoid the radioactive zones, which remain hot. Everywhere he goes, however, Jack is protected by drones, fast-flying globe-like hi-tech wonders that are armed to the teeth and can reliably detect friend or foe.

Jack seems to relish being haunted by the past. He wears a Yankees cap, nostalgically wallows in lore surrounding the final Super Bowl, played in 2017, while surrounded by the ruins of the stadium where it took place and uses the upper part of the Empire State Building, which sticks out of the ground that has swallowed the rest of the structure, as a sort of home base and control tower.

Jack also is inordinately fond of a collection of high-falutin Victorian-era verse by Thomas Macauly titled The Lays of Ancient Rome, especially the line that reads, “And how can man die better than facing fearful odds.” Given that Jack seems to be the last man responsible for tidying up affairs on Earth, he’d better not die prematurely, though there is someone or something down there that seems bent on catching him.

The film’s delightful sense of apartness in the early going and the industrious way that Vika, especially, approaches her task of administering to the final business of Earth are things that can’t last, especially not after Jack brings home the one survivor of a mysterious crash of a spaceship carrying several hibernating humans. Once she wakes up and recovers, Julia (Olga Kurylenko) throws a monkey wrench into life in the loft, not only...
because she is so beautiful (Riseborough’s alarmed reactions to her are indelibly registered) but because she is an arrival from the past, when she was Jack’s wife.

Revelations of what follows are best not detailed, except to say that Morgan Freeman and Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, respectively, play the intelligent and impulsive members of a rebel band that soon captures Jack and Julia. As much as Jack aspires to recapture the past, however, and regardless of Julia’s evident purity of intent, the renewed relationship doesn’t click as intended, mostly because it’s tough to buy the conceit of the couple reunited after so long.

Further twists and betrayals lie in store, but they feel more like obligatory plot complications than organic to the overall story. As a result, viewer engagement gradually lessens, leading to a climax that makes for a dream; if that soon captures Jack and Julia. As much as Jack aspires to recapture the past, however, and regardless of Julia’s evident purity of intent, the relationship doesn’t click as intended, mostly because it’s tough to buy the conceit of the couple reunited after so long.

As Heidi gradually falls under the witches’ spell — it takes place over a week, signaled by title cards indicating the day accompanied by portentous sound effects — the film piles on scenes in which she encounters such malevolent figures as a priest who drips blood from his mouth and a horde of rats that fill her hallway. Speaking of hallways, there are more ominous shots of them here than in all of The Shining.

That film and Rosemary’s Baby are but two of the obvious influences on this effort, with the director’s love for B-movies evident in his enjoyable casting of such performers as Davison, Dee Wallace, Maria Conchita Alonso, Judy Geesoon and Meg Foster as a crone-like witch.

**LORDS OF SALEM**

By Frank Scheck

NEW YORK — It was only a matter of time before rocker-filmmaker Rob Zombie (The Devil’s Rejects, House of 1000 Corpses, the Halloween re-makes) turned his attention to witches. Representing a more subtle, stylized effort than usual for this slasher-film aficionado, The Lords of Salem is more creepily atmospheric than truly scary and eventually lapses into silliness. But it does provide some evocatively spooky moments along the way.

Beginning with a scene set in the 17th century featuring a coven of witches — naked, naturally — cursing the preacher who has sentenced them to be burned at the stake, the film flash-forwards to modern-day Salem, where Heidi (Sheri Moon Zombie, the director’s wife) works as a radio DJ.

One day she receives a mysterious wooden box containing an LP record with music by the titular group, which she broadcasts. The other-worldly music turns out to have a disturbing effect on its female listeners, including Heidi, who begins showing signs of either her becoming one of Satan’s spawns or relapsing into her former drug use.

A local historian (Bruce Davison) who considers witchcery merely a form of psychosis begins looking into the phenomenon, which eventually leads him to an unfortunate encounter with Heidi’s landlord and her female cohorts, who turn out to be modern-day descendants of the ill-fated witches.

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**LORDS OF SALEM**

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NEW YORK — It was only a matter of time before rocker-filmmaker Rob Zombie (The Devil’s Rejects, House of 1000 Corpses, the Halloween re-makes) turned his attention to witches. Representing a more subtle, stylized effort than usual for this slasher-film aficionado, The Lords of Salem is more creepily atmospheric than truly scary and eventually lapses into silliness. But it does provide some evocatively spooky moments along the way.

Beginning with a scene set in the 17th century featuring a coven of witches — naked, naturally — cursing the preacher who has sentenced them to be burned at the stake, the film flash-forwards to modern-day Salem, where Heidi (Sheri Moon Zombie, the director’s wife) works as a radio DJ.

One day she receives a mysterious wooden box containing an LP record with music by the titular group, which she broadcasts. The other-worldly music turns out to have a disturbing effect on its female listeners, including Heidi, who begins showing signs of either her becoming one of Satan’s spawns or relapsing into her former drug use.

A local historian (Bruce Davison) who considers witchery merely a form of psychosis begins looking into the phenomenon, which eventually leads him to an unfortunate encounter with Heidi’s landlord and her female cohorts, who turn out to be modern-day descendants of the ill-fated witches.

As Heidi gradually falls under the witches’ spell — it takes place over a week, signaled by title cards indicating the day accompanied by portentous sound effects — the film piles on scenes in which she encounters such malevolent figures as a priest who drips blood from his mouth and a horde of rats that fill her hallway. Speaking of hallways, there are more ominous shots of them here than in all of The Shining.

That film and Rosemary’s Baby are but two of the obvious influences on this effort, with the director’s love for B-movies evident in his enjoyable casting of such performers as Davison, Dee Wallace, Maria Conchita Alonso, Judy Geesoon and Meg Foster as a crone-like witch.

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