

Peppered with singing cowboys and Bible epics, the film sends up the craziness behind the scenes during Hollywood's golden age



**John Lui**  
Film Correspondent

Last week's Oscar ceremony was missing something. Remember when it was compulsory to have at least one musical salute to Hollywood?

The Coen brothers do. **Hail, Caesar!** (PG, 106 minutes, opens tomorrow, ★★★★★) is their feature-length tribute to Tinseltown's golden age and it's also their best work in years.

Writer-directors Ethan and Joel Coen vacuum up every scrap of film culture they love about the 1950s – autocratic studios, singing cowboys, dancing sailors, Bible epics, the Red Scare, powerful gossip columnists – and stuff it into one package.

The result is a warm, funny and uncomplicated blend of satire and tribute, bursting with affection for a medium at the height of its influence, while gently sending up the craziness behind the scenes at the dream factories.

At the fictional Capital Studios, Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin) is a mid-level trouble-shooter. He delivers bad news, mends star



spats, soothes egos and kills rumours before they hit the tabloids.

He is met with a string of disasters: Matinee idol Baird Whitlock (George Clooney) vanishes during a shoot of the Bible spectacular *Hail, Caesar!*; Dee Anna Moran (Scarlett Johansson), star of synchronised swim extravaganzas, has a crisis of reputation; and director Laurence Laurentz (Ralph Fiennes), maker of blithe comedies, is forced by the studio to admit into his cast Hobie Doyle (Alden Ehrenreich), a lasso-slingin', guitar-twangin' cowboy actor with a drawl as wide as the Rio Grande.

In the midst of this, the Thacker twins, both gossip columnists and both played by Tilda Swinton, have to be diverted from revealing a career-wrecking piece of information.

This all sounds like a mess and it could have easily been one, but the Coens take pains in making

Mannix a real character, not a plot device to connect "bits". Not that the bits in themselves are not a joy to watch. Each one, such as the sailors-on-shore-leave musical number featuring Channing Tatum, is like a mini-Pixar movie, a self-contained delight to be enjoyed on several levels.

The rating advisory on the action-comedy **The Brothers Grimsby** (R21, 83 minutes, opens tomorrow, ★★★★★) warns of "sexual humour" and that is putting it mildly. British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, after a quick dip into more family-friendly territory (*The Dictator*, 2012), makes a return to the type of humour he is best at making: discomfort-inducing, to the point of sadism.

He plays "Nobby" Butcher, an archetypal chav from the neighbourhood of Grimsby, a place known for its football hooligans, drug abuse and a rate of unemployment matched only by



The Brothers Grimsby starring Sacha Baron Cohen and Rebel Wilson (both far left), and Susanne Wuest (left) in *Goodnight Mommy*. PHOTOS: GOLDEN VILLAGE, SCUM CINEMA

the fertility of its single mothers.

His long-lost brother Sebastian (Mark Strong) is a super-spy, now on the run and forced to team with Nobby, or risk capture or death.

Nobby, like General-Admiral Aladeen (*The Dictator*), Bruno (Bruno, 2009) or Borat (Borat, 2006), is a satirical character; but the bite is now less savage. There is a sweetness to the lager-loving lout and director Louis Leterrier (*Now You See Me*, 2013; *The Incredible Hulk*, 2008) is, unlike Cohen's previous helmers, unafraid to expose his niceness.

There are good jokes here, interspersed with strong action sequences, but both sit side-by-side, rather than in integrated fashion, a weakness somewhat offset by the chemistry between Strong and Cohen. One longish, squirm-inducing bit, featuring Nobby removing poison from a certain part of Sebastian's body, has been trimmed to keep to the R21 rating.

For a real squirm, watch **Goodnight Mommy** (NC16, 96 minutes, single screening on March 25, ★★★★★), an intensely disturbing work of horror from Austria, winner of several awards from fright festivals and the country's official entry to the recent Oscars in the Foreign Language category (but failed to get a nomination).

In this modern take on the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale, twin boys Lukas and Elias (Lukas and Elias Schwarz) are summering with Mummy (Susanne Wuest) in an isolated Alpine retreat. She returns from the hospital with a bandaged face following an accident and her changed behaviour leads the boys to suspect she is an imposter, and thus begins the descent into terror.

There are no loud bangs or urgent musical cues, only a sustained mood of paranoia and claustrophobia that plays on primal fears of unhinged mothers, trapped with children with whom they cannot cope. It might be green and warm outside, but indoors, the mood is icy.

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**WHERE:** The Projector, Golden Mile Tower

**WHEN:** March 25, 8.30pm

**ADMISSION:** \$13

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