



Photos courtesy of sonypictures.com/thebountyhunter
Jennifer Aniston and Gerard Butler star in "The Bounty Hunter," which does almost nothing right. A decent idea for a movie is wasted by subpar acting and an all-too-familiar plot.

'Bounty' fails to create laughs



BY KEN DUSOLD
Reviewer

Once in a while, a film comes along that makes the viewer say, "Wow." It might be a masterpiece from an acclaimed director or it might be an embarrassment starring a profitable cast.

"The Bounty Hunter" deserves a "Wow" — and it is not a masterpiece. Jennifer Aniston and Gerard Butler lead a cast of familiar showbiz faces whose acting could have been phoned-in and just as effective. The plot, while humorous in thought, is anything but funny once seen on screen.

Aniston plays journalist Nicole "Nic" Hurley, who jumps bail following an arrest for assaulting a "cop." The assault, explained later, is not only a pathetic excuse for a crime, but also is disappointing as it has nothing to do with the police corruption she is trying to unravel.

Milo Boyd (Butler) is a formerly distressed detective-turned-bounty-hunter, who receives the job of bringing Nic into custody. Of course, Milo also is her ex-husband. The idea of a man chasing his ex-wife to cash in on her incarceration is probably a dream for most divorced guys but not enough to carry an entire movie.

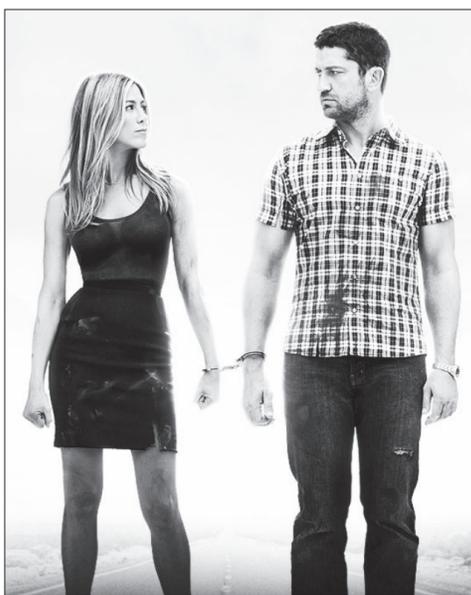
After catching up with Nic in New Jersey's sleazy Las Vegas knock-off, Atlan-

tic City, the former NYPD detective cannot manage to constrain her. During their time together, she punches him in the crotch, uses a Taser on him — which serves him right for not frisking her first — and handcuffs him to a bed frame while he is asleep. However illogical it is for Milo to be so inept at driving a handcuffed woman back to New York City — it takes three days to travel a distance he drives in no time — we are expected to suspend disbelief so the absurdity that ensues can exist.

The absurdity, which attempts to resemble the antics seen in the mediocre film "Rat Race," fails to induce more than an occasional smile. With timeworn gimmicks like dodging golf balls at an elite country club to catch a caddy and trying to escape possible assassins in a rickshaw, one wonders why this film needed to be made. There are so many films involving moronic debt collectors that it is unnecessary to waste our time with the likes of Irene (Cathy Moriarty) and her two henchmen, who are chasing Milo for some past loans.

Even worse than including such clichéd rubbish, the film fails to resolve many of the developments that arise during the story. We do not know what happens to Irene's bounty on Milo, why Milo does not get charged with stealing a car, why a police officer in question covered up a murder or what purpose Nic's mother (Christine Baranski) serves in the story.

Being a romantic comedy, there is a little romance, as the two inevitably begin



to rekindle feelings for one another, particularly when they happen to end up at the place they spent their honeymoon. Considering the lack of chemistry between Aniston and Butler, this part of the film is best spent taking a restroom break.

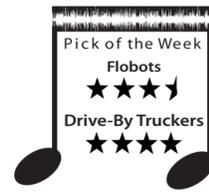
Most of the supporting cast, all character actors, must have forgotten to send their agents Christmas bonuses, because getting them roles in "Bounty" fits the definition of vengeance. Baranski's portrayal of Nic's vain, boozed-up, lounge-singing mother is dissatisfying considering the veteran actress' comedic talents. Peter Greene once again is typecast as the film's corrupt villain. And Jason Sudeikis' performance is almost as gruesome as the fake mustache he sports for the role

of Nic's creepy admirer. Carol Kane, who plays an adorable bed and breakfast owner, is actually funny but is seen only for a total of maybe four minutes.

The only aspect of this film sadder than the shoddy plot and unbearable supporting characters is the fact that Aniston is an Emmy-winning comedienne. Once America's sweetheart, her latest work finds her closer to being an American joke — the visible effects of botox are a far cry from the lovable Rachel Green that made her famous on the NBC sitcom "Friends."

With horrific writing, inexcusable acting and an obvious indifference to intelligence, "The Bounty Hunter" is a brain cell's worst enemy. Creating such a deplorable picture is the true crime.

Southern rockers continue success



BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Flobots

They've proven they can ride a bike with no handlebars, but can the Flobots create new fans?

Three years after their major label debut, "Fight With Tools," rap ensemble Flobots returned to the scene. The Denver locals infuse their politically charged lyrics in their 2010 release, "Survival Story." Producer Caldato Jr., better known for his work with the Beastie Boys, guides the album's dangerous blend of rock and rap.

The guitar riffs follow a much harder and darker vibe than on "Fight With Tools." It is the mixture of heavy instrumentals with rap lyrics that causes the album to stumble on occasion.

Emcees Jonny 5 and Brer Rabbit bring the vocal artillery,

bouncing rhymes back and forth. The vocals sometimes are overwhelmed by the arena rock vibe of the earlier songs as Jonny 5 and Brer Rabbit struggle to keep up with the instrumentation. On the later songs, where the guitars are toned down or extinguished completely, the emcees hit their stride when they are allowed to pace themselves.

There is a constant shining light with violist and background vocalist Mackenzie Roberts. She sings the hooks on a handful of tracks, but her superb viola work is where her talent shines through. Roberts' crisp viola matches every track's style — rapid in some songs, hauntingly slow in others — and ties the band into a cohesive unit. The viola work is where most of the musical highlights stem from on "Survival Story."

Thematically the album is heavy on political messages and doesn't try to hide it. There is little subtlety to the lyrics and from track one the band's serious attitude does not let up. Although engaging, it is a little distracting because there is no humor or satire thrown in — just full-blown

revolutionary lyrics.

For example, in "Defend Atlantis," a song that parallels the United States economic decline to the fall of the fabled city of Atlantis, Jonny 5 raps, "That which creates life has power to take it right back / F---ing with the icecaps / We've gotta push the tide back / We can survive collapse if we don't get sidetracked." The metaphors are there, but they still lack subtlety. Overall, "Survival Story" suffers from overcrowding influences on early tracks but finds its pace midway, especially thanks to amazing viola work. This album probably won't win many new fans but will sway those on the fence from Flobots' last release.

Drive-By Truckers

Georgian southern-rock group Drive-By Truckers also recently released their eighth studio album, titled "The Big To-Do." A cross between alternative and southern rock, the Drive-By Truckers are the love child of Creedence and Pearl Jam.

"Their superb imagery and storytelling helps the band stand out in a sea of jam bands even more than their guitar work."

Drive-By Truckers are known for their "three axe attack," utilizing a triple guitar style on most of their tracks. Mike Cooley, Patterson Hood and John Neff provide the

ammunition that assaults the listener throughout "The Big To-Do."

Their superb imagery and storytelling helps the band stand out in a sea of jam bands even more than their guitar work. The three principal songwriters, Hood, Cooley and Shonna Tucker, pen songs that ring especially hard in today's struggling economic situation. Many songs echo characters in a world that has turned against them. There's a man who has lost his job and is fighting to fend for his family, an alcoholic who can't remember the destruction he has sown ("The Fourth Night of my Drinking") and a boy dealing with a father who has abandoned his family ("Daddy Learned to Fly"). There are some very dark themes at work — "The Wig He Made Her Wear" deals with murder and an Amber alert in a small town.

The Drive-By Truckers continue to be a creative powerhouse in a swamp of similar-sounding southern jam bands. "The Big To-Do" will be a favorite of southern-rock fans and listeners who prefer a little story to their music.

'Desperate Struggle' pokes fun at other games



BY ALEX CARLSON
Reviewer

The Nintendo Wii proved it's not just for jumping plumbers, pointy-eared swordsmen and wacky mini-game collections with the release of the bloody-good action game "No More Heroes" in 2008.

Filled with self-referential humor and plenty of violence, "No More Heroes" didn't just take humorous stabs at the action game genre, it also used the Wii motion controls superbly. The long-awaited sequel, "No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle," does the impossible. It makes practically everything, from the gameplay to the story, even more over-the-top and ridiculous, and that's a very good thing.

"No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle" follows assassin-wannabe Travis Touchdown, who still is recovering from his victory in the assassin-ranking battles

of the original "No More Heroes." Unfortunately, Travis is dragged back into the fray when his friend Bishop is murdered. With 50 assassins trying to defeat him and his friend's murderer resting comfortably at the No. 1 spot in the ranks, it's up to Travis to avenge Bishop's death by taking out any assassin who gets in his way. "No More Heroes 2," much like its predecessor, is a self-aware adventure that repeatedly breaks the fourth wall. The story takes plenty of shots at video games, Japanese culture and even the lavish hip-hop lifestyle. The fact that "No More Heroes 2" doesn't even take itself seriously just makes the storyline even more laugh-out-loud hilarious.

The original "No More Heroes" introduced a clever combat system that abandons the overused waving of the Wii Remote for a more fluid mix of buttons and gestures. Although not much has changed from a gameplay perspective, the action is still fast, flashy and easy to jump into. The introduction of new characters and the ability to use two weapons at once is stylish and adds a unique dimension to the already frantic combat. The linear design of the levels is a bit of a letdown, but combat is varied and over-the-top enough to keep gamers' attention.

In between the violent action

sequences and crazy boss fights, players can complete odd-jobs to earn money for upgrades and weapons. These jobs take place as mini-games reminiscent of the 8-bit style of classic Nintendo titles. A pixelized Travis appears to complete objectives from collecting falling coconuts to fixing pipelines, blatantly making fun of older Nintendo games like the original "Super Mario Bros." These mini-games, despite their simplicity, are incredibly addictive diversions from the main story. There is plenty of challenge and variety in the mini-games, and it's a treat to try out new mini-games as they are unlocked.

With its cel-shaded graphics and powerful punk soundtrack, the original "No More Heroes" showed a new side of the Wii graphics, which until then focused more on colorful protagonists and light-hearted themes. "No More Heroes 2" doesn't change much with the presentation, but it still has a slick, alternative graphic design that tells other Wii games to step aside. Battles are as violent as ever, with every finishing blow causing enemies to explode with blood and money. The boss fights are bombastic and epic, with plenty of flashy visual effects. The frame rate can drag the action down a bit, but for the most part, the pace is kept



Photos courtesy of nomoreheroesgame.us.ubi.com
The sequel to "No More Heroes" on Wii provides solid gameplay and a humorous storyline, just as the original did.

consistent. An upbeat mix of punk themes and video game-esque MIDI songs complement the wacky voice acting with some stellar sound design. It's not too different from the original, but "No More Heroes 2" still has one of the best presentations on the Wii.

"No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle" is a fantastic Wii game retaining the stylish presentation and over-the-top action of the original. There isn't too much that's different from the original

"No More Heroes," but the 8-bit mini-games and subtle combat changes make more of a difference than expected. The adult humor and self-referential jokes won't be for everybody, but those who are looking for a game that doesn't take itself — or anything else — seriously will find "No More Heroes 2" to be a worthwhile offering with unprecedented style. As far as mature Wii games go, "No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle" stands as one of the best.