

## Trailer Tracking: ‘Drive,’ ‘Contagion,’ ‘Paranormal Activity 3,’ ‘Haywire’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 27, 2011 - 5:42pm

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CHICAGO – However, unexpectedly, the past few weeks have seen the release of some major trailers for movies that are targeted for typically off-season release months (September, October, January), and most of them look fairly awesome. While a few underwhelm (looking at you, “Paranormal Activity 3”), the rest feature some of the coolest, most exciting movie trailers that we’ve seen all year. (One is even in the running for the absolute best trailer of the year so far.) And, while they might not feature a lot of CGI, wizards, or robots, the trailers for “Drive”, “Contagion”, and “Haywire” are making us pretty confident that we’re going to be spending the off-season movie months watching some really excellent films.

All that being said, here’s our critical take on this most recent crop of new movie trailers.

### Movie: “Drive”

Best Parts of the Trailer: The bits between the 0:01 mark and the 2:33 mark

Worst Parts of the Trailer: ... we’ve got nothing. It kinda rules.

Our Take: Wow. Just wow. THIS is the perfect example of how gorgeously effective a movie trailer can really be. If you just heard a log line for “Drive” - “A Hollywood stunt driver (Ryan Gosling), who moonlights as a wheelman during robberies, discovers that a contract has been put on him after a heist gone wrong” – you might not be that impressed. Sounds a bit like “Fast Five” or “Gone in 60 Seconds”, the Hollywood angle sounds cheesy, could be a low-rent heist thing... eh, nothing that spectacular. But then you see the trailer put together for “Drive” and... wow, how can you NOT want to see this movie now?

And it’s not because the trailer is gimmicky or clever. It just tells the story of the movie BRILLIANTLY. In a short 2 minutes and 33 seconds, it gets across all of the basic information it needs to, but it also delivers a metric ton of DEPTH – depth of vision, depth of character, depth of coolness. This is a trailer that excels at presenting its audience with complexity. After 2 ½ minutes, we know that Gosling’s lead character is a morally complex, highly driven man (no pun intended), and we get him. He’s no cipher or lame action lead cliché.

We are presented with the complex geometry of the relationships between the characters, and we instantly understand them. Gosling is a driver for heists, he falls for Carey Mulligan and her young son, but then her ex-con husband Standard (Oscar Isaac) comes back into the picture, and unless Gosling helps him pull off a job, the mob is going to hurt Standard’s family... the family that Gosling now loves. It’s amazing drama, and it adds layers of depth that make Gosling’s character seem more like the ancestor of Humphrey Bogart or Steve McQueen than Paul Walker and Vin Diesel. And Refn is able to set up those relationships in the trailer in brief, meaningful moments without spoiling the whole damn movie. The trailer, in and of itself, is a hell of a great short movie.

But la-de-dah complexity aside, “Drive” just looks fairly bad-ass, doesn’t it? The car chases look killer and, when Bryan Cranston, speaking about Gosling, says, “You put this kid behind the wheel and there’s nothing he can’t do,” we believe him. The trailer does a fantastic job of mythologizing Gosling as the ultimate Driver and then showing how his empty, orderly life breaks down after he starts giving a damn about something. (It’s like “The Transporter”, but way cooler and with way less weird French humor.) There’s a moment at the 1:39 mark where you can witness Gosling’s character make a change, decide to act, decide to defend the people he cares about, and it’s breathtaking. The music switches from standard heist music into something far more symphonic, and it has the quiet beauty of that moment in “True Romance” (with a similar music cue) when Dennis Hopper decides to ask Christopher Walken for a cigarette, and you just know that he’s resigned to his fate and isn’t going to take the easy way out. That’s a hard moment for any movie to reference without seeming like a pale imitation, and Refn pulls it off in his freakin’ trailer, which is amazing.

Plus, you get stuff like Albert Brooks, in what might be our favorite casting of the year, as a slimy mob heavy. The exchange where Gosling is

introduced to him is already destined for its place in movie quote heaven – Gosling (not wanting to shake hands after driving): “My hands are a little dirty. Brooks (dead serious): “So are mine.” And we haven’t even gotten to the stuff with the hammer... the bullet and the hammer scene is our new favorite “mundane item turns horrific” moment since The Joker made the pencil disappear in “Dark Knight”.

Are we gushing a bit? Yes, and we’re probably setting the bar way, way too high for Refn’s little heist drama. But, while there have been lots of movies that we’ve liked in 2011 so far, there have barely been any that we’ve LOVED, and the trailer for “Drive”, at least, displays the potential for greatness, the potential of a movie that we could really love, that we haven’t seen in a long while.

**TRAILER OUTLOOK: Almost terminally awesome. Has there been a cooler movie trailer in 2011? If so, we haven’t seen it. Heck, is there a cooler-looking movie scheduled for release in 2011? Unless Tarantino or the Coens sneak something out before year’s-end, “Drive” might be the coolest ticket out there for the rest of the year.**

#### Movie: “Contagion”

Best Parts of the Trailer: The opening shot of that bridge; the creepy sense of domestic terror (thanks for making us afraid of doorknobs and silverware, Soderbergh!); Matt Damon’s heartbreaking confusion; Gwyneth’s look of horror at 0:43.

Worst Parts of the Trailer: The level of spoilers; that the monkey and the red graphics reminded us of Dustin Hoffman’s “Outbreak”.

Our Take: One of the few things that must suck about being Steven Soderbergh is having to constantly hear other people describe movies as “it’s like ‘Traffic’ for this or that.” Way too often, people struggle to describe “issue” films – i.e. films that show different perspectives on global issues – as “‘Traffic’ for immigration”, “‘Traffic’ for race relations”, “‘Traffic’ for abortion.” Sure, it’s a compliment to how well “Traffic” pulled off the whole parallel narrative thing, but it’s got to get old after a while. And, we’re not helping, because, we’ll admit, it’s hard to watch the trailer for “Contagion” and not think, “Ah, it’s kind of like ‘Traffic’ for contagious diseases.”

But, to be fair, the “Traffic” model is a great one for a movie about an unstoppable global virus. We haven’t really had a great health epidemic movie yet, or at least one that didn’t involve horror or fantastic elements (vampires, zombies, etc). Yes, there was Wolfgang Petersen’s fairly successful 1995 film “Outbreak”, but, c’mon, the movie is extremely dated and isn’t too concerned with reality. (I’m guessing most global health emergencies have moderately fewer helicopter chases.) “Outbreak” gave us some fairly chilling, true information about infections and pathogens and wrapped it around a formulaic thriller plot.

On the other hand, “Contagion”, apparently, is taking a very straight, very real world look at what would happen if a vaccine-proof virus ran amok, and the trailer really sells that sense of reality-based dread. The trailer ping-pongs between showing us the world-wide impact of the crisis with various health agencies running around, trying to come up with a plan, and the personal impact, embodied by Matt Damon trying to deal with the effect of the virus on his family. Damon’s scenes are the most stirring moments in the trailer, particularly one scene regarding the fate of his wife that seems like a fairly major spoiler. Who knows? Perhaps the filmmakers thought that the deaths of some of their A-list cast were obvious, but we’ll have to wait until we see “Contagion” to wonder if the major death shown in the trailer would’ve been more impactful if we hadn’t all known it was coming. (Maybe it was too obvious? Particularly if they were going to show later scenes of Damon on the run alone with his child.)

This has the potential to be a big water cooler movie. The kind of film where people congregate afterwards to discuss things like “can you really get sick from a doorknob?”, “would they really hide the President underground?”, “what would you do to get your family past a quarantine zone?” Laurence Fishburne gets most of the best lines in the trailer, particularly in the exchange where someone asks him if someone could weaponize the bird flu – his response: “The birds are already doing that.”

The one minor quibble we have with the trailer is... part of watching a movie trailer is, consciously or subconsciously, guessing how the movie is going to end. And, with a movie like “Contagion”, there really is only one of two endings – they find a cure or it’s the end of the world. Since we didn’t see anything too Road Warrior-y in the trailer, we’re going to go with that they find a cure. So the trick will be making that ending not seem too obvious and making those final, plague-curing moments have impact and import without making it seem like an after-school special. The last thing we want is for the movie to end with a belabored statement like “And this is why we shouldn’t trust the CDC and should always use Purell. THE END.” Fortunately, with a filmmaker like Soderbergh – who’s like the “Traffic” of film directors – we should be in pretty good hands. Although, given the subject matter, we’d bet than those hands are now freshly scrubbed and frequently disinfected.

**TRAILER OUTLOOK: Well done and intriguing. Could be chilling if it finds that perfect balance between domestic thriller and scientific procedural.**

#### Movie: “Paranormal Activity 3”

Best Parts of the Trailer: Best use of bathroom “Bloody Mary” since Candyman stole her act

Worst Parts of the Trailer: The shadow in the corner after “Bloody Mary” wasn’t nearly as freaky as some of the stuff in the earlier “Paranormal” trailers; So, how did they forget that this major event happened twenty years ago?; Everybody loves a prequel, right? RIGHT?

Our Take: The original “Paranormal Activity” is a prime example of a high-concept indie done right. It was purported to be the found video

footage of a haunted house story, and Oren Peli and his fellow filmmakers did an excellent job of taking that concept and delivering the hell out of it. Following "Paranormal 1", the question was – after the high concept, what comes next? "Paranormal 2" tried to up the ante by creating a long family history surrounding the haunting and adding a baby to the mix – we know more than one person who avoided "PA2" because they didn't want to see a ghost mess with a kid in a crib – and it was semi-successful. It varied the theme a bit, but it was hard to ignore that it was essentially more of the same. Now comes "Paranormal Activity 3" and, once again, they have to vary up the formula just enough to keep it interesting, while keeping everything that people dug about the first one. So, how are they planning on doing it? One word – prequel. And, oh, what a loaded word that is.

Because, c'mon, prequels are almost never, ever good. (Aside from "X-Men: First Class" and "Godfather: Part 2", their track record is pretty awful.) Particularly since, in the "Paranormal Activity" world, you now have to explain, "well, why didn't the events of 'PA3' get mentioned in 'PA1' and 'PA2'? Were they forgotten? Were they inconsequential?" Two of the best tricks of "PA2" were the realization that the documentary was unfolding parallel to the first one, allowing Katie from "PA1" to be a major supporting character, and that the demon, apparently, wanted the family's first born son, i.e. Hunter.

So, with that in mind, what's left to show in that family saga for "PA3"? What can we learn from Katie and Kristi: The Early Years? What's left to show? The demon hassling them? The demon biding time until he could get his hands on a male child? This is going to be the big challenge in terms of promotion for "PA3", and this trailer just doesn't rise to the challenge. It has one great moment – the two little girls playing "Bloody Mary" in the bathroom, but the darkness and the game itself is MUCH better than the reveal at the end, where we see a shadowy figure lurking in the corner. It's not much of a shock and one has to hope that it isn't the best "PA3" has to offer.

And while we really dig the idea of directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman being called in to helm "Paranormal Activity 3" – they delivered last year's very cool "can you tell what's real or not" documentary "Catfish" – we can't help but remember what happened when Joe Berlinger, director of one of the best documentaries we've ever seen, "Paradise Lost", was handed the keys to the sequel to "Paranormal Activity"-predecessor, "The Blair Witch Project". The result: one of the worst horror sequels of all time.

**TRAILER OUTLOOK: More of the same. This prequel, found-footage, horror follow-up has some big handicaps working against it.**

**Movie: "Haywire"**

**Best Parts of the Trailer:** The supporting cast; the Gina Carano/Michael Fassbender hotel fight; the supporting cast; the lack of CGI action scenes; did we mention the supporting cast?

**Worst Parts of the Trailer:** The extremely cheesy action movie trailer narration ("she is our nation's most valuable weapon... in a world..."); the final "you better run" Schwarzenegger-esque moment

**Our Take:** Wait, weren't we just talking about Soderbergh a minute ago? Didn't Matt Damon tell us that he was retiring? (We kid, we kid.) The trailer for "Haywire" shows off so much about why Steven Soderbergh is simply one of the most interesting directors out there. The fact that he can go from a serious, big-budget, world-spanning character drama, staffed by a murderer's row of Oscar-bait actors, to a much smaller, gritty, spy noir thriller built around a female mixed-martial arts star who has never headlined a movie before, all in the same year – c'mon, that's just cool. Soderbergh has proven that he can do great popcorn flicks before (i.e. the Ocean's trilogy), but the story behind "Haywire" is way more interesting than Steven just wanting to get his Bourne on.

The fact that Soderbergh found a woman, MMA-champ Gina Carano, who could seriously kick-ass in real life and constructed a bad-ass spy thriller around her – it's unheard of. Action films like this barely exist anymore and, when they did, they were normally just the province of men. Jackie Chan, Steven Seagal, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Tony Jaa – they all had a long series of movies crafted, not around their acting talent (hell no), but rather around their aptitude for kicking butt. So the idea that an Oscar-winning director decided to create a throwback action showcase for a female MMA-star is both very unusual and very, very cool.

And you have to admit, for the most part, Carano looks great in the trailer. Yeah, she's easy on the eye, but we're mostly admiring her capacity for violence. She's confident, strong, and the few action scenes featured really do a nice job of selling the action scenes. It looks like Carano is skilled enough that Soderbergh can rely on wider shots, with less editing, to really show that she's doing all of her own stunts in frame without computer-aided assistance, which 100% rocks. One of the many cool things about doing a '90s action throwback (aside from the sheer nostalgia) is the giddy joy of actually watching some really talented athletes doing amazing things in a single shot. It's something we don't get enough of nowadays in the age where CGI and overdone, Greengrass-esque editing can make anyone look like they're a ninja.

But Carano, bless her mighty fists, isn't even the coolest part of the trailer. The sublime thing that happens when a director like Soderbergh decides to do a low-budget genre experiment is that he can get all of his A-list friends to help out and, dear lord, Haywire might have the most jaw-dropping supporting cast of the year. Remember when you were shocked that Robert Rodriguez got Robert De Niro to show up in "Machete"? That's NOTHING compared to Soderbergh doing a MMA spy flick, with an unknown in the lead, and assembling a supporting cast that includes Ewan McGregor, Michael Fassbender, Channing Tatum, Bill Paxton, Antonio Banderas, and Michael friggin' Douglas. And not only does that killer cast of gold-standard actors lend their collective gravitas to the proceedings, they also look like they're having a ton of fun. Paxton and McGregor are hamming it up, Tatum and Fassbender get into huge throwdowns with Carano – her tussle with Fassbender is one of the trailer's highlights – and Douglas and Banderas make great shadowy agency types. Yes, the plot about "the nation's most valuable weapon" getting betrayed and seeking revenge is a little basic, but it looks like Soderbergh has really tapped into the fun, pulpy side of this twisty genre throwback.

In fact, our only big concern is about Carano. She's an unknown quantity with this being her first major film lead and, while we have no doubt in her ability to sell the action, we're just not sure if she's up to it on the acting side, particularly up against such an intimidating cast of

co-stars. Her final “you better run” line in the trailer is pure cheese, right out of a ‘90s Schwarzenegger vehicle, and she doesn’t get a lot of her talking scenes featured in the trailer, but we’re going to give her the benefit of our doubt. Soderbergh has made a career of creating films with non-traditional lead actors – ranging from “Bubble” to “The Girlfriend Experience” – so we trust in his ability to pick diamonds out of the rough.

**TRAILER OUTLOOK: Surprisingly fun. Soderbergh knows how to make a great trailer, and this entertaining, impeccably cast female Bourne alternative looks like a kick-ass good time.**

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