

## Blu-ray Review: Oliver Stone's Diverting 'Savages' Settles for Trashy Thrills

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on November 20, 2012 - 11:25am

- [Benicio Del Toro](#) [2]
- [Blake Lively](#) [3]
- [Blu-ray Review](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [6]
- [Oliver Stone](#) [7]
- [Salma Hayek](#) [8]
- [Savages](#) [9]
- [Taylor Kitsch](#) [10]
- [Universal Studios Home Entertainment](#) [11]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [12]

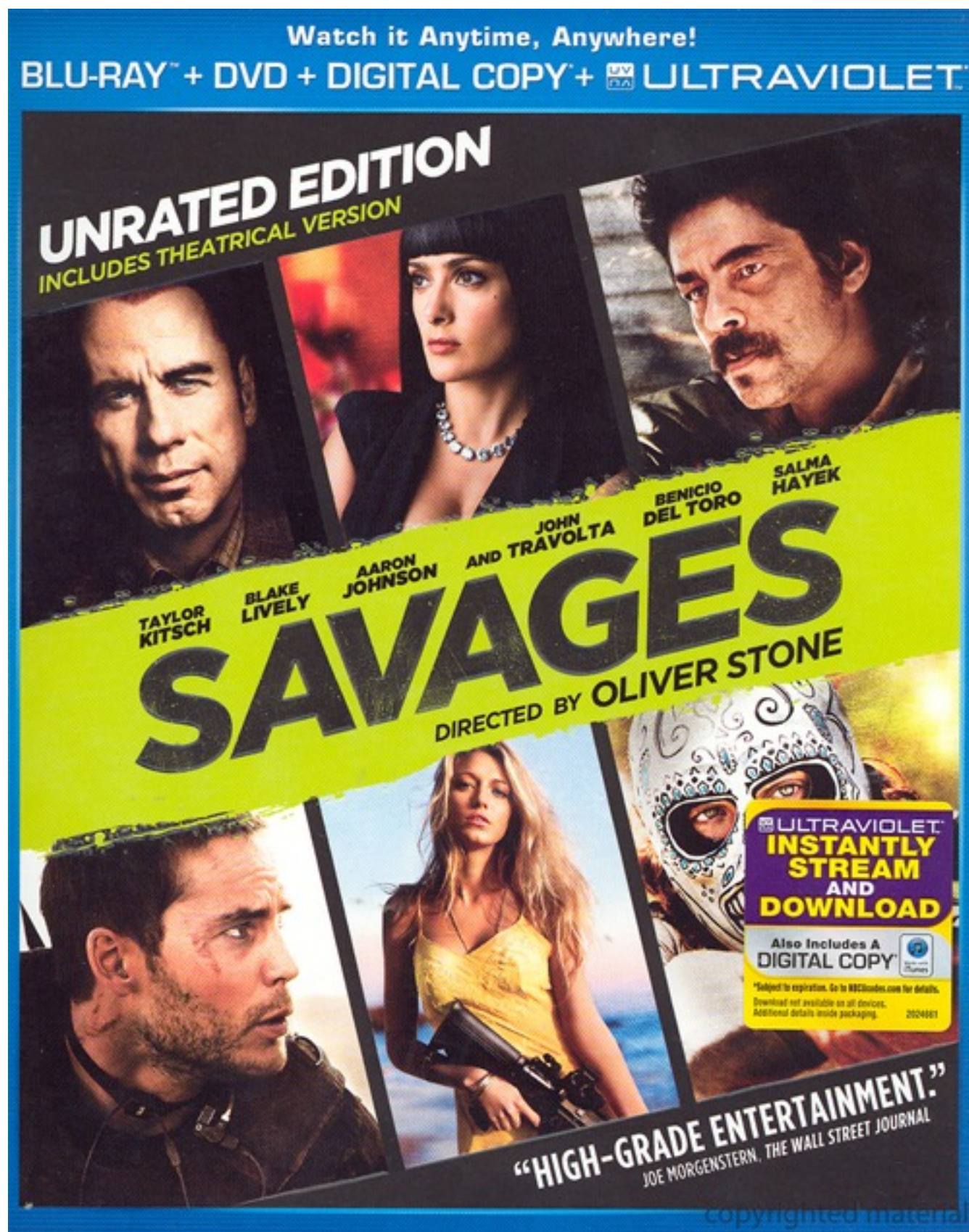
CHICAGO – Perhaps acknowledging that his status amongst Hollywood muckrakers has diminished in recent years, Oliver Stone follows up his toothless Bush biopic and needless “Wall Street” sequel with a wholly inconsequential yet thoroughly diverting little thriller. It’s pure trash that also happens to be Stone’s most compulsively watchable effort since 1995’s “Nixon.”

Taylor Kitsch and Aaron Johnson star as two young entrepreneurs in the marijuana business who are so close that they have no qualms with sharing the same woman, nicknamed “O” (Blake Lively). The script requires this plucky trio to liken themselves to Butch, Sundance and Etta Place while Stone continuously cuts to black and white, as if evoking the final chilling shot of George Roy Hill’s 1969 classic, which froze on the precise instant when the legendary outlaws passed from this world and into infamy.



Blu-ray Rating: **3.0/5.0**

Just like William Holden in “Sunset Boulevard,” O narrates the action from a sardonically cynical god’s eye perspective, though she refuses to reveal whether or not she winds up dead at the end of her story. Lively effortlessly embodies ethereal vulnerability as she dutifully portrays the plot’s prized damsel in distress. Too bad her loyal lovers are so hopelessly bland. Kitsch is like a would-be Paul Walker, while Johnson lacks the charisma necessary to stand toe-to-toe with the picture’s vast array of fearsome low-lives. Ruling the roost is Benicio del Toro at his scary-sleaziest as Lado, the cold-blooded enforcer of the Mexican Baja Cartel that orders Kitsch and Johnson to partner with them—or else. In a classic introductory scene, Lado arrives at the house of his latest victim while his henchmen pose as a yard cleaning crew. The noise of their mowers conveniently blot out the gunfire and screams emanating from inside. Later, Lado pays a similarly threatening visit to a corrupt DEA agent, well-played by John Travolta, whose motormouth skills assist in obscuring his utter lack of loyalty. It’s during a brief scene at the bed of his ailing wife that the agent delivers some of the film’s only pointed dialogue, observing that his methods of backstabbing are no different from those utilized on Wall Street or in Washington. The film’s final denouement also smarts with Stone’s trademark brand of jaded satire.



Savages was released on Blu-ray and DVD on November 13th, 2012.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Once O is kidnapped by the cartel, she strikes up a cautious friendship with the ominous Baja ringleader (Salma Hayek), while Kitsch and Johnson do everything in their power to come to her rescue, and that includes killing a whole lot of people. Stone's sequences of violence are reminiscent of "Natural Born Killers" in their unapologetic level of gruesomeness, particularly during the torture of a wronged Baja heavy played by Demián Bichir of "A Better Life." Yet in America's modern culture of desensitized youth, it's unlikely that Stone's work still delivers the jolt that it once did. Yet what it lacks in shock value it makes up for in pure kineticism. At a running time clocking in well over two hours, the picture doesn't include a single dull moment. Stone may have lost his edge, but he certainly hasn't lost his ability to entertain.

"Savages" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, Spanish and French audio tracks and includes Blu-ray, DVD, UltraViolet and digital copies of the film. Extras are highlighted by an unrated cut that adds 11 minutes, though few of them deepen the narrative in satisfying fashion. In one all-too-touchy-feely scene, Hayek confesses to Lively that she suffers from having "Botox in the heart." Five behind-the-scenes featurettes illustrate the postmodern style of the film's source material, co-screenwriter Don Winslow's original book, which included passages written in the format of a screenplay. Best of all is Stone's commentary track, where he admits that he related to Kitsch and Johnson's characters as they waged war with a major corporation while "exercising their defiance." If there's one thing that's inarguable about Stone, it's his dislike of being told what to do.

'Savages' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Blake Lively, Taylor Kitsch, Aaron Johnson, Benicio Del Toro, Salma Hayek, John Travolta, Demián Bichir and Emile Hirsch. It was written by Shane Salerno, Don Winslow and Oliver Stone and directed by Oliver Stone. It was released on November 13th, 2012. The theatrical cut is rated R.



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[13]

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