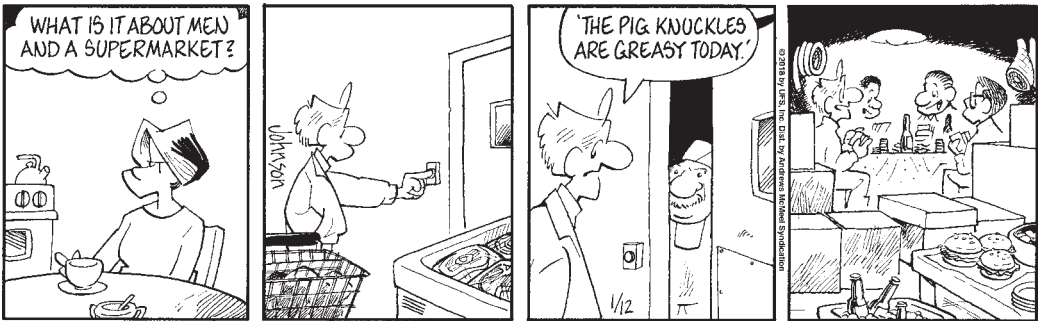
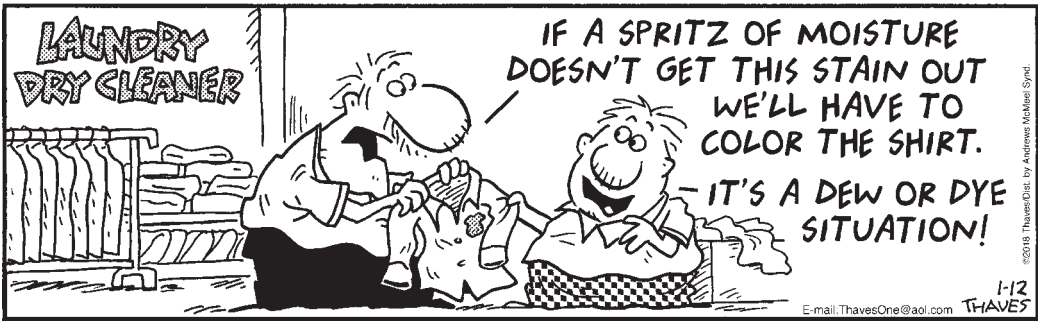


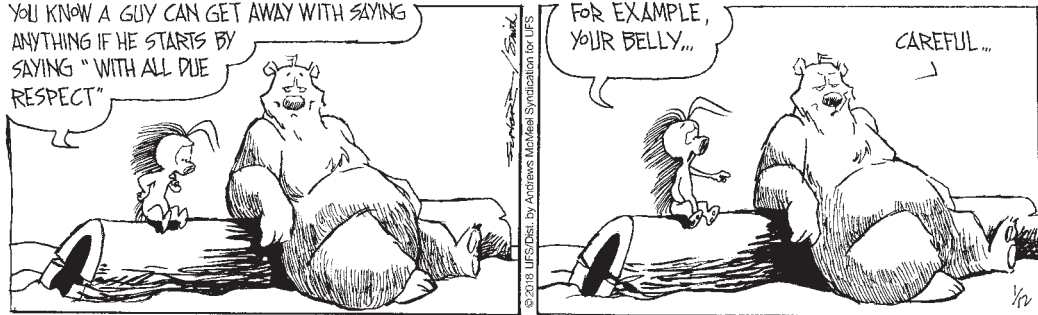
ARLO AND JANIS® by Jimmy Johnson



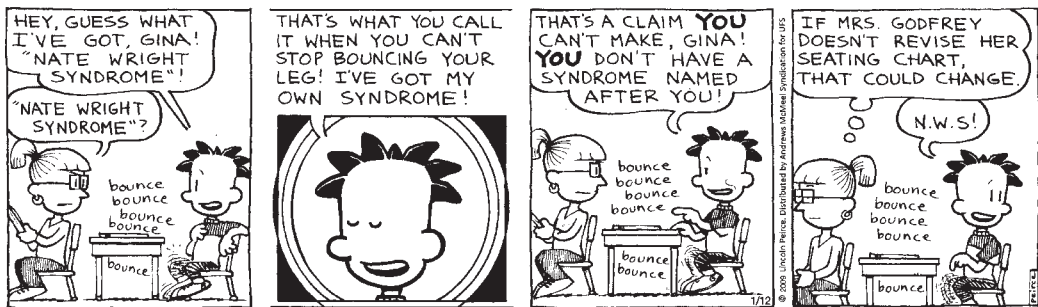
FRANK & ERNEST® by Bob Thaves



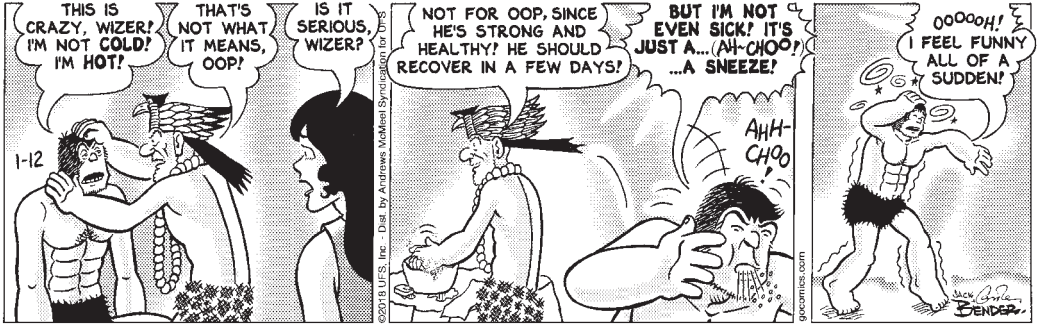
THE GRIZZWELLS® by Bill Schorr



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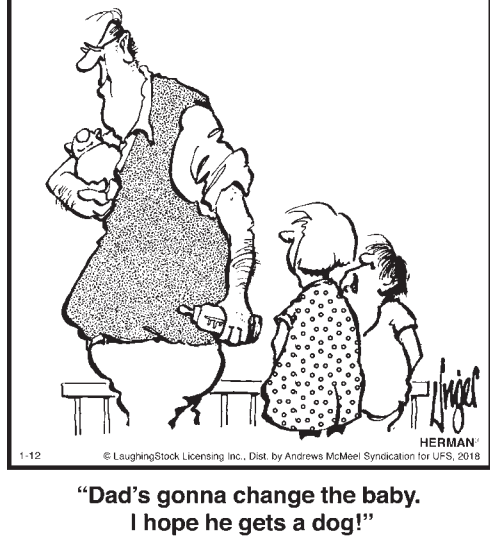
SOUP TO NUTZ by Rick Stromoski



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AT THE MOVIES

It's wild ride for Neeson in action-packed thriller

(AP) — The tagline for the Liam Neeson Metro-North thriller “The Commuter” — “Lives are on the line” — feels like a missed opportunity. I would have gone with: “The quiet car is about to get loud.”

It's been 10 years since Neeson's unlikely reign as the movies' best action hero began with “Taken” — the little Paris kidnapping that unlocked Neeson's special set of skills. What has followed has been a decade of lean, blunt and glum thrillers (three “Taken” movies, “Non-Stop,” “The Grey”) anchored by the looming and still quite potent presence of Neeson.

Neeson has suggested that, at 65, he's nearing the end of the line. So “The Commuter,” which reteams him for the fourth time with Spanish director Jaume Collet-Serra, may be one of our last chances to see Neeson kick some butt. “The Commuter” rides very much the same rail as his previous movies with Collet-Serra; it's a hostage crisis tick-tock that speeds straight ahead. Collet-Serra's genre mechanics, stylized and sober, are efficient.

Neeson plays Michael McCauley, an ex-cop who has spent his last 10 years as a life insurance salesman, commuting Monday through Friday into Grand Central from his family's suburban home up the Hudson in Tarrytown, New York. The movie's clever overlapping opening montage shows the repetition of his days, begun every day with 1010 Wins on the radio, a ride from his wife to the train station and the crowded but solitary walk through Grand Central.

But one day is a particularly bad one. McCauley is fired five years short of retirement. With his savings depleted by the 2008 financial crisis and college tuition coming soon for his high-school graduate son, McCauley's panic is palpable. He stops for a drink with his old police partner (Patrick Wilson) before boarding the train home. There, he's greeted by a Hitchcockian stranger on the train (Vera Farmiga) who explains that McCauley will make \$100,000 on his ride home if he can only find the person on the train “who doesn't belong.”

McCauley, as he soon discovers, has stepped into the plot of an absurdly powerful syndicate that will use him to ferret out a crucial FBI witness. The

gaps in the story's logic aren't to be minded. The web around McCauley is mysterious. And for Cold Spring, a few stops past McCauley's usual one, to be epicenter of such intrigue is curious.

Most eyebrow raising for the 1.6 to 3.1 million who trudge into and out of Manhattan everyday will be an unforgivable incongruity in the train's otherwise largely accurate path. It makes various subway stops through Manhattan, when every commuter since the time of “Revolutionary Road” knows it runs straight to Harlem. It's the kind of inaccuracy that will cause untold swarms of strap-hangers to throw their MetroCards at the screen.

But Collet-Serra, whose “Non-Stop” similarly relished the confined space of an airplane cabin, is too interested with swooping his camera through the train to care much about the blur on the outside. But he knows well how to shoot Neeson, following the actor's hulking frame from car to car.

Their movies are, in part, parables for the terrorism age. Like in “Non-Stop,” where Neeson played an air marshal, the protagonist of “The Commuter” must wrestle with the morality of uncovering the one threat in a sea of maybe-innocent, maybe-guilty faces, some of them “regulars” (daily riders), some of them unfamiliar. With pandering references to the big banks throughout, “The Commuter,” has just enough smarts to make its final destination disappointing.

The old equation of man-plus-locomotive has been a dependable one for the movies since Buster Keaton rode the rails in “The General.” (See also: Burt Lancaster in “The Train,” and Denzel Washington in “Unstoppable.”) “The Commuter” isn't in that class, but there are worse tickets to punch, especially in January. Such a woeful time of year for new releases warrants repeating the old warning: If you see something, say something.

“The Commuter,” a Lionsgate release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for “some intense action/violence, and language.” Running time: 104 minutes.



CROSSWORDS

ACROSS

1 Refuse to obey

5 Nearest star

8 Shoved off

12 Length x width

13 Bonfire remains

14 — vera

15 Jetty

16 Setbacks

18 Swirled

20 Tiny bottles

21 Inquire

22 Waterlogged

23 Alpha opposite

26 Riata

29 Berlin single

30 Broadcasts

31 Twice XXVI

33 Give it the gas

34 — 500

35 Await action

36 Quick-dry fabrics

38 Port near Hong Kong

39 Dog days in Dijon

40 Hosp. worker

41 Cigna rival

44 Prudently

47 Chief support

49 Deafening

51 Nobel Prize city

52 The works

53 Columnist — Bombeck

54 Sharp

55 Small veggie

56 Campus VIP

DOWN

1 Fist bump

2 Great Lakes port

3 Mare's fare

4 Gridiron gain queen

5 Spock's dad

6 Not new

7 Red Wings org.

8 Elk

9 “Frozen”

10 Year-end tune

11 Hardy woman

17 Says for sure

19 “This — stickup!”

22 Guarded

23 Above, to Tennyson

24 Demeanor

25 Jealousy

26 Tops

27 Actor Baldwin

28 Fey or Turner

30 “Green Gables” redhead

32 Familiar vow (2 wds.)

34 Wee bits

35 Like many dens

37 Ono's husband

38 EPA figure

40 Clapton classic

41 Running wild

42 Dexterity

43 Scrabble piece

44 Mall event

45 Folk teachings

46 Arizona city

48 Drum, as fingers

50 Karate level

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

12 13 14

15 16 17

18 19 20

21 22

23 24 25 26 27 28

29 30 31 32

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36 37 38

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47 48 49 50

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