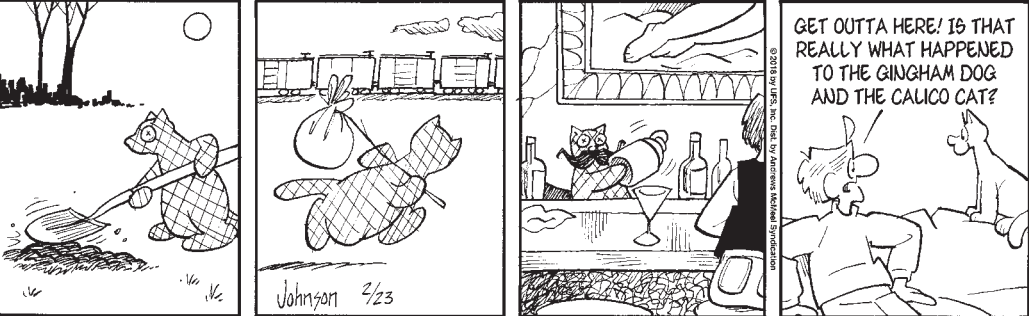


ARLO AND JANIS® by Jimmy Johnson



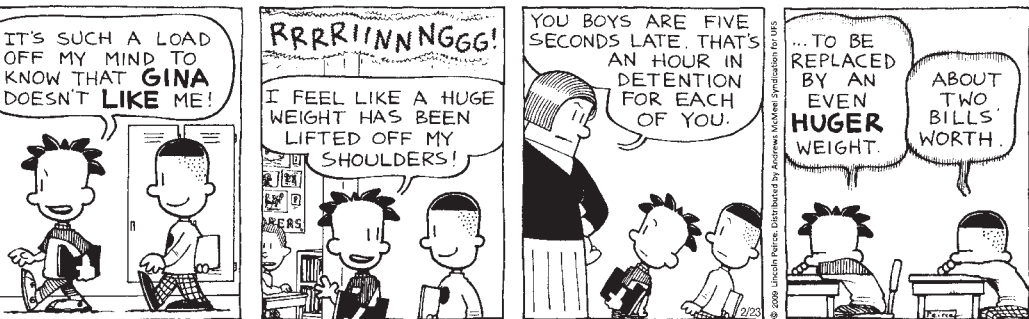
FRANK & ERNEST® by Bob Thaves



THE GRIZZWELLS® by Bill Schorr



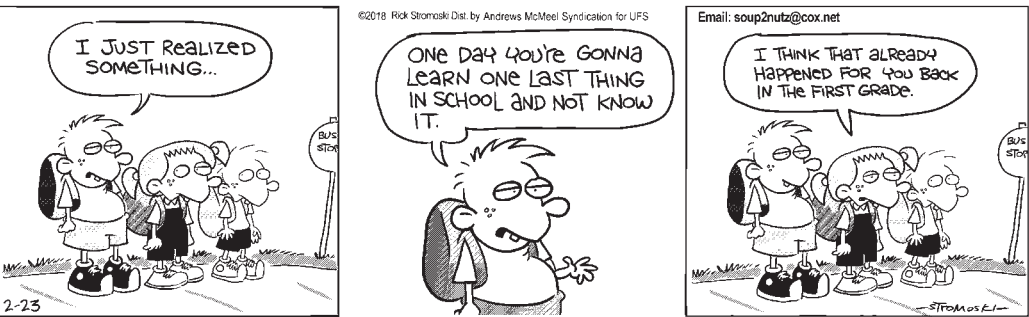
BIG NATE® by Lincoln Peirce



ALLEY OOP by Jack and Carole Bender



SOUP TO NUTZ by Rick Stromoski



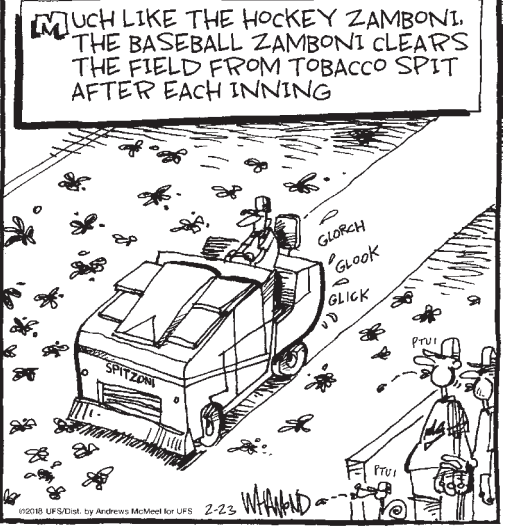
THE BORN LOSER™ by Art & Chip Sansom



HERMAN® by Jim Unger



REALITY CHECK® by Dave Whamond



AT THE MOVIES

'Game Night' a film that's lively and fun

(AP) -- A murder mystery party goes sideways when violent kidnappers arrive before the fake ones in "Game Night," which seems on the page to be like all the other disappointing action-comedies of late.

You know the kind, where ordinary, upper middle class-ish suburbanites get thrown into some wacky underworld or genre situation. Spies live next door! We have to start a casino to put our kid through school! We killed a stripper! While it's a formula that can be brilliant and/or fun (see: everything from "After Hours" to "Adventures in Babysitting"), recent efforts have seemed to result in features that feel more like extended Saturday Night Live sketches — a gimmick stretched far past its worth and padded with some car chases and contrived heart.

Thankfully, "Game Night" does not fall into that trap. A charismatic ensemble cast, a sharp script and a few well-placed twists make "Game Night" one of the more enjoyable big studio comedies in recent memory. John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein ("Vacation") direct off of a script by Mark Perez, whose credits include "Accepted" and "The Country Bears."

Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams anchor "Game Night" as Max and Annie, a married couple who love each other as much as they love games — trivia, charades, board varieties, you name it — and winning. They live in a cul-de-sac, where all middle class suburban couples live in glossy comedies, and host a weekly game night with their friends, longtime couple Michelle (Kylie Bunbury) and Kevin (Lamorne Morris) and the happy, handsome idiot Ryan (Billy Magnussen) and whatever Instagram babe he happens to have on his arm that week.

They also have a very strange next-door neighbor, Gary (Jesse Plemons), a police officer with light serial killer vibes. Always in uni-

form and holding his fluffy white dog, Gary just desperately wants to be included. Plemons plays him with over-the-top seriousness that makes for some of the sillier laughs early on.

The hook of the film comes when Max's brother Brooks (Kyle Chandler), a charismatic alpha male and bane of Max's existence, attempts to one-up the normal game night proceedings by arranging a pricey murder mystery event where one person is kidnapped and the rest have to try to solve it. So no one is the wiser when real kidnappers show up and beat Brooks to a pulp before taking him away, thinking that it is all part of the game. The somewhat ridicu-

lous misunderstanding, while definitely milked for all it's worth, does eventually go away and the couples are all invested in trying to help Brooks get out of trouble. Also by this point Ryan has introduced a different kind of date in his co-worker Sarah, who is played by the wonderful Sharon Horgan.

Attempting to explain why a comedy works is a kind of futile exercise, but this group of actors just works together. They have an easy chemistry with one another that resembles that sort of lived-in friendship that usually only comes across midway through the first season of a sitcom. That and there are a lot of giddily executed movie references.

Of course "Game Night" isn't perfect, and an electric first hour gives way to a slow third act that's handicapped by the gimmick wearing thin and a too-earnest side plot about Max and Annie's shifting plans to have a kid. But it kind of redeems itself by the end with a series of twists and turns fitting of the absurd premise.

"Game Night," a Warner Bros. release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language, sexual references and some violence." Running time: 100 minutes.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS

1 Ivan's refusal

5 Fly catcher

8 Quip

11 Prickly husk

12 Cure

14 Not their

15 Armor-plated critter

17 Heat meas.

18 Tex-Mex snacks

19 Cloud-seeding compound

21 Wapitis

23 Metric weight

24 In plain view

27 "Moonstruck" star

29 Misfortune

30 Kind of sugar

34 Elitism

37 Emma in "The Avengers"

38 Merit

39 Type of headache

41 Silly

43 Watermelon leftover

45 Act servile

47 Car parker

50 Geologic division

51 City dwellers

54 Drop the ball

55 Spoke

56 Director — Ephron

57 Drowse (off)

58 "Ulalume" poet

59 Biting fly

DOWN

1 Hoop group

2 Round tent

3 "Cope Book" aunt

4 Detective, often

5 Small broom

6 Lamprey

7 Island near Java

8 It merged with Exxon

9 Excel

10 Undeniable

13 Gazed at

16 Nitwit

20 Kind of straits

Answer to Previous Puzzle

QUID SLATE

BURNED DULLER

LOAFER EMBLEM

TILE IQS YMA

RABBITS

OMS BBS UCLA

REPEAL TRAILS

ORELSE RENTER

EDIE VIE ECO

ASTOUND

DOE ELM REAP

EMCEED PHOEBE

BARONS HUNKER

TRUSS TEST

8 It merged with Exxon

9 Excel

10 Undeniable

13 Gazed at

16 Nitwit

20 Kind of straits

22 Shows disdain

24 Cries of pain

25 Maria — Trapp

26 Want-ad abbr.

28 AAA recommendation

30 — diem

31 Pantyhose mishap

32 Down Under bird

33 Trial VIPs

35 Stoopied

36 Marshy inlets

39 John, in Ireland

40 Wasting time

41 Don Diego de la Vega

42 Grant

44 Circumvent

45 Enthusiastic

46 Decorate gifts

48 Collar style

49 Trillion: Prefix

52 College maj.

53 Warmed the bench

3-13

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