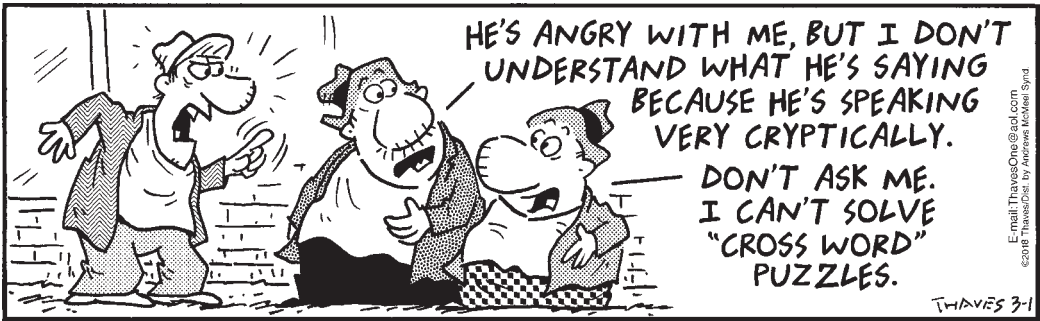


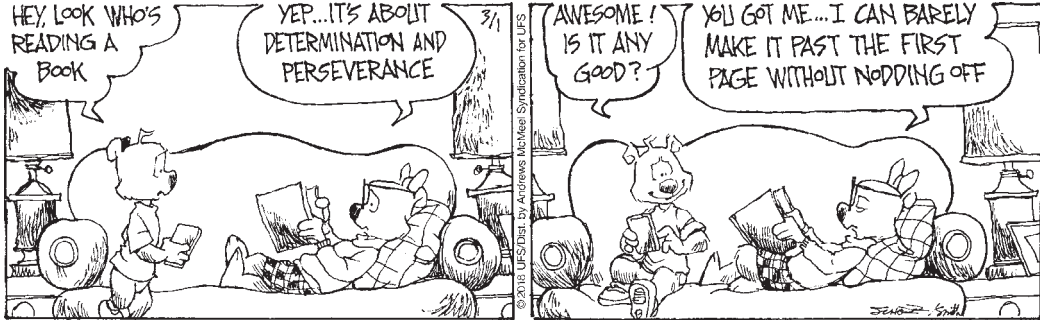
ARLO AND JANIS® by Jimmy Johnson



FRANK & ERNEST® by Bob Thaves



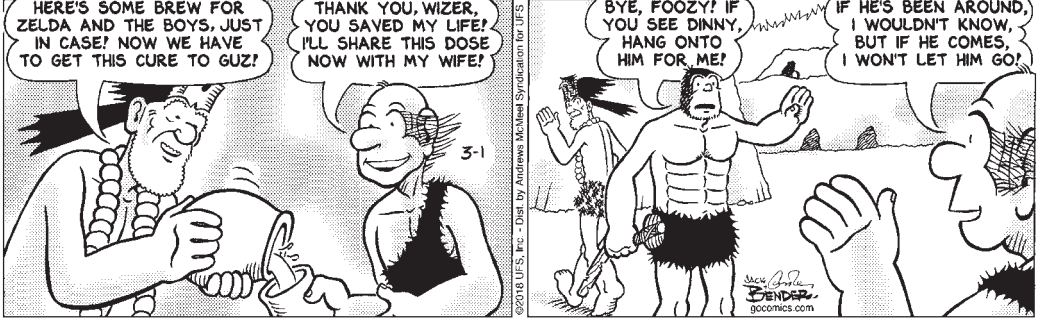
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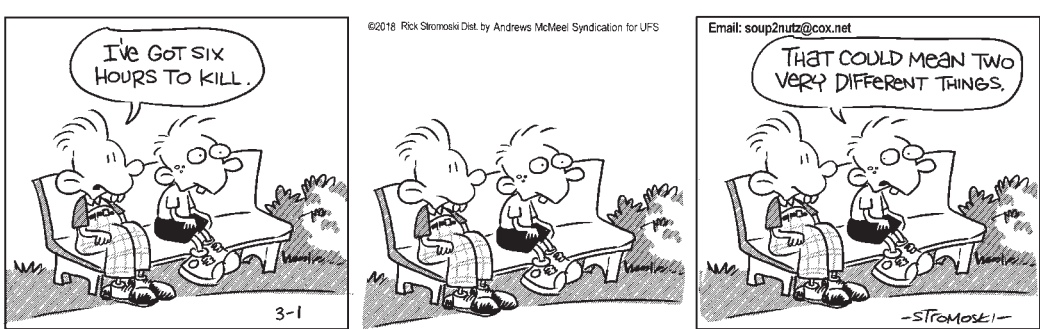
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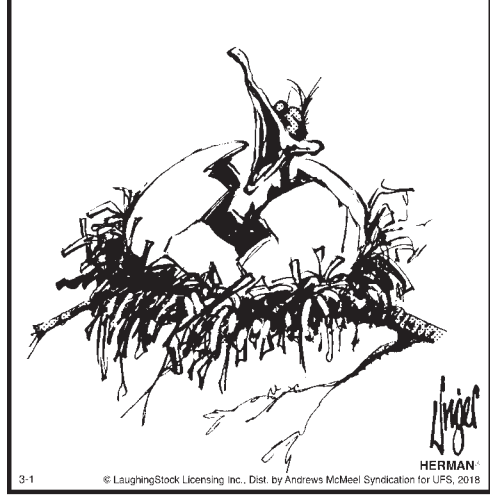
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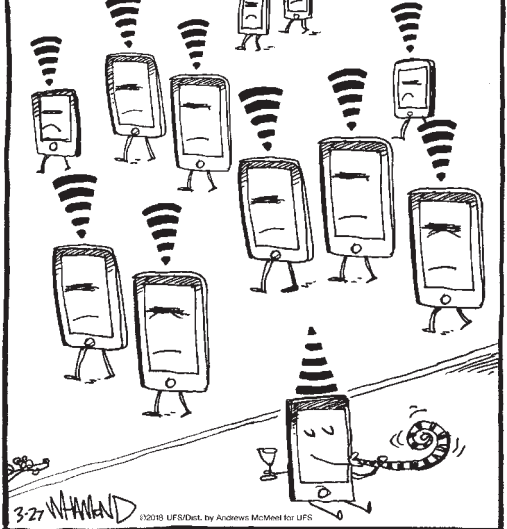
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AT THE MOVIES

Graphic 'Red Sparrow' a cliché-ridden bummer

(AP) — In the James Bond films, sex with a globe-trotting spy seems to be fun, fun, fun. A martini, a tuxedo, a witty line or two and then it's off to a luxurious bed with two tanned, muscular bodies. Not so in the new thriller "Red Sparrow," where the sex is cold, ugly and often violent.

This dark, meandering and cliché-ridden bummer starring a trying-hard Jennifer Lawrence tries to reach for a cool and stylish look at contemporary spycraft but often falls victim to cartoon violence and a muddled story. The creators may call it erotic but it's as erotic as a visit to the dentist.

Francis Lawrence, the director of the last three "Hunger Games" films, reunites with Lawrence for more likely to be remembered more for the outdoor junket photos of Lawrence in a thigh-slit dress in chilly London while her male co-creators wore coats.

Based on a book by former CIA agent Jason Matthews, "Red Sparrow" stars Lawrence as Dominika, a Moscow ballerina who has to rethink her career after a devastating injury. With the advice of her high ranking spy uncle, she goes to a "sparrow" school where the students are taught to use seduction as their main weapon.

Our heroine is soon unleashed onto the world, a little like Luc Besson's "La Femme Nikita" but without that film's visual coherence or empathy. (Lawrence does sport awesome bangs, so there's that).

But what really drives Dominika is never very clear, how she goes from a tea-drinking dancer to someone perfectly happy caving in someone's head with a cane. That's partly so viewers don't know where her loyalties lie and will stay intrigued, but she gets lost in what could be a double-cross or triple-cross — or, if you're in withdrawal from the Olympics — the infamous quad-cross.

Soon you just don't care. "We can't trust a word that comes out of her mouth," one character says of Dominika and he's right. No trust, no care. She's like a reflection of the film itself, getting flatter and more boring by the minute. As a sign of how lost

the filmmakers get, a scene about whether or not a false drawer will open becomes the most thrilling element for a good 30 minutes.

In addition to Rampling, there are fine turns from Jeremy Irons, Douglas Hodge and Mary-Louise Parker (who nevertheless seems to be in a different film altogether.) On the other side, one of the worst casting decisions was making Joel Edgerton Dominika's love interest. He's a puppy dog next to her tiger and there are simply no sparks between them.

"Red Sparrow" takes place in the languid, rich air of old European capitals and it gains no energy from the mostly — and curiously empty — high-end restaurants, hospitals and swimming pools. There are gorgeous exteriors of Vienna, Budapest, London and lush hotel interiors.

Gore? Oh yes. There are two rape scenes, several instances of torture — one with a hospital-grade skin peeler — public and naked degradations, a gross garroting, a dead body in a tub with its head in a plastic bag, and more than a hint of incest. The bloodiness in juxtaposition with the bloodless high-end luxury is jarring — but not in a good way.

Courtesy of screenwriter Justin Haythe, the clichés are all here, from the matching sweatsuits the sparrows wear as they jog on their snowy campus to watching spies wordlessly pass packages in dark and empty parks.

This is a film in which interrogators coolly demand confessions in clipped European accents. It's where a demented torturer lovingly unrolls his bag of evil tools like a contestant with a knife roll on "Top Chef." Then he intones: "Do you know how long it takes to peel skin from a human being?"

Come to think of it, that might be more fun than sitting through "Red Sparrow."

"Red Sparrow," a 20th Century Fox release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong violence, torture, sexual content, language and some graphic nudity." Running time: 139 minutes.

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS

1 Napoleon's fate

6 Gung-ho

11 Aftershock

12 C to C, musically

13 Natural

14 Under an umbrella

15 Intended

16 Liverpool poky

17 Barnyard sound

19 Garish

23 Cookbook measure

26 Landing place

28 Sci-fi Doctor

29 Starbucks orders

31 Coffee mate?

33 Biscotto

34 Question

35 Comfy shoe

36 Pool table item

39 Madrid Mme.

40 Mix batter

42 Fossil fuel

44 Edible tubers

46 Foul smells

51 BMW driver, maybe

54 Crusty roll

55 Basket willows

56 Engraves

57 Fixes

58 In the lead

DOWN

1 Sea eagle

2 Warrior princess

3 "— Old Cow Hand"

4 Gambling game

5 Before, to Blake

6 Yodeler's answer

7 To any degree (2 wds.)

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Answer to Previous Puzzle

PEEK

TWIST

AISLES

BEETLE

INTENT

REELIN

MAAM

ARI

KLM

EGGIER

HENNA

GRACED

IRATE

VADER

TOTAL

AMEND

SOLIDS

GENTS

COMPEL

LCD

CUR

SPAT

MOHAWK

ELPASO

AROMAS

SOIREE

VIPER

ANKA

8 Ramble around

9 Festive night

10 Blushing

11 Allen or Reid

12 Honshu port

16 Veld grazer

18 Mensa stats

20 Deed possessor

21 "Star Trek" lieutenant

22 Pixels

23 Lake boat

24 Erie Canal city

25 Qt. fractions

27 Fabric meas.

29 Mary's follower

30 Always, to Poe

32 Rubber-stamps

34 Police-blotter info

37 Pinnacles

38 Romaine

41 Did steno work

43 Very reluctant

45 Puts on the radio

47 Casino supply

48 Safety agcy.

49 Bulrush

50 Almost-grads

51 — Kippur

52 Not waste

53 ATM code

54 Mauna —

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