

FRIDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT

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Table with columns for Broadcast Stations, Pay Channels, and Cable Stations. Rows include various programs like 'The Tonight Show', 'Jeopardy!', 'The Voice', etc., across different time slots.

Will 'Grey' Change Winter Movie Marketing?

BY SABA HAMEDY AND STEVEN ZEITCHIK © 2015, Los Angeles Times

Valentine's Day movies were once forgettable, midrange affairs, romances that took in decent sums and disappeared as quickly as the contents of a holiday chocolate box.

But by racking up huge domestic ticket sales since it opened Friday, the erotic drama "Fifty Shades of Grey" has turned winter moviegoing on its head.

The modern film business makes its billions primarily by aiming at young males, who are scarfing down splashy comic book fare at an unprecedented pace. But "Fifty Shades," adapted from E.L. James' best-seller, not only has broken records for Valentine's and Presidents Day opening weekends, its totals have challenged spring juggernauts such as "X-Men: Days of Future Past" by successfully appealing to a very different demographic: women over 25.

Nearly 70 percent of "Fifty Shades" moviegoers through Sunday were female, and 58 percent of the audience was older than 25. The film has shrewdly targeted the audience that has made one-offs such as "Julie & Julia" and "Eat, Pray, Love" successes — but with a twist, since the film also

relies on the sequel mentality reserved for young-adult franchises such as "Twilight" and "The Hunger Games."

"This could be the R-rated equivalent of 'Twilight,'" said Paul Dergarabedian, senior analyst at the audience measurement service Rentrak.

The risqué movie, which follows kinky billionaire Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) and his demure love interest, Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson), tapped into a genre — edgy, R-rated romance — that has been largely dormant since the late 1980s and 1990s when such films as "Fatal Attraction" and "Basic Instinct" flourished.

Indeed, with James' additional books, and the prospect of future "Fifty Shades" movies, some believe Anastasia Steele could become the face of a new type of franchise, one that's not built around popular teen book adaptations such as "Hunger Games" or superhero blockbusters such as "Iron Man."

"There is an overall dearth of female protagonists and major characters," said Martha Lauzen, San Diego State University film professor. "That creates a hunger to see females in major roles that ('Fifty Shades') may help ease."

The film is a rarity in the industry not only for its target audience but for the way it came to the screen: It's a

project overseen mostly by women. In addition to being based on a book by a woman, the movie was greenlit by Universal Pictures Chairman Donna Langley, directed by the British filmmaker and photographer Sam Taylor-Johnson from a script by Kelly Marcel. It was the biggest opening weekend for a female director since the 2008 launch of "Twilight," directed by Catherine Hardwicke.

In achieving such strong box-office success, "Fifty Shades" implicitly raises questions about whether many Hollywood assumptions are wrong while also potentially generating a newfound respect for the genre, if not a glut of similar movies.

"I'm sure a lot of movie executives are scouring best-seller lists looking to find the next 'Fifty Shades of Grey,'" Dergarabedian said. "But you walk a very fine line as to whether these types of movies can do well."

Universal already is at work on scripts for the second and third books of the series.

Not everyone is convinced, however, that the film will ignite change in the industry.

"When 'Bridesmaids' came out, everyone started talking about the effect it would have because it was such a huge hit," Lauzen said. "People were saying, 'We are going to see lots of simi-

lar films.' That really never materialized."

Stacy L. Smith, a USC Annenberg associate professor, noted while the domestic market is 50 percent female, only two of the top 100 movies of 2014 were directed by a woman.

"The industry is reluctant to support female storytellers and voices," Smith said. "(But) female filmmakers sell, despite what Hollywood decision makers think."

"Fifty Shades of Grey" became a huge hit after James, a British television executive turned novelist, released it as an e-book in 2011. She wrote two follow-ups and signed on with a major publisher. Now, the books have been translated into 52 languages and have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide.

After Universal won an aggressive bidding war for the film rights in March 2012, the studio worked to find ways to please book fans while also appealing to a mainstream audience that might be uncomfortable with the racy content.

Though many moviegoers were fans of the book, strong ticket sales were also powered by a carefully crafted marketing plan, timed to a Valentine's Day weekend release.

Snubbed

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crime scenes caught by the lens of a serial shooter. Conjured up by writer-director Dan Gilroy, it gave us one of those memorable characters who crawls under the skin so deeply he is impossible to shake. Jake Gyllenhaal's Lou Bloom, a freelance videographer trolling for shots of blood and guts that can be sold to the local TV news, is hungry in every sense of the word.

Though the 30 pounds the actor lost added to the eerie look, it is his portrayal of an insatiable appetite for success that unnerves. The effect of Lou's unblinking ambition is riveting. Between Gyllenhaal's stirring acting and Gilroy's scary telling, the film is psychologically chilling in just the way a well-crafted, Hitchcockian thriller should be.

"GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY"

Very risky business for the academy to go so light, you may be saying. Au contraire. Though "Guardians" — part science fiction, part spoof — puts it about as far outside the academy's best picture box as one could imagine, qualitatively director James Gunn's aim was true. I realize it is not one of those quote-unquote prestige pictures, but the movie was extremely smart and well-constructed, well-acted and absolutely entertaining, due in large measure to the engaging Chris Pratt as its charming space jockey and a wise-cracking animatronic raccoon (voiced by Bradley Cooper). Rarely do films we love enough to see again and again make it in. "Guardians" was a real chance go with a rule-breaker and show that the academy is open to taking the not-so-serious films more seriously.

Even riskier business would be the bizarre case for considering "The Interview." With its farcical faux plot against North Korea's parody-perfect leader Kim Jong Un, the silly Seth Rogen and James Franco slapstick became the most significant movie of the year. Not on the quality scale, mind you. No high IQ scores either. But thanks, or no thanks, to a very touchy foreign tyrant, "The Interview" became a symbol of free speech in America and the current poster child for squashing cyber-bullying rather than being merely a bad movie. I'd slip it in as No. 5 on my list, but I figure I'm already pressing my luck.

Book

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Sister Ann also discovered material that wasn't available in the 1990s, as well as the opportunity to provide a look at the last 20 years of monastic life. She worked with Neville Ann Kelly on the revised book, which was published by Lean Scholar Press.

"Dr. Kelly used the Internet to find new material, and we looked at the possible reorganization of material since the 1990s," the nun said. "The book was cut from 540 pages to 480 pages to save expense. That made it more challenging than ever."

The book shows the monasteries were not just quiet places where monks and nuns lived in quiet retreat, Sister Ann said. Prayer and contemplation were indeed important, she said, but the monasteries also played a dynamic and often controversial role in shaping the world far outside their walls.

"They taught not only the liberal arts but also agricultural skills. They performed important work with education and health care," she said. "They kept civilization going and organized."

The monasteries also found themselves affected by movements and events all around them, Sister Ann said. They were often targeted by rulers and governments who wanted to seize the monastic property. Other times, those rulers viewed the churches and monasteries as politi-

cal threats which needed to be crushed. And some rulers wanted to crush education and cultural development.

"The monasteries were seen as powerful," Sister Ann said. "You saw the monasteries in Germany, England and Italy faced threats throughout their history. The French monasteries tended to escape from those threats."

The turmoil has continued to recent history with World Wars I and II and communism, she said.

However, the monasteries also enjoyed support from certain leaders through the centuries, Sister Ann said. In turn, the monasteries exerted their own impact on the politics and events surrounding them.

In compiling the original book, Sister Ann visited Europe multiple times, including family trips, which gave her a first-hand opportunity to visit monasteries. She also researched documents, which at times became difficult to locate or interpret.

"You heard so much about the German, Swiss and Austrian monasteries. I think that's because they became the mother houses of our monasteries in the United States, like our Benedictine Sisters here at the Sacred Heart Monastery," she said. "In my research, I found the French monasteries and their history to be neglected the most."

Monasteries are far from strictly European and North American institutions, Sister Ann said. In fact, her latest research looks at the spread of monasteries around the world. "I went to African and Asian na-

tions many years ago, and they were full of novitiates," she said. "Those countries have a minority of Catholics, but the monasteries were founded by Europeans."

Sister Ann also looked at both men's and women's monasteries, including the cooperation — and sometimes competition — that developed between them. In other instances, double monasteries were formed and overseen by an abbot or abbess.

"In Europe, they had a natural cohabitation in the sense that they had individual houses and separate monasteries but lived in proximity, prayed together and worked together," she said.

Throughout their history, the Benedictines have maintained their focus on several rules, Sister Ann said.

"The emphasis has been on community and good works," she said. "The community is based on regular prayer, serving the needs of others through education, schools and hospitals."

However, monastic life has seen changes in recent years, Sister Ann said. Her revised book looks at Benedictine life from a contemporary perspective.

For one thing, those who follow monastic principles don't necessarily live in monasteries.

"We are seeing strong movements with more laity involved in monastic life," she said. "You are now seeing oblates following the Rule of St. Benedict. They included married couples and widowers. They follow the rule the best they can in their everyday life."

Sister Ann believes such a movement, which is seeing rapid growth in Africa and Asia, reflects a search for spirituality and seeking God in daily life.

The oblate movement also attracts people, both Catholic and other denominations, who don't want to enter a formal religious calling such as priest, pastor or nun, Sister Ann said.

"There are a lot of people who, before, may have pursued a (religious) vocation," she said. "Now, they are following other pastoral work."

While some monasteries have closed for lack of numbers, Sister Ann doesn't see monasteries going out of existence. In fact, she can foresee a renaissance in the years ahead.

"It's cyclical. I have seen monasteries that were down to one, two or three people and now they are flourishing," she said. "Monasteries have endured and they have boomed."

Regardless of what form they take in the future, monasteries and those who follow the monastic life will continue to live an enduring Christian message, Sister Ann said.

"We are called to serve," she said. "What is the loving thing to do? Seek the good of the other, not your own personal good."

For orders, further information and excerpts, visit the book website at www.benedictinehistory.com. You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.