

Heroes and monsters

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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There are four films released this week: *Patriot's Day* is an account of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and the everyday heroes who inspired the world in the extraordinary hours that followed; a 12-year-old boy attempts to deal with his mother's illness and the bullying of his classmates by escaping into a fantastical world of monsters and fairy tales in *A Monster Calls*; a literate slave and preacher hopes of leading his people to freedom in *The Birth Of A Nation*; and a teenager encounters a strange and subterranean creature with a taste and a talent for speed in *Monster Trucks*.

Patriot's Day

Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Peter Berg (*Deepwater Horizon*, *Lone Survivor*), it is an account of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and the everyday heroes who inspired the world in the extraordinary hours that followed. In the aftermath of an unspeakable act of terror, Police Sergeant Tommy Saunders (Mark Wahlberg) joins courageous survivors, first responders and investigators in a race against the clock to hunt down the bombers before they strike again. Weaving together the stories of Special Agent Richard Deslauriers (Kevin Bacon), Police Commissioner Ed Davis (John Goodman), Sergeant Jeffrey Pugliese (J.K. Simmons) and nurse Carol Saunders (Michelle Monaghan) this visceral and unflinching chronicle captures the suspense of the most sophisticated manhunt in law enforcement history and the strength of the people in Boston.

“I hope this film works as a visceral experience, so that for two hours the audience gets caught up in the emotion and the energy and the intensity that infused the city in those 105 hours between the bombing and the capture of the brothers,” says director Peter Berg. “And I certainly hope that it becomes an opportunity for people to have a discussion about what is happening around us today and why it’s happening, and how at the end of the day love wins.”

Adds Wahlberg: “People will continue to do bad things, but they cannot dictate how we live our lives. We need to be able to go to a marathon, we need to be able to go to a baseball game, we need to be able to go to the movies, we need to be able to live normal lives and we all have to come together. The people of Boston showed that, in the end, love of our fellow man is always going to win out. That’s why this story needed to be told. And why the film’s positive message should be seen by everybody.”

A Monster Calls

A visually spectacular drama from acclaimed director Juan Antonio Bayona (*The Impossible*), based on the award-winning children’s fantasy novel.

12-year-old Conor O’Malley (Lewis MacDougall) is about to escape into a fantastical world of monsters and fairy tales. He is dealing with his mother’s (Felicity Jones) illness, which has necessitated Conor’s spending time with his less-than-sympathetic grandmother (Sigourney Weaver). His daily existence at his UK school is one of academic disinterest and bullying by classmates. As Conor’s father (Toby Kebbell) has resettled thousands of miles away in the US, the boy yearns for guidance.

He unexpectedly summons a most unlikely ally, who bursts forth with terrifying grandeur from an ancient towering yew tree and the powerful earth below it: a 40-foot-high colossus of a creature (portrayed in performance-capture and voiceover by Liam Neeson) who appears at Conor’s bedroom window at 12.07 one night – and at that time on nights thereafter. The Monster has stories to tell, and he insists that Conor hear them and powerfully visualise them. Conor’s fear gives way to feistiness and then to looking within; for, the Monster demands that once the tales are told it will be time for Conor to tell his own story in return. Ancient, wild, and relentless, the Monster guides Conor on a journey of courage, faith, and truth.

“I saw this as a powerful and important story to tell as a movie – an adventure that anyone can relate to,” says Bayona.

The Birth Of A Nation

Set against the American South thirty years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War and based on a true story, it follows Nat Turner (Nate Parker), a literate slave and preacher whose financially strained owner Samuel Turner (Armie Hammer)

accepts an offer to use Nat's preaching to subdue unruly slaves. As he witnesses countless atrocities - against himself, his wife Cherry (Aja Naomi King), and fellow slaves - Nat orchestrates an uprising in the hopes of leading his people to freedom.

The Turner slave rebellion stands as one of the most influential acts of resistance against slavery in all American history, yet remarkably, the story has never been recounted in a contemporary screen drama. Contentious to some and inspirational to many, until now, the life and impact of Nat Turner has largely been confined to folktales, novels, documentaries and a few paragraphs here and there in history books.

Writer, director and actor Nate Parker takes on a distinctly vast ambition for a first-time filmmaker, presenting a more take-charge slave narrative than we are used to seeing. Amidst sweeping action and romance he presents a man driven equally by love, spirituality, fury and hope to free his people from the legacy of bondage in America. In the process, he restores a figure long relegated as a historical footnote and shows him as the heroic trailblazer he was.

For Parker, the film was also an answer to a calling he had felt throughout his life – and worth taking a considerable personal risk to pursue. “I have asked myself how I could be most effective as a filmmaker: I can either keep reading these scripts that project people of color in stereotypical, counterproductive ways or I can put everything I am into a project that I believe will change the conversation and create the opportunity for sustainable change.”

Monster Trucks

Looking for any way to get away from the life and town he was born into, Tripp (Lucas Till), a high school senior, builds a monster truck from bits and pieces of scrapped cars. After an accident at a nearby oil-drilling site displaces a strange and subterranean creature with a taste and a talent for speed, Tripp may have just found the key to getting out of town with a most unlikely friend.

This live-action/computer-animated action comedy film is directed by Chris Wedge and written by Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger, Derek Connolly and Matthew Robinson.

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