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## Game Night (Movie Review)

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## Game Night (Movie Review)

### **Abstract**

"Although *Game Night* is escapist in good ways, it's just a fine draft of a movie."

Posting about the movie *Game Night* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/game-night-movie-review/>

### **Keywords**

movie review, Game Night, John Francis Daley, Jonathan Goldstein

### **Disciplines**

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### **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

# “Game Night” Movie Review

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 [inallthings.org/game-night-movie-review/](http://inallthings.org/game-night-movie-review/)

Josh Matthews

March 9, 2018



Title: “Game Night”

Starring: Jason Bateman, Rachel McAdams, Jesse Plemons, Kyle Chandler, Lamorne Morgan, Kylie Bunbury

Directed by: John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein

Written by: Mark Perez

Music by: Cliff Martinez

From its opening shot, “Game Night” knows exactly what it is: an escapist comedy targeted at middle-age adults. The first line of the movie is, “Who cares about winning? Let’s get drunk,” which seems to say it all.

Although there is no actual drunkenness in this movie, it tries to offer a kind of moviegoer’s wet bar. Do you want goofy scenarios, hijinks, and cute couples who all want more complete lives? You may consume them to excess here.

The whole plot of this movie involves three middle-class couples who get to play the game of their lives. These couples comprise an adult gaming group that regularly plays trivia, charades, and Monopoly together on the weekends.

On the particular night featured in the movie, they throw away their boardgames. Instead, they must solve an elaborately staged kidnapping. The entire city is their gameboard, and, they are told, they won’t be able to tell what’s real from what’s fake.

This kidnapping game, sort of like a really expensive murder-mystery party, is set up by the billionaire brother of one of the gamers. That gamer, Max (Jason Bateman), feels insecure when compared to his brother Brooks (Kyle Chandler). Yet he’s got a great wife, Annie (Rachel McAdams), a fellow gamer whose fun-loving nonchalance matches Max’s own attitude towards everything... except the brother he envies.

Once Brooks invites Max and Annie and their four friends over to his rented mansion, the game seems too enticing to be true. The prize is Brooks' 1976 Corvette Stingray, which Max has always wanted. When two masked men bust into Brooks' home, attack him, and then drag him out the door, the three couples watch in delight. This is going to be some game.

But wait. Brooks seems to be really fighting back. And the masked men have guns, which seem genuine. Maybe this kidnapping is real?

It's at this point where "Game Night" creatively plagiarizes David Fincher's 1997 thriller "The Game." That movie featured Michael Douglas as an uptight multi-millionaire businessman, who's enrolled in an elaborate game by his little brother (Sean Penn), in which his life becomes a game that involves gun play and car chases. Douglas doesn't know whether he's playing a game or if the game has gone awry. He's pursued endlessly, shot at, and kidnapped, all of which, he thinks, ought not to be a part of any game.

It's the same with the characters in "Game Night." Everything seems fake, until the gun that Brooks was carrying goes off, and a real bullet goes through Max's arm. This makes a real hole, with real blood pouring out of it, and results in some of the movie's funniest scenes.

At this point, no more can be said about the plot. It should suffice that the movie *sort of* fulfills its promise that the real and the fake are hard to distinguish, but it doesn't address the idea as well as it ought to.

Although "Game Night" is escapist in good ways, it's just a fine draft of a movie. You can see its potential as a great comedy, but there are one too many couples playing the game, as well as a few slow gags that don't pay off. While Bateman's presence does signal that this is going to be a very crude comedy, it's less so than I expected—but still, much cruder than it ought to be.

What works best is Cliff Martinez's electronica score coupled with the vision of directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, who showcase a level of craftsmanship here that makes me excited to see whatever they do next. Even if this movie had stunk, the extended shot of a Fabergé egg being thrown around a mansion would be worth the price of admission.

"Game Night" offers mere hedonistic fun at the movies, without the unbearable weight of news, politics, and everything else. It gives us two late-30-somethings, Max and Anna, who provide vicarious living for viewers around the same age. The movie contains much 1990s pop-culture nostalgia. Plus, Max and Anna are old enough to really want children, and they are sincerely trying. (Let the moviegoer judge whether they are *mature* enough to have children.)

I admit that I chose this movie over more serious fare. Why? The late February offerings at my local theaters included a movie about a terrorist on a train, an Oscar-nominated movie about obsession and "toxic masculinity," a serious movie about race and race-relations in America, and even a movie that, given its simple title, I assume is the most depressing and jokeless of the lot: "Annihilation."

Perhaps all are great movies. I have no doubt that one or two of them are. However, "Game Night" is a kind of antidote to the slate of grim movies regularly offered to us, as well as to any viewing diet that over-consumes world news and current events.

If we are regular news watchers and readers, we need an occasional break from the never-ending emotional rollercoasters that are our lives.

"Game Night" knows this, and tries its hardest to help us.