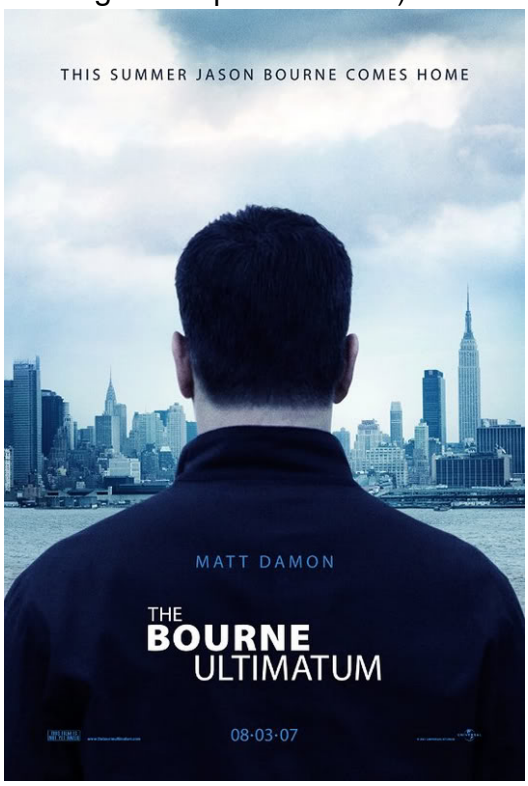
The last of the true summer blockbusters was released this past weekend, and "The Bourne Ultimatum" has just been raking it in at the box office ever since. The first two movies were very good, and if you're like me and agree with Mitch on most of his reviews (he even talked me out of hating the Sopranos finale) ... it looks like the third one is gonna be pretty damn good as well.



The last of the true Summer Blockbusters was released this weekend, and as far as seat-grabbing action goes, the expertly crafted "The Bourne Ultimatum" well serves the old adage of saving the best for last.

Matt Damon returns as the amnesia suffering super spy Jason Bourne. Also returning from the superlative "Bourne Supremacy" are screenwriter Tony Gilroy, putting much more humanity and soul into Bourne that was seen in the Robert Ludlam books, and director Paul Greengrass, once again proving himself the master of the hand-held camera chase and fight scenes.

The best trilogies make it a point to not only move the story along from one movie to the next, but to focus on a different aspect each time. In "The Bourne Identity", it was all about Jason Bourne finding out who he was. Having learned that, he was trying to find out what he did in "The Bourne Supremacy". In this final chapter, he is looking for the "why?";

attempting to get to the bottom of his own psyche to learn why a man would agree to become a soulless killer.

The film somewhat overlaps with the last one, starting at the end of the big chase scene in Moscow that was the climactic conclusion. But it's not a re-viewing of the last one, it's a different angled viewpoint that culminates with Bourne wanting to re-create his own morality into a less ruthless version.

To discover that, Bourne attempts to make contact with a British reporter who seems to know much more about Bourne than Bourne does himself. Of course, the reporter is getting his information from a high level confidential source, which means he is being tracked not just by Bourne, but the C.I.A. as well, in the form of slimy Black Ops head Noah Vosen, played to perfection by David Strathairn. The always dependable Joan Allen is back as C.I.A. bigwig Pamela Landry, working theoretically as Vosen's superior, but finding herself second guessed and thwarted at every turn as she strives to bring Bourne in rather than have him killed.

Similar to a James Bond movie, the locations and chase scenes are key to any "Bourne" movie, and this one is no exception. But here, the locations are not the exotic eye-candy used to enhance the playboy image of the star. Instead, London, Madrid, Tangiers, and New York are used as substantially varying backdrops to the roller-coaster chases, harrowingly nerve-racking escapes, and wince-inducing fights.

In an earlier review, I noted how the fight scenes in "Casino Royale" were so much better than any previous Bond movie due to the realism. Greengrass ups the bar even more in this film, with the fight in Tangiers between Bourne and the "asset" (read: contract killer) named Dash inducing audible grunts and gasps from the audience as they pummel each other for what seems to be five minutes. This comes after an amazing ten minute chase scene where Bourne is trying to first stop Dash from killing the informant, and then from killing Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles, appearing now in all three movies). The

movements throughout the narrow streets are almost enough to give a person claustrophobia.

Shifting the location to New York, the plot goes into overdrive as Bourne becomes the hunter as well as the hunted, closing in on the truth while watching his back at every turn. The highlight is a breathtakingly implausible chase scene through the streets of New York with a conclusion that is both unexpected and quite satisfactory.

Although the action pieces are amazing, the success or failure of the movie still hinges upon the acting, which is nothing short of top-notch. Strathairn is perfect in these types of roles, almost as good as Chris Cooper in becoming chameleon-like when completely immersed in the role, equally adept playing a multi-layered villain as he is playing the good guy (Edward Murrow in "Good Night, and Good Luck"). Joan Allen shows that there are still excellent acting opportunities for women over 40, and makes the most of her turn as Landry, a true CIA professional that nonetheless has a sense of right and wrong that comes from her moral center, not an executive memo.

Julia Stiles finally gets more than ten minutes of screen time in this film, and she makes the most of it. While her motives in helping Bourne may be a bit murky, Stiles can handle hardened resolve and near-hysterical panic with equal aplomb.

But as in the first two movies, it is Matt Damon who makes this series such a success. His acting range is simply incredible. In the last two years we've seen him as a callow, manipulative businessman in "Syriana", an emotionally closed bureaucrat in "The Good Shepherd", an insecure, clumsy con artist in "Ocean's Thirteen", and a smooth, talkative corrupt cop in "The Departed". Here, he is completely different from any of the aforementioned performances. Bourne is a killing machine with a conscious. He doesn't want to kill, but when he is faced with danger, the programming kicks in and he simply reacts as a finely tuned mechanism. Damon is able to portray not just the cold, calculated reactions that his training produced, but also all of the

pain and anguish brought about by so much death, including that of his beloved Marie in the second movie.

This is reportedly the final Bourne movie that Damon will make. I certainly hope so, because this movie is such an excellent wrap up to the trilogy, that I don't see how anything else can add to it.

It has been a summer of fantasies, costumed superheroes, dork comedies, and popcorn adventure films. Some very good...many of them not so good. In any case, it's ending on a high note, with a savvy adult oriented action flick that can take it's place amongst the best of all time in its genre.

My Rating: Brian Sipe (3 ½ footballs)