

'Son of God' Debuts Second in Box Office

Non-Stop, a thriller starring Liam Neeson as a U.S. air marshal trying to stop a string of murders on an international flight, collected \$30 million in ticket sales to soar into the lead at the domestic box office.

It swept the week's other new film, *Son of God*, into second place with \$26.5 million in sales during a strong box office weekend which coincided with Sunday's bestowing of its annual Oscars, Hollywood's biggest night.

Son of God is based on *The Bible* television miniseries produced by *Survivor* producer Mark Burnett and his wife, Roma Downey.

The Lego Movie, which led the box office for three consecutive weeks, was third in ticket sales at U.S. and Canadian theaters with \$21 million, according to studio estimates compiled by tracking firm Rentrak.

Non-Stop is the latest film to feature Neeson in an action role, following his hit thriller *Taken 2* in 2012.

The voice of the 61-year-old Irish former amateur boxing champion is also featured in the animated *Lego Movie*, which "stars" characters based on the colorful plastic toy blocks.

That has racked up nearly \$210 million at the box office since its Feb. 7 release.

Universal released *Non-Stop* during the same part of the year as Neeson's 2009 hit *Taken*, which opened in late January, and the move paid off handsomely as the film far surpassed studio projections for a total of about \$19-21 million.

"This was a great result for the weekend," said Nikki Rocco,

president for domestic distribution at Universal Pictures, which released *Non-Stop*.

"Liam has become a bonafide star, but we saw a little more diffuse audience than we've seen for his previous films."

Beating Forecasts

She said more than one-third of ticket buyers were under 25, and prospects for the film looked strong in coming weeks as his films tended to have box office "longevity."

Son of God, which stars Portuguese actor and former model Diogo Morgado as Jesus Christ, features scenes not used in the History Channel miniseries that was nominated for three Emmy nominations.

The movie received generally poor reviews, getting "rotten" reviews from 37 of 50 critics tallied on the site Rotten Tomatoes, although 82 percent of audience members liked it.

"It's a phenomenal opening," said Chris Aronson, president of domestic distribution for Fox, which distributed the movie.

He said forecasting the fortunes for the religious-themed movie "defied all conventional wisdom."

"I thought if we were in the \$12 million to \$15 million range we'd be in great shape," he said.

"But I'm not at all surprised it did more than that."

The Lego Movie, which also features the voices of Will Ferrell, Will Arnett and Morgan Freeman, was the fourth film since October to lead the box office over three straight weekends.

It followed on the heels of *Gravity* in October and *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* in December, according to Box Office Mojo. *Ride Along* also led the box office for three consecutive

weekends in January.

Rounding out the top five, the George Clooney World War II-era film *The Monuments Men* took in \$5 million, while *3 Days to Kill*, starring Kevin Costner as an over-the-hill international spy, was fifth with \$4.9 million in ticket sales.

Warner Brothers, a unit of Time Warner, released the film *The Lego Movie*. Universal Pictures, a unit of Comcast's NBC Universal division, distributed *Non-Stop*.

Son of God was released by Fox, a unit of Twenty-First Century Fox.

Relativity distributed *3 Days to Kill*. *The Monuments Men* was released by Sony's Columbia Pictures.

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