

New *Wall Street*, same issues

Douglas's Gordon Gekko returns in Oliver Stone's satisfying sequel

| Like it or not, sequels are a dime a dozen in Hollywood these days.

| Original ideas seem harder to come by. And even when they do come, why would a production company gamble on a new story when it could simply churn out another edition of a time-tested blockbuster franchise every other year?

It is in this movie climate that the September release *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* stands out in two ways. One, though it is in fact a sequel, the release dates of the original and this film are separated by more than 20 years, something very rarely seen in this industry. And two, there has arguably never been a franchise whose core themes and ideas are just as prevalent today as they were when debuted years ago. The original *Wall Street* came out in 1989, starring Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen and directed by Oliver Stone. This widely acclaimed film cut to the heart of 1980's excess and greed. Though it was created as a warning to the world about the perils of unbridled power and ambition, for many it became an inspiration and encouraged them to follow in the footsteps of wildly charismatic villain and Wall Street top-dog Gordon Gekko, played by Douglas in an award winning performance. The new film, *Money Never Sleeps*, opens with Gekko being released from prison, a stint that owed to his crimes committed in the first film. The world he reenters is in many ways largely the same, but he has seemingly changed, leaving jail a softer and poorer man and yearning to reunite with his estranged daughter Winnie (Carey Mulligan). Winnie just so happens to be dating an up and coming Wall Street broker Jake Moore (Shia Lebouf) who is interested in funding alternative energy research through his employer, banking company Keller Zabel. Keller Zabel's stocks soon starts crashing out of the blue, and Jake's father figure and company founder Louis Zabel (Frank Langella) commits suicide in his grief. Jake is deeply shaken by this news, and immediately begins to seek revenge on those he believes to be responsible for the rumors that tanked his company and led to his mentor's death. He seeks the help of his soon to be father-in-law Gekko, who in return asks for Jake's help in reconciling with his daughter. From this point, the movie essentially becomes two stories, a love story between Jake and Winnie and a story detailing Gordon's comeback and "redemption" amongst the financial crisis of 2008. The film, like the original, exists deep within the world of big business and trading and involves quite a bit of insider dialogue. But remarkably it still finds a way to keep it all relatively easy to understand and follow. The performances are great all around, from Lebouf in perhaps his best role yet as Jake to Josh Brolin as the film's primary, uber-rich villain. Douglas does outstanding work here as well, fitting like an old glove into his famous role as Gordon Gekko once more while still finding new layers to the character. The biggest complaint one may hear about this film is the transformation of Gekko, who is only allowed to really cut loose into his old "skull-sucking" self at late points in the film. And it is admittedly a little disappointing to see a somewhat tamed Gekko introduced in favor of a redemptive arc and love story. Perhaps director Stone was worried that history would repeat itself and the original's "Greed is good" motto would be misunderstood and taken literally by many once again if presented by Douglas's captivating

performance. By the movie's end, however, Stone can be forgiven for a little preaching to the audience since his sequel offers another fascinating look into the souls of men who rule Wall Street and the greed, that for better or worse, still rules our world. Verdict: B+