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## Remake of 'SuperFly' out-blings the original

In 1972, "Super Fly," a low-budget crime drama starring 35-year-old Ron O'Neal as the dashing drug dealer Youngblood Priest, was considered a breakthrough.

Like the detective story "Shaft" the year before, "Super Fly" was set in Harlem, targeted African-American audiences and featured a black protagonist with agency.

So what if the movie didn't have much of a story? It was universally relatable: A man wants out of the game, but the game won't let him go.

So what if its characters snorted cocaine just to say hello, casually as a handshake? It was the '70s. Crack was not yet a scourge.

Prior to the 1972 movie, the word "fly" was an adjective, slang signifying something hip and cool. To be super fly was to be sensational. After its release, "Super Fly" became the name as well as the demeanor of the Priest character in the popular imagination.

Before the "blaxploitation" genre even existed, "Super Fly" offered a fantasy not previously associated with black protagonists: beautiful girls, customized cars and stellar sartorial ensembles. Not to mention the biggest fantasy of all, an antiauthoritarian black male who wasn't controlled by "the Man."

This guy was fly. Super fly.

Then came the deluge. "Super Fly" was a success. Made for \$500,000, its box office ultimately exceeded \$30 million. Holly-

wood learned that low-budget domestically released portrayals of blacks as criminals with flashy lifestyles could offer spectacular returns on investment.

What began as an antiestablishment novelty evolved into an industry standard and clichéd portrayals of urban pathology grew into the dominant depiction of African-Americans.

Now, more than four decades later, producer Joel Silver has decided to dust off the O.G. icon. Passing up an opportunity to create a textured depiction of its hero's life or tighten up the story, the filmmakers of the recently released "SuperFly," set in Atlanta, have chosen to stick with the sparse plot and double down on the fantasy elements — guns, girls and Gucci garb — most likely to appeal to a generation raised on music videos.

By day, Director X (nee Julien Christian Lutz of Toronto), the director of "SuperFly," is a videographer of choice for the likes of Drake, Kanye West, Jay Z and

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John Mayer. Not surprisingly, X's movie is visually gorgeous, and its soundtrack includes original 1972 Curtis Mayfield cuts as well as bass-heavy Southern trap music in the score.

Unlike the world-weary Ron O'Neal, the new Youngblood



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Priest, 21-year-old actor Trevor Jackson, is barely out of his teens. Priest makes a luxurious living in uneasy parity with a rival crew of coke suppliers — the Snow Patrol, a gang that promotes its brand by wearing white clothes, driving white cars and living in a snow-white villa.

Handsome and meticulously groomed, Priest travels under the radar of the police. He has a business partner, Eddie (Jason Mitchell, "Straight Outta Compton"); an exacting mentor (Michael Kenneth Williams, "The Wire"); and two girlfriends (Lex

Scott Davis and Andrea Londo) with whom he polyamorously cohabits in his Architectural Digest-worthy home.

Everything — the money, the sex, the respect — swims happily along until an envious hothead from the Snow Patrol challenges him. When a bystander is killed by a bullet intended for him, Priest resolves to leave the business.

Before he checks out, he needs to make one last score. But as they say, mo' money, mo' problems.

The appeal of the original "Super Fly" character was in his resourcefulness. He lives by his wits and prospers. Audiences want him to survive. He handles with streetwise grace a life that is as stressful as it is glamorous.

The new "SuperFly" requires willful ignorance (or just ignorance) from its audience as it refuses to acknowledge two generations of social history that have occurred in the interim between the films. Crack? The prison pipeline? A War on Drugs? The opioid epidemic? Never heard of it.

Director X isn't trying to deliver a movie that makes a statement. "SuperFly" is an uncomplicated fantasy designed to seduce 20-somethings by outblinking its predecessor: Mildly retro and stylistically indebted to MTV, this remake is the cinematic equivalent of fruit-flavored electronic cigarettes — a socially transgressive, deceptively glamorous product targeted to young people.

Who wants in on that game?