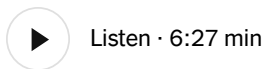


# ‘I Love Boosters’ Review: A Fashion-Forward Sense of Justice

Keke Palmer plays a shoplifter who sells high-end clothing at a deep discount in Boots Riley’s polychromatic new film.

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**By Maya Phillips**

May 21, 2026

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**I Love Boosters** Directed by Boots Riley · Adventure, Comedy, Crime, Drama, Sci-Fi · R · 1h 45m

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There are fashion crimes and there are property crimes; strutting from the center of the Venn diagram between the two is a ferociously dressed Keke Palmer in Boots Riley’s outsized polychromatic new film “I Love Boosters.”

Palmer plays Corvette, a stylish but broke wannabe designer in the Bay Area with racks upon racks of designer clothes in her possession. She’s a booster, a shoplifter who steals merchandise and sells it on the streets at a discount. In particular, Corvette and her band of merry boosters target Metro Designer, the stores of the high-end fashion designer Christie Smith (Demi Moore). As Corvette and her so-called “Velvet Gang” square off against Christie, they eventually get a leg up in the form of Jianhu (Poppy Liu), a Chinese warehouse worker who appears with a piece of reality-altering tech that threatens Christie’s empire.



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Riley's new film is a rainbow-colored fantasia of styles, shapes and patterns against bright, equally mesmerizing backdrops. Each of the Metro Designer stores sports a monochromatic theme, so one scene to the next might be awash in shades of yellow or red, the characters themselves also beautifully accented in those respective hues with color-coordinated wigs, makeup and accessories. Thanks to the costume designer Shirley Kurata and the production designer Christopher Glass, the eye candy is endless, the mash-up of hues and the sometimes sleek, sometimes absurd outfits perfectly in step with Riley's delightfully bonkers aesthetic. So too is Tune-Yards' playful, idiosyncratic score.

As Corvette, Palmer leads the film with zest and a bold sense of retributive justice. She's the schemer in charge, but in Riley's dramatic close-up shots Palmer allows flickers of vulnerability to show through Corvette's steely facade. She can carry the comedy and yet remains the most grounding force in the movie, even as its action grows more outlandish.

The Sheriff of Nottingham to Corvette's Robin Hood is Christie, an entrepreneur with a lofty self-image. Christie lives in a high-rise so chic it defies the rules of physics, slanting at a perilous angle. Played by Moore with an impeccable mix of ignobility and aloofness, like a haute couture villain from a "The Devil Wears Prada" cut scene, Christie steals ideas to create runway attire with six-figure price tags and proselytizes about the power of fashion not just as trends or as art but as a way of shaping reality. "Humanity is our canvas," she says with not a smidgen of irony.

As with his first film, "Sorry to Bother You," here Riley leads with his progressive labor politics, but his aims in "I Love Boosters" are more ambitious. He begins with the more obvious economic differences between the elite, as represented by Christie, and working class consumers. His satire is strongest earlier in the film, with pointed jokes about how

poorly the working class retailers of the Metro Designer stores are treated despite the exorbitant prices of the products they sell. (In one hilarious bit the employees propel themselves from starting blocks to sprint to their 30-second break time.)

Riley then cleverly expands his critique to include the inhumane conditions of the overseas warehouse workers who manufacture the overpriced clothes — like sandblasted denim — sometimes at their own peril. But then Riley keeps expanding his scope to look at the money trail behind conspiracies small and large: pyramid schemes, ill-begotten wealth buying legislative influence.

At some point Riley's satire goes in too many directions and the rest of the movie starts to lose its focus. Similarly, the introduction of a "Doctor Who" style sci-fi piece of tech that alters time and space and either furthers or undoes contradictions is as conceptually clever and imaginative as it is a muddled plot device.



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At different points, the movie either excels or fails in its excesses. Its cast is stuffed with winsome actors, but most of them are given short shrift in the script. Corvette's two partners in crime, Sade (Naomi Ackie) and Mariah (Taylour Paige), are underused, written as forgettable sidekick characters so the female friendships fall flat. And several of the other secondary characters (Don Cheadle, Jermaine Fowler, Kara Young and LaKeith Stanfield, in an especially baffling role as Corvette's mysterious love interest) also don't have enough material to work with in the midst of all the surreal chaos; they end up as distracting cameos.

And even with Riley's expert skill for quirky tonal shifts in dialogue and visual humor, some of the wackiness in the movie is more cartoonishly shopworn than his more innovative swerves (like, say, giant horse people). Christie's slant-floored apartment sets

up some recurring physical gags, and throughout the film Corvette's worries reappear in the form of an Indiana Jones-style boulder of unpaid bills and notices rolling through the streets of Oakland, Calif. Later in the movie, in the midst of an overstuffed climax featuring several pieces of sci-fi gear and an elaborate chase sequence, things switch to stop motion. Screwball, absurdist, satirical: There's such a grab-bag approach of styles, gags and references in this film that campy sci-fi portal technology is as likely as body horror involving death by orgasm.

All of which is imaginative and entertaining, but at the expense of a more coherent and biting political message. It makes sense, then, that the plot of "I Love Boosters," compared to the sharp and punchy "Sorry to Bother You," ultimately ends up in a place that's a lot more pat and a lot less convincing. Too many elements of Riley's sophomore feature hang like excess fabric from what would otherwise be a stunning, smart ensemble.

### **I Love Boosters**

Rated R for some explicit language and a freaky sex scene. Running time: 1 hour 45 minutes. In theaters.

### **I Love Boosters**

**Director** Boots Riley

**Writer** Boots Riley

**Stars** Keke Palmer, LaKeith Stanfield, Mahdi Cocci, Taylour Paige, Naomi Ackie

**Rating** R

**Running Time** 1h 45m

**Genres** Adventure, Comedy, Crime, Drama, Sci-Fi

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