

## **Movie Reviews by Phillip W. Weiss**

**Arranged mostly in alphabetical order**

**Rating scale: 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating.**

**“Spoilers” means that the review includes details about the movie’s plot.**

**Below is the list of movies (and some television shows) reviewed by Phillip W. Weiss. At the right of each title is the year of release (in parenthesis) and date first reviewed.**

**Every review was written by Phillip W. Weiss**

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**When It Was a Game (1991) (TV), 2 November 2010**  
**Going Ape (1970), 1 September 2010**  
**Whiteout (2009), 18 September 2009**  
**Wild Hogs (2007), 22 March 2007**  
**World Trade Center (2006), 22 August 2006**  
**X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2009), 5 May 2009**  
**X-Men: The Last Stand (2006), 20 June 2006**  
**Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942), 19 December 2005**  
**Ya sluzhil v ohkrane Stalina, ili Opyt dokumentalnoy mifologii (1989),  
27 September 2010**  
**Year One (2009), 7 July 2009**  
**You Don't Mess with the Zohan (2008), 3 June 2009**  
**Yours, Mine and Ours (2005), 12 June 2010**  
**Zodiac (2007), 10 March 2007**  
**Zombieland (2009), 12 October 2009**

### **Addendum**

**Summer Storm (1944), 14 December 2010**  
**Black Swan (2010), 13 December 2010**  
**Deutsche Wochenschau Nr. 681/40/1943 (1943), 11 December 2010**  
**The Tourist (2010), 11 December 2010**  
**The Next Three Days (2010), 9 December 2010**  
**Faster (2010), 4 December 2010**  
**The Mayor of Hell (1933), 28 November 2010**

**The Country Girl (1954), 28 November 2010**

**Judgment at Nuremberg (1961), 27 November 2010**

**Burlesque (2010), 25 November 2010**

**Fair Game (2010), 20 November 2010**

**Unstoppable (2010), 20 November 2010**

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### **10,000 BC (2008)**

**Great movie for a sci-fi flick., 31 March 2008**

**5 stars**

**Let's get real. This movie is not exactly one of the classics. No, it's not even worthy of an honorable mention. Actually, I wonder if this movie is even worth critiquing. The movie is crammed with special effects which is just Hollywood's way of covering up a mediocre story and equally mediocre acting (though that has much more to do with the material than with the skill of the performers). When one considers the movies in the science fiction genre, certain movies set the standard for excellence. King Kong, Alien, The Thing From Another Planet, Predator, The Day The Earth Stood Still, movies that have become icons. This movie does not meet that standard. It's flashy special effects cannot save it from its ultimate fate - oblivion to DVD land where all mediocre movies quickly go after an unsuccessful presence in movie houses. And let us remind one thing, movies are meant to be shown on BIG screens, not TV screens.**

**Don't believe the negative reviews of this movie! This movie is great for sci-fi. It is definitely one of the better films of the sci-fi genre. As a matter of fact, this movie contains all the elements of a classic, with great acting, excellent script, and outstanding special effects. The movie is part Jurassic Park, part Lost World, part King Kong, part Indiana Jones, part Ten Commandments and part every other sci-fi movie about prehistoric times ever made. This movie deserves to be nominated for every award in the movie industry. Everything about this movie is crammed with entertainment. Wonderful movie; masterful example of cinema verite. This movie is worthy of every accolade found in the English language.**

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## **2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)**

**Pretentious, 31 July 2005**

**5 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**When I first saw this movie years ago, I was so intrigued by the music and special effects that I would have rated it a 10. But, alas, time marches on and so does my taste in movies. Recently I happened to watch this movie again and to my chagrin I found it BORING. What made the movie even more unpalatable was the pretentious and muddled story ... or message ... or cryptic allegory ... or whatever, that left me feeling profoundly annoyed. What the heck is this movie about anyway? I liked the beginning with the actors jumping around in monkey suits screaming at each and fighting and, well, acting a lot like people, but when the movie introduced the obelisk ... and then the space station ... and then the talking computer with an attitude ... and then the astronaut growing old ... and then a baby in a capsule looking at earth ... I knew that somewhere there was a message, but it was a message not received by me because frankly, my dear, I didn't give a hoot. The one character in the movie I liked, in fact the only character in the movie that is worthy of the term "character," was the computer. If the movie had just been about the computer, and how well he ... or she ... or it ... sang "Daisy," I might have liked this movie a lot more. This movie is an example of people getting in the way of a perfectly good story. Let the computer explore space. People have more important things to do.**

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## **2012 (2009/I)**

**Nothing on earth lasts forever, including the earth itself., 14 November 2009**

**8 stars**

**This movie starts out with very cheesy acting and some grotesquely inane dialog, causing one to feel that this is going to be a very long, very tedious cinematic experience. But somewhere in the middle of the movie something happens. The writing, the acting, the directing, and the special effects pull together as the story becomes more plausible and the movie more watchable. The movie was able to sufficiently recover its cinematic bearings to the point where it was telling an interesting and provocative story. For the human race, it's pandemonium time and this movie pulls no punches in showing the chaos that ensues as the world is literally coming apart at the seams, caused by a mere fluke of nature. This movie shows that nothing on earth lasts forever, including the very planet we live on.**

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**21 (2008)**

**Good movie., 3 May 2008**

**8 stars**

**This is a ... (should I say it?) ,, this is a ... (will anyone believe it?) ... this is a ... good movie ... yes ... a GOOD movie ... (I'll say it again) ... a GOOD MOVIE!!! What I believed would be a typical Hollywood juvenile piece of celluloid tripe was actually a watchable, engaging motion picture with a good story, good acting, a credible script and ... a beginning, a middle and an end. The movie glorifies the art of card-counting and paints a rather cynical picture of the human condition but never sinks to the level of a maudlin melodrama. The movie also is unpretentious and tells a story without trying to moralize. One thing is for certain: if you are a member of the Las Vegas chamber of commerce you will definitely love this movie because this movie has to rank as one of the better movies whose setting is Las Vegas.**

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**28 Weeks Later (2007)**

**One of the best sci-fi movies in a long long time., 18 May 2007**

**10 stars**

**I went to watch this movie with no preconceived notions regarding the quality of the movie. In fact, I never heard of the movie, but what I watched was impressive. It's not a horror movie. Rather it's a science fiction movie that's based on a highly plausible premise. The action is fast-paced, accompanied by a musical score that intensifies the growing sense of doom as attempts to contain and eradicate a lethal disease unravel with catastrophic results. The scope of this movie is reminiscent of *The Body Snatchers* and *The Day of the Triffids*, the latter an excellent, and now all-but-forgotten, sci-fi story. This is one of the best science-fiction movies in a long long time and proof that when it wants Hollywood can present a credible sci-fi movie that tells a story and does not insult the audience's intelligence.**

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### **3000 Miles to Graceland (2001)**

**Very good movie, 9 July 2007**

**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**This is a good movie with an imaginative story and great acting, especially by Kevin Costner and Courtney Cox, who give really impressive performances. As for Kevin Costner, he gives a great "bad guy" performance as a psychopathic killer who believes he is Elvis Presley's son. At first the movie seems to be a comedy, with a gang of guys posing as Elvis Presley look-alike trying to rob a casino, but after the robbery, which nets 3 million dollars, the story takes a far more serious turn as Kevin Costner sets out to systematically eliminate everyone who directly or indirectly had anything to do with the robbery. Kurt Russell plays one of the robbers who ultimately confronts Kevin Costner. This is a good movie and is worth watching.**

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### **300 (2006)**

**What about Pericles?, 30 March 2007**

**8 stars**

**This movie is about a great story, effectively told and acted. Gerard Butler is impressive as Leonides and the special effects add to the drama associated with one of the great moments in military history. What the Spartans did was remarkable, their sacrifice profound and their legacy not forgotten. Bravo for this movie, an outstanding cinematic accomplishment.**

**The Battle of Thermopylae is one of the major events in European history and the victory of the Greeks over the Persians was a truly momentous event, not only for Greece but for world history. The movie is about heroism, determination, and sacrifice. Ancient Greece is associated with the glory of Athen, with its Parthenon, and great political and cultural leaders, such as Pericles, but Sparta had its moments too and this movie is about one of those moments.**

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### **3:10 to Yuma (2007)**

**Excellent movie. Kudos for Russell Crowe and company, 22 September 2007**

**10 stars**

**For a remake of a movie that was made fifty years ago, this is an excellent movie. Usually remakes are lemons. Not so with this one. This is an excellent movie, with great acting, solid script and beautiful cinematography. Russell Crowe once again proves that he is one of the great actors and the rest of the cast give great performances too, especially Ben Foster and Peter Fonda. Now regarding Mr. Fonda, his presence improves any movie. What a wonderful actor. But what raises this movie to a higher level is the story, which is part High Noon and part Good, Bad, Ugly. Tuco would have been at home in this movie. If you like well-acted, well-scripted movies, then this movie is for you.**

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### **61\* (2001) (TV)**

**Don't tamper with my heroes., 19 March 2008**

**4 stars**

**Don't tamper with my heroes. Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris were two of the greatest baseball players of the early 1960s whose accomplishments on the baseball field is now legend and to portray these two great athletes, these two great baseball players, these two great men who became legends in their own time, these icons of American sports history, as little more than spoiled, temperamental substance-abusers is outrageous. Mantle and Maris had personal weaknesses? So what? Who cares? What counts is what they did ON THE FIELD, in front of the ENTIRE WORLD!!! The year 1961 was one of the greatest years in the history of baseball. The Detroit Tigers won 103 games that year yet failed to win the American League pennant by SIX games because the Yankees won 109 games that year. Nary a mention is made of that important fact in the movie. What the Yankees accomplished that year was legendary and is talked about to this day and cannot be ignored when considering what Mantle and Maris did that year. This movie completely fails to capture the excitement and intense public interest in Mantle and Maris's chase of one of sport's most sacred records and further fails to place it within the context of the what was one of the greatest seasons in the history of the American league. No mention is made of the incredible pennant race between the Detroit Tigers and the The New York Yankees, a critical piece of information that is essential to better appreciating the circumstances surrounding the quest to break Ruth's record. Breaking Babe Ruth's single season record of 60 home runs was**

like breaking the sound barrier but this movie reduces the event to a hokey, schmaltzy mess and strangely attempts to portray Maris as a surly chain-smoking malcontent and Mantle as a temperamental, philandering alcoholic. I don't need Hollywood to show me that Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle were human beings with human frailties. I don't need Hollywood cutting down my heroes. What Maris and Mantle accomplished in 1961 speaks for itself. Breaking Babe Ruth's home run record is something that happened on the field, for the whole world to witness. How Maris and Mantle handled it is best left to the audience's imagination.

Any treatment of the subject of Mantle and Maris must include a more than just passing mention of the entire 1961 baseball season. The competition to break Ruth's single season home run record was brisk. That year SIX players in the American League and two in the National League hit more than 40 home runs. Also a relief pitcher, Luis Arroyo of the New York Yankees, had 15 WINS in addition to 29 saves, an incredible performance that is all but forgotten yet actually happened. Any relief pitchers winning 15 games nowadays?

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### A Bell for Adano (1945)

Credible, 3 August 2005  
7 stars

I know that the movie is a bit unrealistic in its characterizations. I know that the movie is a bit heavy-handed in its stereotypical portrayals of the Italians. I know that the movie is fiction, and that no matter how much you try to sugar-coat the story, the fact is that Italy was a member of the Axis alliance, was belligerent and fascist, and went over to the Allied side only after it was thoroughly defeated. So any portrayals of Italians being particularly passive or pro-American circa 1945 must be taken with a huge grain of salt. All this being said, I still liked this movie. The movie brings out, in typical Hollywood fashion, that the United States and the Allies DID liberate Italy from fascism, and which prevented Italy from becoming a total basket case like Germany and Japan became after the war. The pro-American bias of the movie is unmistakable, but as a World War Two movie what else could you expect? The fact is that the United States liberated Western Europe from the scourge and Nazism and fascism, and movies like "A Bell for Adano" serve to ensure that what the United States did to help Italy and the rest of Europe is not forgotten.

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## **About Schmidt (2002)**

**Jack Nicholson is "Schmidt", 17 November 2005**

**8 stars**

**What is one to do when they suddenly have to deal with the fact that their life has been one big zero? This is the theme of this movie. A man is searching for something, but what? He is a traveler without a compass, wandering aimlessly, escaping from the nothingness of his existence but with no place to go. This is not a happy movie; it's about loneliness combined with insight that leads to awareness, but what to do with this knowledge, that is the question. The main character, Schmidt, is traveling through life and his journey is not a happy one. It's full of obstacles that rob him of whatever little happiness he experiences. The people who befriend him are social misfits. His daughter is a shrill. His son-in-law is a buffoon. That's life. And Schmidt? He is a dud, a dullard, an insurance man who made no plans for himself. He's angry, marginalized, rejected, and for good reason: he has the emotional sensitivity of a rock. Okay, retirement can be rough, but with Schmidt it becomes a struggle for survival. Jack Nicholson gives a great performance as the wandering Schmidt. He captures the essence of the character. Nicholson is Schmidt.**

**This movie is about a retiree named Schmidt who has lived in an emotional shell all of his life, and after all of the props, his job, his marriage, and his home, that made up his cocoon, disappear, he is left alone, now on his own, to fend for himself in the big, scary world to which Schmidt has no emotional connection. The only thing Schmidt has left is a mobile home to which he beats a hasty retreat when things become too rough, too depressing or too confusing for him. Only when Schmidt's driving his mobile home does he feel a measure of security and sense of self. Schmidt is like a lost little child who doesn't know where to go or what to do, and whose life is so devoid of warmth and who is so strongly convinced of his own worthlessness that his only fulfilling relationship is that of being a foster-father to a young African girl with whom he communicates by mail. For Schmidt, everything he has ever done has been a waste of time, a fraud and heaped in futility. Jack Nicholson is excellent in this movie. He projects a deadpan, flat expression along with droll speech that conveys the emotional shallowness of the character. He was perfect for this role. Jack Nicholson is "Schmidt."**

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## **Absolute Power (1997)**

**Was this movie supposed to be science fiction?, 26 September 2005**

**3 stars**

**Excuse me for asking, but ask I will: Are we supposed to believe that a senior citizen is able to neatly sneak into a heavily protected house, break into the owner's sanctum-sanctorum, and then witness the President of the United States having a fist fight with a woman, who is then assassinated by government employees? Are we REALLY supposed to believe that? Isn't that stretching things a bit too far - even for a movie? And then after, we're supposed to believe that the thief is really a good guy who really cares? And that he's merely a retiree who happens to steal things - but has a sense of integrity? Or that the President of the United States is screwing his benefactor's wife - in the benefactor's home? C'mon now ... this can't be a serious drama. Maybe it was meant to be a science fiction story about a retiree with some kind of special power to perform acts of magic that defy any sense of logic, because this movie defies logic.**

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## **"According to Jim: Dana Gets Fired (#2.20)" (2003)**

**Not funny., 30 December 2008**

**What an annoying episode. The two lead actresses, playing Jim Belushi's wife and sister-in-law, cackled and screeched in an unfunny episode. First, someone is fired. Second, the boss had cause to fire the woman who was fired. Third, Jim Belushi was not funny. His performance was flat and uninspired. Plus his character is the one who gets the woman, his sister-in-law, fired. Why the writers of this show would find this amusing is baffling. The boss is upset and exercises his prerogative to let his employee know it and warns her to improve or else. Okay, it's heavy handed but that's work and that is the nature of our capitalist system. One is the worker, the other is the boss. A story, even in a sitcom, must have plausibility in order to be amusing. This episode is entirely devoid of anything that could generate laughs. The fired woman is devastated, the birthday party for Belushi's brother is ruined, Belushi is placed in an awkward position of having to admit that he got his sister-in-law fired - by threatening her boss no less - and then the episode ends with Belushi doing something really dumb that in the real world would get somebody into deep trouble.**

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## **A Civil Action (1998)**

**Lawyers have feelings too., 12 May 2008**

**6 stars**

**This is a good if somewhat long dramatization on the pitfalls in the American civil justice system. The problem with this movie is that the plaintiff's case is so weak that it undermines the theme of the movie. Here, the victims do not triumph until the federal government agrees to resurrect the case. Hence, the movie should have been about the heroics of the federal attorneys to compel the defendants, large corporations, to settle and take responsibility. This notwithstanding, the movie still makes a number of good points regarding the nature of litigation, especially as it relates to its cost. However another problem with this movie is that it portrays attorneys themselves as being victims of system that can quickly bankrupt all but the largest and most well-financed law firms. The case itself gets lost in the story and the actual victims, the plaintiffs, are marginalized as the process itself takes center stage. The John Travolta character is an attorney whose competence to handle such a complex case is repeatedly tested with negative results making it difficult to have empathy for the character who is basically simply messing up. He makes mistakes that are so egregious that this movie could have been subtitled How to Lose a Case Without Even Trying.**

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## **Alexander (2004)**

**Intriguing, Though Flawed, Movie, 27 July 2005**

**5 stars**

**The movie is too long, too wordy, the script muddled, at times even ridiculous, and the special effects not particularly special. Yet, the movie has some redeeming qualities. First, it depicts, albeit in a contorted way, the life of one the most interesting and famous persons in history, Alexander the Great. Second, Colin Farrell gives a strenuous, although not entirely believable, performance, and what it lacks in quality, he makes up for it in sheer determination. Then again, maybe it was asking a bit too much from Mr. Farrell to play a Macedonian and to portray the character not so much as a conqueror but as a person in conflict, with himself, his companions and his family. Maybe the movie misses the mark by concentrating more on Alexander's personal issues and less on what he actually accomplished. For Alexander's accomplishments in and of themselves could have provided more than enough material upon which to base a drama. That Alexander is depicted as constantly bickering with his companions and even having some kind of strange relationship with his**

wife detracts from the fundamental premise of the movie - that Alexander was a special person who accomplished a lot in a relatively brief period of time. One should be warned that if you are expecting a documentary about Alexander, this is not the movie to watch. Nevertheless, this movie is still worth a look. It's not the greatest movie, far from it, but at least it will let you know that Alexander DID exist, that he DID conquer almost all of the known world and that what he DID still generates interest 2,500 years later.

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### **Alien (1979)**

**Great movie., 17 November 2005  
10 stars**

With the possible exception of "Predator" this movie is the best and most intense science fiction movie ever made in the history of Hollywood. This movie offers everything a movie should have - a great story, excellent acting, a simple yet compelling plot, empathetic characters and a creature that is merciless, frightening and loathsome. Further, this movie stands the test of time and is as watchable today as it was when it was first released in 1979. Every character in this movie has an important role and every line in the script is taut with tension as the crew of the space ship, isolated and alone in the middle of nowhere, try to figure out how to defeat a monster that seems invincible and is hunting them one-by-one. If you haven't seen this movie, see it.

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### **All About Steve (2009)**

**Say hello to Sandra Bullock's worst movie., 7 September 2009  
1 star**

This movie takes the goal of appealing to the lowest common denominator to a new low. Okay, this is just a movie and so expectations should be adjusted accordingly, but even a Hollywood potboiler should contain at least a smattering of something that approximates intellectual content, something which this movie glaringly lacks. To watch Sandra Bullock acting and sounding like a dunce was pathetic. Surely she can do better than this. The story is so inane and unfunny that it is hard to imagine how anyone would have thought to make it into a movie. The story contains nothing that grabs or keeps audience interest. Ms. Bullock's costumes are ridiculous and the supporting cast do nothing to detract attention from her outlandishly poor performance. Thomas Haden Church provides what little

relief there is from the unfunny mediocrity that permeates this movie but his efforts are too little to reverse the tide of banality.

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### **All the King's Men (2006)**

**This movie just doesn't make it., 2 October 2006  
4 stars**

The sound track is awful and the movie's time frame is all wrong. This movie is set in the early 1950's but contains no historical landmarks to connect it with that period of time. By the early 1950s the populist politician who was part rabble rouser, part priest and part charlatan stomping across the countryside was already a thing of the past. It's post World War Two, it's the Cold War, the "hicks" are leaving the country for the city, the civil rights movement is already beginning to pick up momentum and television is already on the scene. None of this is mentioned in this movie. Also, the movie's main character, Willie Stark, is so utterly unlikeable that his exit from the movie brings relief, not from the fact that he is deceased because, despite his demagoguery Willie really didn't deserve what he got, but because it meant that it was just a matter of time before this ponderous, overblown movie would be rambling to its inevitable and inglorious end. If you want to watch this movie, do so, but don't expect a classic movie because this movie just doesn't make it.

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### **All This, and Heaven Too (1940)**

**Barbara O'Neil's performance highlights this movie., 5 November 2010  
9 stars**

This movie has it all: a great cast, excellent direction, a powerful script, superb cinematography and beautiful sets. This movie stars Bette Davis and Charles Boyer and both give excellent, memorable performances. However, the strongest performance is given by Barbara O'Neil. She dominates this movie. Her portrayal of a scorned, rejected wife is one of the greatest performances ever witnessed by this reviewer. Anatole Litvak must have been overjoyed to direct such a great actress in such a great role. Take away her incredible performance and the movie would still be good but would lose much of its bite. One can only wonder why Ms. O'Neil's role was not expanded, indeed why she did not get top billing, for her performance was by far the strongest and most dynamic. Bette Davis's performance is subdued, controlled and polished. Charles Boyer's performance is somewhat more animated but he plays his role most

convincingly. The movie is reportedly based on a true event which gives it a certain degree of credibility which is an important feature of this movie. Although the movie is long, it does not drag, it does not lag, and it hits no snags. This is a wonderful movie, definitely worth watching.

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### **Almost Famous (2000)**

Schmaltz job., 9 May 2010  
5 stars

After attempting to watch this movie I just gave up. I admit it. The story meant nothing to me. Frances McDormand's character meant nothing. The whole rock and roll milieu thing meant nothing. There was simply nothing in this movie that inspired me to want to watch it. Now, the movie is a period piece but it fails to give one a sense that they are watching a story from that period. And the plot and subplots are such that it soon becomes apparent that the movie is really a touchy-feely story masqueraded as a cool, upbeat contemporary comment on generational conflict and is a schmaltz job. Now if one likes schmaltz, then go for it; but if one is not in the mood to watch fluff, then this movie will cause you to ask yourself: Why am I watching this movie? Isn't there something better I can do with my time? Whenever a movie opens with the lead player having a scowl on her face, it is time for the audience to beware. You have been duly warned.

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### **Amelia (2009)**

Solid biopic., 2 November 2009  
10 stars

If you want to see a movie about a truly interesting person, this movie is for you. Bearing an uncanny likeness to the the title character, Hilary Swank gives a wonderfully balanced and believable performance as Amelia Earhardt. The audience is given a chance to get to know Amelia and as the movie goes on, we learn more and more about her and also about the men in her life. However, what makes this movie dramatically strong is that instead of playing up the intimate aspects of her life, it focuses on her accomplishments as a pilot. That is the crux of the movie and the director avoids transforming this movie into just another Hollywood soap opera and for that we should be grateful.

The movie presents the life of Amelia without fanfare. For some, that could make for a boring movie, but for others provide an unpretentious yet

informative glimpse into the life of one of the major figures in U. S. aviation and world history. The way she and Mr. Noonan disappeared is so similar to what happened to another beloved person, Princess Diana, whose tragic death also impacted the entire world. In a way Amelia was royalty too, not the formal royalty of an aristocracy, but a royalty based on character and achievement and just like with Diana, everyone loved Amelia and when she disappeared the whole world felt the loss. All Amelia wanted to do was fly. Hilary Swank definitely deserves at least a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress. This was Ms. Swank's movie and she makes that movie happen.

This movie also raises a question. Why is it that persons like Amelia, innocent, wonderful, loved by all, are taken from us so early? Just like with JFK Jr. and Diana, Amelia had so much to give, yet at the blink of an eye, she was gone, forever, leaving us to wonder - why?

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### **American Gangster (2007)**

Look out for the piano and try to cut out the middle man., 6 November 2007  
8 stars

This is an excellent movie that once again showcases the talent of one of the greatest American actors today, Denzel Washington. This is a DW tour-de-force, another chapter in the illustrious screen career of this outstanding star. There are no accolades that can adequately describe his presence in this movie. Mr. Washington is part Pacino, part Brando, and ... yes ... even part James Cagney. The only drawback to this movie is casting Russell Crowe as a Jewish police officer. Mr. Crowe does his usual fine job, but his portrayal as a "Jewish" officer was a stretch. This movie also teaches certain facts about how to conduct a business, namely if you cut out the middle man you can reduce overhead, regulate the quality of the product and thereby greatly increase profit. That's a pretty good lesson to learn. The problem is of course that the equation leaves out one factor, the law. If you want to know what that means, watch the movie. By the way, this movie also teaches how to use a piano to discipline employees and why certain employees should not wear clothing. Of course, do you really want your employees going about without clothing?

Regarding Russell Crowe being cast as a Jewish police officer, this is another egregious example of the kind of blatant miscasting that can destroy the credibility of a movie. Why would any producer want to cast an actor in a role that the actor can in no way believably project? Mr. Crowe is no more believable as a Jewish police officer than would have been, let's say, James Cagney in a similar role. It just doesn't work, so why do it? By

the way, when was the last time a Jewish actor played an Irish cop? Get the point?

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### **American Movie (1999)**

If this young man could do it, why not us?, 28 June 2010  
10 stars

This movie provides an excellent insight into the world of movie making, a world that requires no special training, just the desire to do something creative. Movie making is one of the few areas left where formal credentials are not required. Case in point is the subject of this movie, a young man who starts out with nothing and years later creates a commercial product. It's really quite impressive. What I did not like about this documentary is that the young man and his associates are portrayed as being marginal and dysfunctional characters when in fact they are business people trying to put together a commercial product, and just because they don't dress or sound the part does not make them any less deserving of respect. Then again, maybe that's a strong point of the documentary. Whatever the case, this documentary should be a must see for anyone who has an urge to create but does not know where or even how to start. If this young man could do it, why not us?

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### **A Mighty Heart (2007)**

Raises questions., 5 July 2007  
8 stars

This is a powerful, compelling movie, well acted, except for Angelina Jolie. Ms. Jolie's performance borders on the macabre. Her performance is shrill and evokes no sympathy. The possibility of her husband being abducted should not have been a surprise. He had a dangerous assignment, and as the Pakistani interior minister alluded, he put himself at risk, perhaps unnecessarily. Why WOULD a U. S. based financial newspaper want to interview a Jihadist in the first place? This would be like an Islamist newspaper sending a journalist to the U. S. to interview a Christian evangelist, and then disappearing. Questions would be asked. What is particularly surprising is the revelation, according to the movie, that the newspaper provided certain information to the CIA, thereby giving the appearance of credibility to the accusations that their reporter was a CIA spy. The point of all this is that the actual story has less to do with Ms.

Jolie's character, who suffers a personal and tragic loss, than about the degree to which the news media may be implicated in covert government activities in foreign countries.

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### **Anaconda (1997)**

**Not a Bad Movie, 11 August 2005  
6 stars**

Okay, the movie is not the greatest, but it's not that bad either. The movie's story features a an extra-large creature but instead of a huge gorilla, this movie has a huge snake - and no Fay Wray. Now, the snake is angry, but can you blame it? It's a snake, and man has infringed on its territory. The acting is not bad and Jon Voight proves that he can transform a poor script into something that at least is credible. And Jennifer Lopez proves that she is a good actress. But Mr. Voight is the star of this movie and for that reason, this movie is watchable. But this movie's message is clear: keep away from the snake, and admire it from a safe distance because if you get too close, it could ruin your vacation.

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### **Angel Eyes (2001)**

**Another excellent performance by Jennifer Lopez, 3 August 2007  
9 stars**

Once again, Jennifer Lopez proves that she is a wonderful actress. Ms. Lopez truly the star of the movie. Also, the story itself is good and there is a strong performance by Jim Caviezel. This movie explores some very sensitive subjects ... death, loneliness, grief ... as well as renewal, restoration and redemption. At times the movie borders on sentimentality but manages to avoid that pitfall as Ms. Lopez's fine performance transcends any weaknesses contained in the script and transforms this movie into something special. A man experiences devastating personal loss, a woman has unrequited anger, both are alone yet both overcome their personal issues to come together and move forward in their lives. When managed correctly and respectfully, these themes are the ingredients that make for a good movie and in this case it works.

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## A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)

Keep your nightmares to yourself., 2 May 2010

4 stars

This is a horror movie that is more laughable than horrible. Why is this? Because the genre is fundamentally weak. Ever since The Exorcist Hollywood has been desperately trying to produce another horror masterpiece but instead produces horrible facsimiles. As a result the bar for this genre has been lowered practically to the floor, resulting in laughable hokum. For a movie to succeed, it has to have a credible, plausible story, something that will engage the audience, something this movie fails to do. The more the characters talk about sleep, the more one may want to take a nap. There is so much talk about sleep that after awhile the subject becomes tiring. Insomnia is a problem and should not be trivialized, but this movie does exactly that. Nightmares are preventing you from sleeping? Tell it to a psychiatrist. Take some no-doze. Have yourself a drink, if that's your fancy. Take a walk around the block. Visit a library. And if someone is coming after you with a long metal nails, call the police, but please, PLEASE, don't make it into a movie. (Yawn) Some of the dialog is witty and the acting is good, but the story is just too shallow to prevent the movie from sinking to the level of pablum. However, the movie ends strongly. It's just too bad that the first 90 minutes or so of this movie isn't equally as good.

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## An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

Politician pushing a cause., 9 May 2010

4 stars

This piece of celluloid won awards? It's not a documentary, it's a political diatribe in a documentary format. To be effective, a documentary has to be objective; that is not the case here. Instead, a disgruntled politician with an ax to grind uses the documentary format to attack his political opponent. Is mankind responsible for global warming? Maybe, maybe not. Al Gore is not a scientist and is no more of an expert on this issue then the next guy or gal, yet he is sounding the alarm, as if he's the only one in the know. We don't need Al Gore to alert us about climate change. It's an old story and one that he has co-opted to discredit his political opponents. Well, he has a right to voice his opinion, but that's all it is, an opinion and his carries no more weight than anybody else. This "documentary" claims that scientists are unanimous in the belief that man-made global warming is a fact, yet he neither cites any specific scientists nor does he provide a list of sources backing up his assertions. Instead Mr. Gore expects the

audience to believe him. Beware of the politician who is pushing a cause. Such activity always masks a hidden agenda, one that is self-serving. From vice-president to environmental shill, that seems to summarize the career of Al Gore.

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### **Annie Hall (1977)**

Excellent movie, 24 June 2007  
10 stars

This movie is thirty years old but stands the test of time, meaning that after all these years the movie is still watchable. Now why is it still watchable? Because it deals with the nature of relationships, a topic which transcends time. Also, the acting is wonderful, especially Diane Keaton's performance as Annie. Diane Keaton has to be one of the best comediennes Hollywood has ever produced, and Woody Allen goes the extra mile to show the audience the fundamental absurdity and irrationality of romantic involvements. Far from being some corny, superficial farce, this movie presents an interesting character study of a woman who undergoes emotional and intellectual growth while her partner struggles, unsuccessfully, to cope with the change. If you want to watch a movie about someone who changes for the better, then this is the movie for you.

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### **An Officer and a Gentleman (1982)**

Sometimes a guy needs a big brother., 15 October 2005  
10 stars

This movie is about an adolescent who becomes a man with the help of a big brother, who in this case is a hard-nosed, no-nonsense, tough-as-nails drill sergeant. The adolescent is a wayward young man with no direction and with no one to depend on except his alcoholic sailor father who believes that the young man will never succeed at anything. Well, the adolescent wants to prove his father wrong and does something most unexpected - applies for Navy flight school and is accepted. Now the question is: Will he succeed? For him to succeed, this adolescent will have to change: become a team player, take on responsibilities, apply himself to achieving goals, and complete an exceedingly difficult 12-week course that will test not only his physical strength and mental capabilities, but the very essence of his character. In short, the adolescent will have to become a man. And there is only one person who cares enough to push him to succeed - the adolescent's drill sergeant who does everything he can to get

the adolescent to drop out, which does not happen. This movie shows what a person can accomplish when they believe in themselves and have a big brother who cares enough to make them succeed. This is a great movie.

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### **An Unfinished Life (2005)**

**Bart the Bear for Best Actor, 14 September 2005**  
**8 stars**

I liked this movie. True, there was some pretentious violence, like between Einar and the boyfriend/stalker, and Jennifer Lopez seemed somewhat miscast, but the theme of a man unwilling to come to terms with the death of his son made for an interesting, though somewhat somber, movie. Robert Redford proved once again that he is a great actor. But the real star was Bart the Bear. Bart was incredible. Bart was powerful. Whenever this movie started dragging, all the director had to do was bring in Bart, and the movie immediately picked up in tempo and action. Bart roared, Bart growled, Bart reared up on his hind legs, Bart was sad, Bart was depressed, Bart was forgiving. Bart could have easily killed Einar or Mitch, but what did he do instead? He gave them "a piece of his mind" in the form of a lot of bellowing and roaring, as if to say "How could you have done this to me?" or "I'm a bear! Deal with it!" and walked away, to reclaim his place in the wild where he belonged. In fact, this is the best movie about a bear since "The Bear," which is the classic movie about conflict between bears and people. I would have entitled this movie, "Bart: The Misunderstood Bear." This movie also confirms the beauty, strength and majesty of bears, especially the grizzly bears. Also, Josh Lucas is definitely one of the better actors. He was great as Lt. Ben in "Stealth" and he was great in this movie too. I wonder how Lt. Ben would have dealt with Bart. I believe they would have become real good friends.

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### **A Place in the Sun (1951)**

**Appearances can be deceiving., 8 October 2005**  
**10 stars**

What's a mild-mannered, plain-looking, self effacing no-account guy, with absolutely nothing going for him, in short, a complete non-entity, supposed to do when he has a chance to get in with the rich crowd but can't because of the presence in his life of a woman he not only does not love, but downright detests? How does a guy with no resources and limited intelligence deal with such a situation, especially when he is trying to hook

up with another woman, this one who is beautiful and rich, and is going to be his meal ticket that will guarantee his "Place in the Sun"? This movie suggests that one must be wary of judging people too quickly, and to resist the temptation to be seduced by a superficially friendly or self-effacing mannerism because the seduction may be motivated by secret ulterior motives that render you a mere tool in their quest to satisfy their own nefarious needs. What makes this movie so great is how the movie captures how the guy completely fools everyone and is found out only after after the guy himself commits a crime. If he had played his cards right, he would have never been found out. But then again, if he had succeeded, there wouldn't have been a movie.

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### Apollo 13 (1995)

Good movie., 6 January 2006  
8 stars

Apollo 13 is a good movie. It's well acted, offers a compelling story, and dramatizes how team work can achieve positive results. The problem with this movie, however, is that we know what happened. Apollo 13 was not an obscure historical event nor did the participants disappear into the pages of history. Hence the movie does not offer any surprises. After the several disasters associated with space exploration, it is obvious that space travel is extremely risky, still experimental and not to be taken for granted. If Hollywood insists on making movies about space exploration, however, then why not make a movie about one of the spectacular successes, like Apollo 11, or the dramatic events surrounding the flight of Alan B. Shephard in May 1961?

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### A Single Man (2009)

Incredible performance by Colin Firth, 11 October 2010  
10 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Despair, hope, redemption. This is what this movie is about. A man is living a lie, forced to play a role forced on him by a society that would reject him if he revealed the truth about himself. He is single, but not from choice but because of the repressive nature of a society that is driving him to contemplate suicide. Now, this single man is actually well liked, respected and even admired, yet he is not happy and for good reason: he is an

emotional fraud. He lacks that courage to emerge from his shell and when he finally meets someone with whom he can connect, it is too late. All his plans are for naught; life plays a cruel joke on him. Just when he thought that he had turned over a new leaf, had been redeemed, hope is renewed, it is all taken away from him in a twist of fate that underscores our vulnerability and makes one wonder whether any of it is worth the effort. We worry, we make plans, we despair, we have hope, we hope for the best, deal with our fears and in the end, poof! It's all gone. What a great movie. Colin Firth gives one of the great performances as an English college professor who is struggling to find a reason to live as he prepares for his own death. This movie makes a powerful statement about life.

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### **A Song to Remember (1945)**

The music is the star., 13 October 2005  
10 stars

This movie is about the life of one of the greatest, if not THE greatest, piano composer in history, and Polish patriot, Frederic Chopin. Now, why should someone bother to watch this movie about Frederic Chopin? Let me give you one good reason: the Music. This movie has to be one of the greatest musicals ever produced by Hollywood. This movie is permeated throughout by the music of Chopin, and Chopin's music is wonderful; indeed it is immortal and transcends time. This movie introduces the audience to some of the finest music ever composed. In addition, the story itself is interesting, not only because it's about Chopin and his relationship with Georges Sand, played magnificently by the beautiful Merle Oberon, but also because it poses the question that confronts all artists: Does the artist exist to serve himself or to serve society? Chopin had to struggle with this very question. But first and foremost in this movie is the music. In this movie, the music is the star.

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### **Anything But Love (2002)**

This movie will restore your faith in humanity and maybe in yourself.,

25 April 2010  
10 stars

This is one of the greatest movies ever made. Acting - excellent; direction - excellent; story - excellent; screenplay - excellent; art direction - excellent; dramatic intensity - excellent; in short, every element of this movie is

excellent. The movie deals with several themes - social pressure, artistic integrity, personal integrity; courage; the demeaning nature of the audition process and the purpose of art. The story is intense; character development - fantastic and the characters both relevant and likable. The music is incredible; and the beautiful Isabel Rose, who is the personification of Kitty Carlisle, and the great actor Andrew McCarthy, who plays a struggling musician, should have won every acting award for their fine performances. What makes this movie even more of a gem is that it is entirely unpretentious, tells a story, has great continuity, is highly watchable - and features the lovely Eartha Kitt. The story is neither corny nor hokey; it's about pursuing your dream. It's about being true to yourself. It's about love, real love - for a person, for art and love of life. This movie will make you laugh and cry; it will make you feel good; it will restore your faith in humanity and maybe in yourself.

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### **Atonement (2007)**

Commendable movie., 11 January 2008  
9 stars

I don't believe it. Indeed, I'm amazed. This movie is actually good. A Hollywood romance movie that is actually watchable. Amazing. Shocking. Refreshing. I was expecting the usual Hollywood potboiler garbage - inane love story, major historical events being reduced to mere cinematic footnotes, laughable acting, ludicrous miscasting, etc. In other words, I was expecting a piece of junk, but thankfully my expectations were not met. This is a powerful movie with a compelling story and excellent acting. If I can't bring myself to rag this movie, then this movie has to be good. As a movie buff who has critiqued scores of movies, I've watched some major cinematic clunkers, stuff that doesn't even merit a DVD, cinematic flotsam that are a joke. This movie however is a work of art and warrants whatever commendations it gets from the public.

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### **Australia (2008)**

Commendable movie. Once again Nicole Kidman shines., 27 November 2008  
9 stars

December 7, 1941, a day which will live in infamy. Those ominous words were spoken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his message to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Japan in response to the

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Yet Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was but one facet of a comprehensive offensive involving numerous targets stretching from Hawaii to Burma, a distance of approximately 8,000 miles. One of the targets was Australia, which was bombed by the Japanese. This movie dramatizes this event and in doing so brings this event to the attention of the American public, some of whom may not even know that Australia was actually attacked. This movie effectively portrays this historical event and does so in a way that fits well into the story.

This movie makes reference to a certain event in history: World War Two. It is amazing that not so long ago Japan actually contemplated invading ... Australia. Today such a thing would seem impossible, preposterous, ridiculous, yes almost laughable but in the war-racked world which serves as the backdrop for this movie, it was a distinct possibility. No matter what you may think about this movie, its dramatization of Japan's militarism and aggression is enough to make this movie worth watching. Japan's offensive that started on December 7, 1941 was possibly the single largest military offensive launched by one country in history. The attack stretched from Pearl Harbor in the central Pacific to Indo-China and Australia, a distance of several thousand miles. Such a momentous event alone is a worthy subject for a movie, that is, a movie about the audacity of the Japanese to conceive of, much less actually execute, such a bold and reckless offensive. By attacking the United States and other countries Japan guaranteed its own destruction. But at the time Japan did not know that nor could they have known.

Once again Nicole Kidman proves that she is the best Hollywood screen actress today. She is truly the star of this sometimes funny, sometimes poignant, sometimes melodramatic, sometimes campy and consistently entertaining movie. The movie is long but after a slow start that includes a rather lengthy opening off-screen monologue, a device which never adds to a movie, the pace of the story quickens and soon becomes an action-packed adventure replete with classic Hollywood characters reminiscent of those found in westerns, except this movie covers a far more expansive time line and takes place within an historical context which gives the story more depth. This movie is well-acted, engaging and exciting. But first and foremost it is a Nicole Kidman vehicle and if you are a Nicole Kidman fan then this movie is for you.

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## Avatar (2009)

**It's hokey ... but it works!, 29 March 2010**

**10 stars**

**How does James Cameron do it? How does he manage to take a hokey, transparent story and make it work? It is amazing. Just like with Titanic, Mr. Cameron creates a great movie out of an old story. The movie is great because it grabs and keeps the audience's interest. Also, Mr. Cameron takes CGI to a new level of sophistication, so much so that soon the CGI and the real acting merge as one ... and it works! Having expected this movie to be little more than a long cartoon, surprisingly the movie is a work of cinematic art, and not just an animated feature with voice overs added.**

**The cast is superb, especially Stephen Lang, who plays perhaps the most challenging role, and the always lovely Michelle Rodriguez who gives a strong performance as a soldier with a heart. If this movie proves anything, it is that Michelle Rodriguez is one of the finest actors in Hollywood today, and beautiful too.**

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## AVPR: Aliens vs Predator - Requiem (2007)

**Incredible movie. Great sci-fi. The humanoids are the stars. Bring on Godzilla!, 25 December 2007**

**10 stars**

**Alien vs. Predator? Humbug! Predator wins all the way. Let's make it a fair fight: Predator vs. GODZILLA!!!! Now THAT would be a fair fight! Or what about Predator vs. the Wicked Witch of the West? or Predator vs. The Terminator? Or Predator vs. that huge flying saucer from Close Encounters of the Third Kind? Or Predator vs. the ghosts from Ghostbusters? Or Predator vs. the Alien from the original movie which was the meanest and nastiest Alien of them all? Or what about Predator vs. the Giant Mantis? or Predator vs. the original Frankenstein creature? Or what about Predator vs. Gort from the Day the Earth Stood Still? Or Predator vs. The Thing from Another Planet? Or Predator vs. The Invisible Man ( who also had a very nasty disposition)? Or Predator vs. The Mummy? Or Predator vs. the giant bugs from Starship Troopers? Or what about Predator vs. the Martians from the War of the Worlds? Or Predator vs. T-Rex and company from Jurassic Park? Or Predator vs. King Kong? King Kong would have squashed Alien.**

**If anyone watches this movie with an open mind (that is, without any bias, if that's possible), you will have to admit, albeit begrudgingly, that this is**

actually a good movie. As much as you may want to rag it, make fun of it, deride it, put it down, quash it, squash it, malign it, denigrate it, or belittle it, as tempting as it might be, you will not be able to honestly do so. This is a quality sci-fi movie. Accept it.

When I went to watch this movie I was expecting just another Hollywood piece of potboiler junk, but I was surprised. This movie is actually good and as much as I would like to rag it, I can't because the movie gives no cause to do so. This movie is an action-packed science-fiction thriller in which the humans are completely superfluous except when they get in the way of the humanoids who have made earth their battlefield, and there's nothing the humans can do about it. NOTHING! This may be the first sci-fi movie in which the humans are completely helpless and rendered incapable of fighting back. In other words it's an original story, and it's the humanoids who are the stars.

This is an incredible movie. Earthlings, when the Alien and Predator arrive, you're in the way! While these incredible non-human beings are going at it, the earthlings are utterly hapless and helpless. This movie is the surprise of the year. It out-Mists the Mist and it's even more compelling than the original Predator, which is one of the great sci-fi movies of all time. This movie is an example of Hollywood getting it right, where special effects do not trump the story, which this movie actually has. The question posed by this movie is: How do you get rid of unwanted humanoids from who-knows-where that have infested your town? Although not human, they are not animals nor mindless monsters. They are very human-like, especially when it comes to aggressive behavior. They are utterly fearless, act without remorse, are completely ferocious, extremely cunning, and in the case of Predator, armed with an array of weapons, including laser and nuclear, designed to destroy anything in the universe. They are not to be trifled with and in this movie they are not. Although Alien is intriguing, it is Predator who is most interesting. This is not a goofy movie. This is incredible sci-fi story with great acting and excellent special effects. Remember, although monstrous in appearance, Alien and Predator have certain human-like characteristics which make them far more complex than your typical Hollywood scary-monster. One thing is for certain: they have absolutely no use for humans except as an occasional meal. Otherwise, don't get in their way because they're unstoppable. And for goodness, sake, don't try to break up an Alien-Predator fight. That would be a huge mistake.

In previous movies, humans initially are over-matched but still recover enough to at least put up a fight. What makes this movie different is that in this movie the humans are absolutely no match for the Aliens and Predator who are vastly superior in terms of weaponry, cunning, stealth and sheer power. They can be injured, they can be killed, but at a price that would mean the eventual defeat for humans in an all-out war. Regarding the

**Aliens, at first one might consider them to be merely highly vicious and uncontrollable monsters without any intellect, kind of like the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park and other similar Hollywood pulp, but that is not the case. They are highly intelligent, capable of planning actions and acting in concert to achieve for them the ultimate goal - to reproduce and at the same time destroy everything around them. Okay, Godzilla wanted to reproduce too, but unlike Aliens, Godzilla's intelligence was inversely proportional to her (or rather its) size ... and if you don't know what the term "inversely proportional" means, then that's your problem. Predator would have disposed of Godzilla in five seconds.**

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### **A Woman Under the Influence (1974)**

**A Candid Portrayal of the Devastating Effects of Mental Illness, 27 July 2005  
10 stars**

**At first I thought this movie was a comedy, but it certainly is not. Then I thought it was some kind of touchy-feely movie with an offbeat esoteric message, and likewise it is not. Then what is this movie? It is a candid portrayal of the devastating effects of mental illness on a woman and her husband who is trying his best to cope with his wife's erratic behavior. In this movie, Gena Rowlands, in what is probably her greatest performance, is a woman who is so repressed that she actually loses her ability to communicate, which leads to numerous problems. Although her husband, wonderfully played by Peter Falk, wants to help and is supportive, he is clueless as to what to do. There are some comical scenes in the movie, but this movie is pure drama about a serious topic, mental illness, and how it can destroy an entire family.**

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### **Babel (2006)**

**"Crash" goes international, 16 November 2006  
9 stars**

**If you like the movie "Crash" then you will like this movie too. This movie is great and Brad Pitt proves once again that he is a great actor. Indeed, Mr. Pitt is probably the best actor in Hollywood today. But getting back to the movie, the director succeeds in presenting a story that builds to a climax that is truly dramatic and which include characters with whom they audience can empathize. Most poignant is the deaf mute Japanese girl who**

cannot express her anguish and the Moroccan man who refuses to abandon an American couple in their time of trouble. But most special is the Mexican housekeeper whose innocent actions produce such powerful and unintended consequences. With the one exception being the scene where the American couple are discussing an intimate bodily function, this movie is an excellent work of cinematic art and is worth watching.

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### **Balls of Fury (2007)**

**Laughter abounds, 14 September 2007  
9 stars**

There are some who may look down at this movie with disdain and dismiss it as just another lowbrow attempt to elicit cheap laughs. Well guess what? This movie does exactly that, and that's great! This is an incredibly funny movie, with goofy but likable characters, especially James Hong who plays Master Wong. James Hong gives one of the funniest performances ever. He was great. He made this movie happen. Also, Maggie Q was great. She is the next Sandra Oh. And the the goofy story line also contributes to the overall humor, and of course, one would be remiss if they did not mention the performance of Christopher Walken who once again proves that he is a great actor. His deadpan approach was absolutely perfect for this movie. If you want to watch a movie that will make you laugh, then this is the movie for you.

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### **Barfly (1987)**

**Ludicrous+implausible=this movie, 29 April 2006  
4 stars**

Is this movie for real? Are we supposed to believe that that a broken down, chronic alcoholic, who is disheveled, gets into fights, never bathes, never has money, and does not work, is a gifted writer who could sell a story to a publisher, who just so happens to be a beautiful rich woman, and further that this wreck of a man is able to have sex not just with one but with TWO attractive women who are willing to fight over him? NO WAY!!!! This scenario is so fantastically ludicrous that it borders on being science fiction. Indeed, the implausibility of this movie is so profound that it can't

be placed in any specific genre. The movie has funny, witty lines, but it's not a comedy. The movie has its dramatic moments, but it's not a drama (the movie is too laughable), the movie has a detective in it, but it's not a mystery; the movie portrays the problems relating to alcoholism, but it's not a documentary. So, what kind of movie is this movie? It's a movie with a message: that if you are a guy who drinks, smokes, doesn't work, doesn't bathe, and lives in the flophouse, women will find you attractive.

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### **Bataan (1943)**

Commemoration of the U. S. Role in World War Two, 8 August 2005  
10 stars

This movie dramatizes the U. S. decision to stand fast and defend the Phillipines, a decision which in hindsight may or may not have been the wisest, militarily, given the almost untenable position that the U. S. forces found themselves in when the war broke out, but from a moral standpoint represented the U. S. at its finest. The quality of the movie is not that important; what is important is the story itself, a story of determination and selfless sacrifice in the face of overwhelming odds that hopefully will not be forgotten. Indeed, that China today is an independent state is due to the U. S. decision to confront Japanese expansionism, at a huge cost to the U. S., and to the U. S. Open Door Policy ... but that's the another subject.

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### **Beauty and the Beast (1987)**

Enjoyable movie., 24 May 2006  
9 stars

If you want to watch a true work of cinematic art, then watch this movie. This movie is proof that when Hollywood wants to, it can make a movie that transcends the garbage that Hollywood usually dishes out. This movie is good because of the acting of the two leads, Rebecca De Mornay and John Savage. Their excellent acting ensures that this movie does not become just another corny Hollywood contrivance or another twisted and distorted interpretation of a classic story. Mr. Savage's interpretation of the Beast is endearing for both children and adults and along with Ms. De Mornay's portrayal of Beauty makes this movie something that all can enjoy.

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## **"Ben Casey" (1961)**

**Ben Casey is the Captain Kirk of medical dramas., 14 December 2005**

If you are looking for the ultimate medical role model, then look no further. It's right here with Ben Casey. Dr. Casey is stalwart, resolute, ethical, courageous and above all clinically competent. He is everything a doctor should be. He's all business but he's compassionate too. Ben Casey is the greatest medical drama in the history of television broadcasting. All the other medical shows are in second place. One important reason for the show's excellence is the star of the show, Vincent Edwards. Mr. Edwards IS Ben Casey. Mr. Edwards took this character and made it into a television icon. He is to Ben Casey what William Shatner is to Star Trek. Both characters command respect, and earn it episode after episode. It's too bad that Dr. Casey and Captain Kirk never served together on the Starship Enterprise. THAT would have made for an interesting show.

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## **Ben-Hur (1959)**

**Great Movie, 28 August 2005**

**10 stars**

"Where's my mother and my sister?" The scene when Ben Hur confronts Messala is enough to make this film worth watching. Charlton Heston as outstanding in the title role, but the performance that really was extraordinary was that of Stephen Boyd as Messala. Mr. Boyd's portrayal of the sinister Messala is uncanny. In fact, if it wasn't for Mr. Boyd, this movie would have run out of steam and become just another overblown Hollywood biblical epic. Another wonderful performance is that of Jack Hawkins as the Roman proconsul who is saved by Ben Hur and ultimately adopts Ben Hur, which allows Ben Hur to return to Judea to search for his mother and sister, who Messala had imprisoned out of sheer spite for Ben Hur. Of course, this movie contains two classic moments: first, when Ben Hur returns to Judea as the Roman proconsul's adopted son and in one of the greatest scenes in movie history confronts Messala and demands to know the whereabouts of his mother and sister; and second, the chariot race where Ben Hur, wearing the Star of David and now hero of the people, defeats Messala. This movie offers a compelling story and powerful acting, and as such, is a great work of art.

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## Beowulf (2007)

Be gone, oh rotten movie! Hollowman and Alien vs. Predator! - you have company., 30 November 2007

1 star

Remember when your English teacher in high school or college told the class that one of their assignments was to read Beowulf? Not exactly the most popular work of literature. Really, how many people out there actually had, or have, any interest in reading Beowulf? Be honest. It would not be unreasonable to say that Beowulf is not on the list of the world's most popular literary works. Yet Hollywood, in its infinite quest for profit, decided that this is the kind of story that can be transposed onto the big screen and that there is an audience for this kind of story, with its heroes and villains and monsters and ... well you get the point. So Hollywood concocted this movie, part science fiction, part science fantasy, part epic and COMPLETE JUNK. Welcome to the world of special effects. After watching this movie, one can reasonably ask: Why have actors? Why not just special effects and who cares about the story? If the story is idiotic ... who cares? Just throw in some special effects. If the dialog is laughable? Who cares? That can be cured with special effects. If the plot is ridiculous, again, who cares? Special effects can do the trick. There are scenes in this movie that provoke outright laughter. If this movie accurately portrays the level of civilization in Europe circa 6th century A.D., then it is a miracle that people actually survived. If you believe this movie, then the people, particularly the men, were actually uglier than the monsters, except, of course, for Beowulf who, of course, is an Adonis while all the other guys are a bunch of overweight gin-guzzling jerks or skinny sniveling dorks who are too stupid to do anything except let themselves be kicked around or sacrificed for the hero, who, of course, has sex with beautiful women. This raises another point: In the 6th century why are the men so ugly while the women are so beautiful? It's like their two different species, with the men being like links between Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal Man (except of course for Beowulf who is perfection personified - duh!) and the women being more like a bunch of giggling Aphrodites than poverty-stricken 6th century females just trying to survive. (I wonder what kind of odors women emitted in the 6th century? After all, bathing was not one of their priorities.) What about the female of females in the movie, the super-Monster, who is also a mother, yes, A MOTHER, played, surprise, surprise, by Angelina Jolie! Some super-monster! There are mothers and there are MOTHERS and Ms. Jolie plays A MOTHER!!! If Ms. Jolie's mother character is supposed to be a monster, than bring her on because any monster that looks like the beautiful and talented Angelina Jolie is the kind of monster that one should have at home, or at work, or wherever. One other point: There are parts of this movie where certain characters speak a language that be best described as gibberish. It would have been helpful if those

parts of the movie had included subtitles. Then again, maybe the entire script should have been in gibberish. As a matter of fact, this movie would have been far more interesting if the entire script had been written in Old English - without subtitles. Why have Beowulf speaking fluent English? Why have Beowulf speaking at all? What it comes down to is this: this movie is pretentious junk that tries to be part Hamlet, part Troy, and even part Alexander (the latter two not the greatest movies but light years better than this waste of celluloid) but actually is a hyped-up pseudo-cartoon version of a medieval story that probably no person has read in its entirety in maybe a thousand years but which someone in Hollywood believed could be transformed into something that today's contemporary audience would buy, meaning (must it be said? Yes!) - SPECIAL EFFECTS!!!! - and in 3D!!!! Hollywood made 3D movies in the 1950s - for kids and back then the movies cost a quarter and nobody made any big deal about it. Now 3D is supposed to be something special. Yeah, right. Leave Beowulf in the the book where he belongs so that the lone person who decides to actually read the book can use their imagination to visualize the story instead of having to rely on Hollywood's version - which is crass, banal and guided not by the quest for artistic excellence but by the quest for the almighty buck.

This movie is so bad that it makes Phantom of the Opera (movie version) seem like a 10-star classic. You can take special effects just so far, but special effects cannot replace a story, no way. This movie is about phantasmagorical events revolving around themes such as heroism, selflessness and other high personal virtues. Okay, but the movie approaches these themes by catering to the lowest common denominator of intelligence to dramatize these points. If Beowulf is the best example of English literature from the Middle Ages, then the middle ages were the dark ages indeed.

Now here's an idea: Why not take Godzilla, King Kong, Rodan, Mothra, the Giant Mantis, the Predator (with the infra-red vision and the a-bomb strapped to its arm) and the T-Rex from Jurassic Park and put them on an island with Beowulf and see what happens? All special effects. NO STORY NECESSARY.

Anthony Hopkins's presence in this movie is a travesty, a joke. It's not his fault. It's a gig and a paycheck, and he didn't create the role, he just acts it. But to have this fine actor going about half-naked would have been like Hamlet going about with his pants down while engaged in a soliloquy. Please, be gone, oh rotten movie, go to DVD-land with all the other forgettable rejects.

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## **Billy Budd (1962)**

**Good movie., 23 August 2007**

**8 stars**

**When Hollywood attempts to tackle complex issues such as ethics or morality, then look out! Journey with caution. Remember, it's Hollywood, where the bottom line ultimately dictates quality. Yet this movie manages address deeper, more profound issues without sacrificing quality. The black and white cinematography was excellent. The performances were superb, especially Robert Ryan's and Peter Ustinov's. Issues were candidly discussed. The conflict between morality and duty, the issue of life an death, the question of justice versus injustice are presented with clarity. The movie gives a negative and disturbing portrayal of late 18th century life in the British navy, especially its apparent policy of inflicting wanton and arbitrary punishment by an uncaring and abusive officials who have to compel the crew to perform through threats. This is a period of history that perhaps requires further discussion.**

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## **Blades of Glory (2007)**

**Hilarious comedy, but with a message, 24 April 2007**

**10 stars**

**This movie is hilarious. Also, this movie is a great spoof on professional sports, especially the self-centered narcissism that is the trademark of the sport establishment. Scene after scene parody the pettiness and ridiculousness of today's professional athlete and the fans who follow them. Fairplay and honest dealing are out the window as the characters in this movie do the most outrageous things to undercut and discredit their opponents and win at any cost. What makes this movie even more remarkable is that it successfully mocks the self-centered pomposity of professional sports and the phoniness that makes it difficult to take professional sports seriously anymore.**

**Some further comments. This movie highlights the fundamental pettiness that characterizes professional sports today and how talented and highly trained athletes are reduced to the level of buffoons for purely commercial reasons. It is the buffoonery that produces the humor, but it is a buffoonery that has some basis in historical fact which calls to question the integrity of professional sports. Rivalries are nothing new in the world of sports, but the question is: why have rivalries? What ever happened to the maxim: "It's not if you win or lose, it's how you play the game?"**

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**"Blind Date" (1999/I)**

**Nasty, 5 August 2006**

**1 star**

**If you like to watch a show that confirms the utter hopelessness and emptiness of dating, and how dating brings out the absolute worst in people, then this is the show to watch. This show is about how men and women play games with each other and how dating is the ultimate waste of time and is utterly devoid of any redeeming social value except as proof of the hypocrisy associated with people trying to assert their dominance through devious means. The men are invariably portrayed as fools as they try to play up to the women who are arrogant, self-centered and manipulative and absolutely not worth the effort. This show is further proof that money cannot buy love as the men take the women to fancy restaurants where they engage in meaningless talk which sets the stage for the woman's rejection of her hapless companion. On this show every man is portrayed as awkward and socially inept while the women are portrayed as self-centered man-haters who basically have no use for their dates except to use them as a means of acting out their contempt of men.**

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**Blood Diamond (2006)**

**Good movie, 20 February 2007**

**9 stars**

**This is a good movie. The story is compelling and the acting is excellent. The movie suggests that the fighting is instigated by outside forces that want to control access to certain natural resources, a premise which makes for a good movie. The movie raises certain questions. Is all warfare based on the struggle to control natural resources? Is all warfare a response to market forces that demand certain products and will prompt certain groups to take extraordinary measures to ensure that the needs of the market place are met? The analogy to oil and the Mideast crisis is obvious. This movie is a powerful statement on what happens when greed runs rampant. The results are catastrophic.**

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## **Body and Soul (1947)**

**The Best Film of its Genre, 27 July 2005**

**10 stars**

**When considering the factors that contributed to making this movie one of truly great cinema classics, such as the story, the direction, the dialogue, the pathos, the conflicts, the supporting cast, the one factor that most directly contributed to making this movie great was that of its star, John Garfield. Here, Garfield plays Charlie Davis, a brooding, moody, cynical, angry young man traumatized by his father's untimely and violent death and determined to literally fight his way out of poverty, no matter what it takes. Yet, Charlie Davis is likable, for despite the hardened exterior, he is still fundamentally a good man who is struggling to do what is right despite the pressure to cave in to those who merely want to use him. And although Charlie weakens, he never breaks, and when put to the test, his basic honesty and strength shine through, which makes him a hero and which transforms this movie from just another boxing movie into a true cinematic classic.**

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## **Body of Lies (2008)**

**Is the movie over yet?, 19 October 2008**

**2 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**Maybe being a government bureaucrat is not the most glamorous way of making a living but it's still a way to make a living. However, after watching this movie, one may come away believing that every government bureaucrat is a lazy, bloated, conceited, paper pusher who lives exclusively to partake of his next lunch break. Not exactly a pretty picture, but this is the picture that the audience has to endure when watching what is nothing more than another tedious, noisy, overacted action movie. Just what the doctor ordered ... right? How many more of these movies has Hollywood made? One thousand? Two thousand? The formula for making these movies is so beaten into the dust that by now it should be completely unrecognizable. The locales change but the plots remain the same, and with the same shallow character development and the equally shallow acting as trained performers are asked to devolve into pseudo-cartoon characters and act accordingly. This movie seemed to run-on interminably. "When will this movie end?" I repeatedly thought to myself. Leonardo DiCaprio was totally unbelievable as a CIA operative, but what has to be one of the great gaffs of miscasting, an overweight Russell Crowe plays a**

CIA bureaucrat. Please note that in this movie the on site operative is "lean and mean" while his desk jockey supervisor is fat. This is called stereotyping. What was the casting director thinking? Why not have Jack Nicholson play an overweight office clerk? Or Nicole Kidman play a frumpy department store saleswoman? And the story was so fantastic that no amount of literary license could afford it credibility. An obviously non-Arab American (Mr. DiCaprio) trying to pass himself off as an Arab ... speaking fluent Arabic ... concocting all kinds of hair brain schemes that are doomed to failure ... trying to out think and outfox real Arabs who are completely unfooled by his laughable Arab masquerade ... trying to romance a Palestinian woman while in the middle of conducting a highly sensitive and complex espionage mission ... etc. By now you get the point. Next time try casting an actual Arab in the role. Not even the most naive movie goer can believe all that. There should be a rough balance between the protagonist and antagonist. In this movie the protagonist is so transparent and incompetent that it leaves the story in shambles. Next stop for this movie - DVD land and oblivion. And one other thing. Don;t let this movie discourage you from working for the government. The pay may not be great, but the fringe benefits are excellent, a critical fact that this movie conveniently omits.

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### Breach (2007)

Was Joe McCarthy that far off the mark?, 22 March 2007

7 stars

Okay. The movie is based on "actual events." So why make the movie? Why not just show the newsreels about the guy who spied from the inside? Whenever a movie stresses that it's based on "actual events" it means only one thing - "BEWARE! You are experiencing this movie at your own risk. Literary license here is running amok!". Who is to know why the spy did what he did? And why try to figure it out? Why not just ask him? He did what he did ... and it caused damage, so we are told. And what about the other fellow sent in to spy on the spy? Yes, this movie is based on "actual events" just like the movie Titanic and every war movie. But no matter how creative the script and how skilled the actors, the fact is that something based on "actual events" is not the same as the real "actual event" and should not, and must not, be treated as such because the movie is a work of fiction which may not necessarily conform with the facts. Nevertheless, the movie is a credible work of art, with strong acting, especially from Chris Cooper, and a powerful message suggesting that perhaps Senator Joseph McCarthy's claims of subversion within the government may not have been all that far off the mark. If you don't know who Joseph McCarthy was then visit my review for Good Night, and Good Luck.

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**Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)**

**Stay away from this movie. You have been warned., 2 August 2009**

**1 star**

**This movie is so bad it is shocking. Renee Zellweger prattles on with what has to be one of the phoniest British accents ever in movie history in this rapid, mind numbing story. But what is worse is the character she plays - an annoying, simpering, pouting, insecure, overweight woman whose sole preoccupation is trying to keep relationships with men who obviously do not care about her and should have absolutely nothing to do with her. The character is so unattractive, indeed abrasive, that there should be no surprise that she has problems maintaining relationships. But Ms. Zellweger's horrible, phony British accent is just too much to bear. The producer of this movie couldn't find an English woman to play Bridgit Jones? They had to hire an American actress? Why not have Brad Pitt play Hugh Grant's character? If you like movies which feature American actors playing unattractive, piggish-looking people, then this movie is for you. Otherwise, stay away! You have been warned.**

**Any resemblance between Renee Zellweger's character and any actual British persons, living or deceased, is purely coincidental.**

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**Brokeback Mountain (2005)**

**Ennis - the new hero, 1 March 2006**

**10 stars**

**I'm trying to figure out what is the purpose of this movie. I watched the movie and afterwards asked myself: What is this movie about? What was the director trying to prove? What new theme was Hollywood trying to exploit to make an extra buck? Two men have the hots for each other? So what? That they try to conceal it from their families and friends? What else is new? That everyone in the movie kinda knows what's going on but really don't say anything? Okay. So ... what's the point? Two pals ... who are more than just pals. One dies ... the other is left to cope with the loss, a loss that he cannot discuss with anyone because to do so will reveal the kind of relationship they had, a relationship that was considered taboo. To me, when the movie ends is when the movie should have actually begun. Usually, I don't endorse the use of flashbacks because flashbacks tend to muddle the continuity of the story, but here a flashback right at the start of the movie would have been wonderful: a middle aged man looking out of**

window, seemingly at nothing, but consumed by thoughts and feelings that he cannot share, that must remain within him forever. What is he thinking about? And why? Anyway, the movie is worth watching. Heath Ledger offers a great performance as a quiet man who's in conflict with himself and with society, a middle of the road rebel who must restrain his innermost feelings in order to survive in an unforgiving society that will reject him and ostracize him if he ever fully reveals his true self. Ennis is the new hero.

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### **Broken Flowers (2005)**

**There's Nothing Funny About This Movie, 8 September 2005**  
**4 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

Bill Murray is known as comic actor. But here Mr. Murray plays the main character in a serious drama about a man who decides to confront his past, and the confrontation is inconclusive, at times nasty and painful. The women from his past are now middle aged ladies with lives of their own and are characters that do not make this story a pleasant trip down memory lane. The premise of this movie is that the main character is on some kind of quest, prompted by a letter from anonymous source saying that he fathered a child twenty years ago. But so what? Is an anonymous letter a sufficient basis for a man to travel all over the United States and impose himself on others? I don't think so. Indeed, one can reasonably question why Mr. Murray's character would even want to bother. Plus, Mr. Murray's character is not particularly likable, which makes the movie even more unfunny. The movie is not funny, the characters are troubled and sad; if you want to see a Bill Murray movie, rent "Caddyshack."

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### **Battleship Potemkin (1925)**

**Great movie., 10 April 2008**  
**10 stars**

I expected to watch another tepid, dull, ludicrous, poorly Soviet propaganda film and instead, to my huge surprise, I watched a great movie that contained all the elements that elevate this movie to the level of a great work of art. The story is told simply and straight-forward, has excellent acting and provides a positive portrayal of people who act to protest their mistreatment and assert their rights. It is almost unbelievable that this

movie was made under the regime of Joseph Stalin because the style of the movie is distinctly un-Soviet and contains evidence of the kind of creativity not associated with the Stalinist regime. That the movie is so-called silent does not detract from its powerful story; the musical score is a masterpiece. Watch this movie.

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### **Brooklyn's Finest (2009)**

**Ethan Hawke's greatest movie., 5 March 2010  
8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

This is a strong movie with powerful performances by the entire cast, especially that of Ethan Hawke whose portrayal of a corrupt police officer carries this movie and warrants special recognition. Richard Gere's performance in some ways is reminiscent of Paul Newman's performance in Fort Apache, the Bronx, that is, of an older jaded police officer who has lost all hope yet perseveres. The movie relies on perpetuating all kinds of stereotypes to move the story along and suggests a level of corruption and violence that if plausible would render our society inoperable. Yet the story works, mainly due to the great acting and the fast paced action which manages to keep the audience's attention. One is kept wondering how the various subplots will work themselves out and who will survive the maelstrom that engulfs all concerned. Don Cheadle also gives a credible performance as an undercover police officer and Wesley Snipes gives a surprisingly measured and multifaceted performance as a street gangster. All in all, a powerful movie.

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### **Bruce Almighty (2003)**

**Excellent movie., 17 December 2007  
10 stars**

Yes, miracles do occur. They happen when often least expected, like when I was channel surfing and came across this movie. So I watched it and to my complete surprise actually enjoyed the show. This movie had humor, a good story, solid acting and an overall endearing quality lacking in most, or more accurately practically all movies churned out of the Hollywood movie-making machine. Jim Carrey was actually FUNNY and Jennifer Anniston was wonderful. Morgan Freeman was commanding and Steve

Carell was funny too. The scenes with Mr. Carrey and Mr. Freeman were really excellent, well scripted and well acted, making for a compelling movie worthy of positive attention. There might be some who may object to the movie's portrayal of God, but those objections notwithstanding, it's a respectful portrayal and one which helps the audience to better appreciate the pitfalls as well as the benefits of divine power. Excellent movie.

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### **Bukowski: Born into This (2003)**

The great American poet, 21 April 2006  
10 stars

I first became acquainted with Charles Bukowski's work about a year ago and actually purchased one of his books. His poetry is of the nitty-gritty, down-to-earth, no-holds-barred variety, that I find revealing and fascinating. This movie goes beyond Mr. Bukowski's poetry to examine the man behind the work, and does a credible job of presenting the life of this extraordinary writer and artist. It shows how he overcame major social, emotional and financial barriers to become a world famous author while at the same time remaining true to himself. The movie tries to portray Mr. Bukowski as a gruff man, which at times he was, but he was also a decent man whose poetry gave expression to the thoughts and feelings of millions and millions of persons whose voices are never heard, and if heard, is never heeded. Watch this movie.

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### **Bulworth (1998)**

Great Political Satire., 12 August 2005  
9 stars

A politician throws caution to the wind and speaks his mind without pandering for votes. It's too good to be true, which is why this movie works. For wouldn't it be refreshing if a politician leveled with the people, talked to the people instead of talking AT the people? Wouldn't it be refreshing if a politician decided to stop being manipulative and just expressed what he thought? This movie is a satire of a political process that reduces an elected official to the status of a burnt out relic of a former time when idealism counted for something, and which has been replaced by a cynicism that permeates through the political discourse. The scene in which the senator is plotting his own demise because he believes his own career to be a sham sets the mood of this movie, because it's only when the senator decides to do himself in that he finally feels able to reveal his

most intimate and personal feelings about things that have been simmering within him for a long time. This in turn raises the question: What was he so afraid of that he felt he had to repress himself for so long? When the senator decides that he no longer has to be afraid, he then is able to level with the people and with himself. There are few, if any, movies that deal with the subjects of political and personal honesty and integrity more effectively and compellingly than this movie.

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### **Burn After Reading (2008)**

**A good movie but not a great one., 14 September 2008  
7 stars**

A good movie. A clever movie. A great movie? No way. Not even close. The movie has a muddled story and is not particularly humorous. BUT there is one aspect of this movie that saves it from DVD oblivion - the stellar performance of John Malkovich. Mr. Malkovich makes this movie work. He is actually FUNNY. This cannot be said for the other performers. Was Frances McDormand funny? NO. Brad Pitt? NO. By the way, he was not the Brad Pitt of Mr. and Mrs. Smith and Troy, two movies in which he excelled. Brad Pitt playing a buffoon is an example of flagrant miscasting. Nevertheless the actors give strong performances and the story does offer an interesting take on the nature of bureaucracy and human irrationality. There are movies in which casting top stars as goofy, cartoon-like characters work, but this is not one of those movies. Casting Steve Martin, Chevy Chase, Dan Ackroyd, Bill Murray, Jack Black, Eddie Murphy, Ben Stiller, or Steve Carell as buffoons can generate laughs with the right material but comedic acting can fall flat with the wrong cast and in this movie, with the exception of Mr. Malkovich, it falls flat.

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### **Capote (2005)**

**Beware of counter transference - it can warp your judgment, 10 October 2005  
10 stars**

In this movie a writer is assigned to cover a story of an entire family brutally slaughtered by two men; the two men are apprehended, incarcerated, tried, convicted and sentenced to death. The two men committed a crime that was as senseless as it was heinous. These men deserve no special consideration or attention whatsoever, except as it relates to the horrible crime they committed. Yet the writer befriends one of

the murderers - in fact the one who actually did the killing - and now has to deal with the fact that he now has an intimate relationship with a cunning and deceitful mass murderer, who is so nasty that his own sister wants nothing to do with him. The writer knows that yet he can't help himself. No matter how much he tries, he can't stop thinking about this murderer. Well, what does that say about the writer? The movie shows how the writer, who is urbane, mild-mannered, well-liked, and respected, recognizes the unacceptability of transforming this work assignment into something personal, but he simply can't help it, and now he is stuck with having to deal with the consequences for the rest of his life. For by writing an entire book about these two no-account murderers, is the writer in a way really writing about himself? Is the writer in a way condoning, glamorizing or at least excusing, what these two men did? Indeed, the writer even goes so far as to obtain legal counsel for these dangerous characters. This movie shows what happens when a professional person who is expected to maintain professional objectivity loses that objectivity and becomes enmeshed in the subject matter that he is examining. Once the boundary that separates the job from the personal is crossed, the consequences can be emotionally devastating, which is what happens to the writer as the writer, who was a successful and gifted author, never writes another book and drinks for the rest of his life.

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### Captain from Castile (1947)

Good epic movie., 8 November 2005  
9 stars

This movie is about the conquest of the Aztecs by Cortez. The central character of this movie, therefore, is Hernan Cortez, brilliantly portrayed by Cesar Romero. Nobody could have played the role better. In this movie Mr. Romero truly is the star. True, Tyrone Power has top billing, but in reality his role is secondary to that of Mr. Romero's. But more important than who actually starred in this movie is the story itself. It's about the conquest and destruction of an entire civilization and how personal feuds can fester for years, even when the parties are separated by an ocean. An especially powerful scene in this movie is when an emissary from the King of Spain presents a warrant for the arrest of one of Cortez's soldiers for treason against the king, and Cortez firmly tells the emissary that the warrant is worthless and will not be honored since they are not in Spain and that Cortez will not permit any feuds in his army. It's just too bad that the movie did not concentrate more fully on the actual collapse of the Aztec empire, because that's the real story, and one that perhaps deserves its own movie.

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## **Carnal Knowledge (1971)**

**Control and Sex., 27 November 2005**

**10 stars**

In this movie, the main character is a man, played by Jack Nicholson, who hates women, but can't do without them. He's addicted to women like a substance abuser is addicted to drugs. He hates the very thing that he's addicted to. Yet to deny himself means agony. To him, women are the enemy, to be used and disposed of, otherwise they could dominate him and make him serve THEM and pay attention to THEM, in exchange for the sex that he needs and craves. He covers up his weakness with a veneer of cynicism that makes him seem strong and in control, but that veneer is easily cracked whenever he succumbs to a woman's charms. For in this movie, the Jack Nicholson character is weak and child-like in his relationship with women. He needs women like a boy needs his mommy and then pushes them away when he begins feeling smothered, sending them double-messages that confuse them and in the process confuse him too. Ultimately, he winds up being alone, his narcissistic tendencies simply too powerful to be overcome by the obsessive drive to have sex. This movie dramatizes the conflictual relationship between control and sex and how this conflict, unresolved, warps a man. This is one of Jack Nicholson's greatest movies.

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## **Casablanca (1942)**

**Don't make a remake!, 15 September 2005**

**10 stars**

There's a saying: "If it ain't broken, don't fix it." This saying is especially applicable to this movie. This movie is a timeless classic, which stands alone and cannot be replicated. I know that countless words have been written about this movie, so anything I say will probably be nothing new, but I'll say it anyway. This movie could have easily become some kind of corny and phony contrivance about some ex-patriot loser who is wallowing in self-pity because some woman led him on and then gave him the old "heave-ho." This movie could have easily become little more than just another World War Two movie, with the good guys vs the bad guys, with the latter getting everything they deserve. But this movie goes way beyond that, and is a work of art. Now this may sound like a cliché, but it isn't. This movie actually conveys a story that is both complex and compelling and contains some really great acting which transforms the script into something that the audience can actually listen to and follow without trying to figure out what's going on. Many of the characters in this movie are

intrinsically unattractive and unlikable, but when mixed together, they emerge as some of the most memorable characters in the history of American cinema. I won't rehash this movie because anyone who knows cinema has undoubtedly already seen it. But suffice it to say, this movie is one-of-a-kind and should be treated as such.

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### **Case 39 (2009)**

**Excellent psychological thriller., 11 October 2010**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

The power of suggestion. This what this movie is about. An eight year girl terrorizes the people closest to her and nobody understands what is going on until it is too late. After all, how could a cute eight year girl hurt anybody? How could anyone so defenseless and so vulnerable be capable of driving people to their deaths? These are the questions posed by this movie. This movie is more of a psychological thriller than a conventional horror movie. Here there are no monsters, except of course for the monsters in our minds. Sometimes all it takes is a suggestion, a mere mention of a few words, to conger up those demons buried deep inside our psyches. And for us those demons are real, they terrify us and we will do whatever we must to make them go away. At least that's what happens in this excellent movie. Rene Zellweger is absolutely marvelous as the social worker who becomes an unwitting tool for the eight year old girl. Bradley Cooper once again gives another strong performance as Ms. Zellweger's colleague and Ian McShane provides yet another solid performance as the police officer who belatedly learns the truth. All in all, this is an excellent movie, well scripted, well acted and one of the better movies.

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### **Casino Royale (2006)**

**A fallible and gullible James Bond, 2 December 2006  
5 stars**

If I've said it once I've said it a thousand times: "Beware of the hype." There is an inverse relationship between the level of hype and the quality of a movie, and proof of this is this movie. The opening title song is awful, the story inane, and this James Bond is a far cry from the invincible hero of films from the past. Daniel Craig gives a credible performance as a fallible and gullible James Bond and the the leading ladies are lovely, especially Vesper. But good acting and pretty ladies cannot save this movie from

what is a weak story. But that should not be surprise. After all, given all the hype that preceded this movie, what else should one expect?

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### **Cellular (2004)**

**Kim Basinger is wonderful in this movie., 19 October 2008  
8 stars**

**Don't laugh when I write this: this is a good movie, well worth the time to watch. (Are you laughing? If you are, STOP IT!!) This movie offers a fast-paced story with strong acting and a lot of tense scenes. Maybe the story's credibility is stretched a bit far, but isn't that why there's something called literary license? Kim Basinger was great. She carries the movie. Terrific acting job. Jason Statham is equally strong as the bad-guy and the entire cast give excellent performances. The reliable William H. Macy gives his usual engaging and entertaining performance. Also, Ms. Basinger is absolutely beautiful and is a star. If you like action thrillers, and Kim Basinger, then this movie is for you.**

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### **Changeling (2008)**

**Abuse of power - an old story but well told here., 7 November 2008  
10 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**Abuse of power can be ugly and creates lots of havoc and hurt lots of people. But sometimes it also brings out the best in people as they marshal all their strength and determination to confront and combat the abuse. This movie is about one of those instances where one person, without influence, with few resources but with indomitable will, stands up to a corrupt system, draws a line, and makes her stand. In short, this movie is about heroism and redemption. Cruelty is always repugnant but perhaps never more so then when perpetrated by the very people who swear to protect and defend us. We as members of society invest them with a sacred trust which they in turn promise to honor. This movie is about one of those instances where that sacred trust is dashed to the ground and stomped into the dirt under the dubious pretension of enforcing the law and protecting the public. And what can be more dastardly than the victim being a young single mother? Who among us is more in need of protection and care than a young single mother? What kind of community would even think of wanting to crush a single mother whose only "crime" is that she**

wants to find her son? This movie poses these questions and does so with a quiet strength that is only equaled by the fundamental forthrightness of the story itself. This story is not a melodrama; there are no hysterics. Rather the story speaks for itself with an eloquence that is almost nonexistent in movies today. Angelina Jolie's performance is outstanding. She dominates this movie. She is the star and deservedly so.

Yes, the movie is a little on the long side, at times seems to drag out, but so what? Here sensationalism takes a back seat to story telling. The supporting cast is excellent and there is a good mixture of pathos and indignation that contribute to keeping the story interesting. The "bad guys" are actually bad because they knew that what they were doing was wrong but did it anyway out of a crass desire to protect their reputations. How pathetic. This movie is about what happens when one person refuses to knuckle under and confronts the system with the only thing she has going for her, the truth. This theme alone makes the movie well worth watching.

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### **Charlie Wilson's War (2007)**

**Ugh! This is Julia Roberts' worst movie., 21 January 2008**  
**1 star**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

Has Hollywood forgotten that the Cold War is over? That Russia is not the enemy? That the Soviet Union was fighting the groups who today are our enemies ... who hate us ... who call us infidels and other vile names ... and who we're now fighting in Afghanistan? If anything, we should have helped the Russians fight those maniacs posing as so-called freedom fighters. Under the pretext of telling a story about an unknown alcoholic, glib politician who miraculously develops a sense of duty to humanity ... while in a hot-tub with coke-snorting prostitutes ... this movie takes direct aim at the Soviet Union (i.e. the Russians). How dumb is that? Russia as the enemy? Duh! Oh, they were communists? Was that the problem? If this movie is some kind of anti-commie tirade, then the movie is way too late. There's no more Soviet Union! Everybody happy now? Is the world now a better, safer place? After the events of September 11, 2001, any country that attacks those groups that hate us and want to harm us is our ally. We would have been a lot better off if we had let the Russians stay in Afghanistan. Better them than us having to fight those criminal fanatics. Bashing the Soviet Union over their intervention in Afghanistan, which borders in their country, would be like bashing the Soviet Union for their actions in the Battle of Berlin in the closing days of World War Two. If the

**Soviets had not been willing to administer the final coup-de-grace against the Germans, WE would have had to do it and who knows how many thousands of American soldiers would have been lost. That we actually covertly aided and abetted groups in Afghanistan that openly hate us is absolutely amazing. Ugh!**

**Also, neither Tom Hanks or Julia Roberts are particularly believable in this movie. Tom Hanks as a corrupt, alcoholic Texas Congressman? I don't think so. Julia Roberts as a rich Texas Southern Baptist trying to sound like a female Lyndon Johnson? I don't think so. If the movie works for you, fine. But any movie that rags on the Russians is just missing the point. Russia is not the enemy, and while they were involved in Afghanistan, neither was the Soviet Union.**

**Whose idea was it to make the incredibly beautiful Julia Roberts look like a grotesque, overly made-up, two-bit hooker?**

**Does Charlie Wilson EVER stop drinking?**

**By the way, I wonder how we would like it if certain radical groups were located right across our border. In 1962 we were ready to start a nuclear war over the presence of missiles in Cuba, and Cuba doesn't even border on the United States. So why should the Soviet Union have acted any differently? And now that we have troops and helicopters in Afghanistan, do you think the Russians are now willing to help us?**

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### **Charly (1968)**

**It tries for greatness but doesn't quite make it. 28 January 2008  
7 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**At the risk of revealing my approximate age, I will tell you that forty years ago I considered this movie to be excellent and was greatly impressed with the performances of Cliff Robertson and the beautiful Claire Bloom. Alas, time has gone by and after watching this movie again my opinion has changed. What I once considered to be a sensitive dramatization of the plight of the mentally challenged is today little more than typical simplistic Hollywood hokum. For this movie to be truly effective it has to have some connection to reality, and here the movie fails. This movie asks the audience to believe that a mentally challenged man is transformed into a**

virtual genius and then mysteriously regresses but while in the genius phase has a relationship with his psychologist who disregards every ethical and legal standard of her profession to act out her counter-transference fantasies. The question here is: who is more maladjusted? The hapless patient who is a victim of a weird experimental procedure, something that a Nazi scientist would have concocted and then goes awry, an experiment conducted apparently without the patient's informed consent, or his pathetic out-of-control psychologist who takes advantage of her patient for her own personal gratification? Also the performances themselves are unconvincing. Even in the "moron" phase Cliff Robertson does not seem mentally slow enough or disabled enough to warrant undergoing a radical experimental procedure and Claire Bloom's performance as the psychologist borders on the laughable. Her behavior is so erratic and irresponsible that I was waiting for the scene where someone calls the state licensing board to demand the revocation of her license. One of the lowest points of the movie is when Ms. Bloom's character asks, no begs, Charly to marry her after they find out that the operation has failed. It would have been better if Charly had said yes so that in the next scene the psychologist could be shown acting out her maternal fantasies with the now post-genius "moronic" Charly who is again babbling like a child but at least now has a surrogate mother to take care of him while they sleep in the same bed as husband and wife. Ugh!

The purpose of a therapeutic relationship is to help the patient improve their functioning in society. The clinician is supposed to closely monitor the patient's progress toward achieving certain goals, utilizing the most effective and appropriate therapeutic techniques to achieve these goals - all for the benefit of the patient, not the therapist. However, in this movie the therapist's only goal is to have sex with the patient who has undergone a remarkable intellectual transformation but is still a patient. Ultimately the therapist's self-serving acting out hurts the confused and bewildered patient who is permitted, indeed encouraged to act out his sexual fantasies with his therapist. The movie provides a sensationalistic and completely unfair portrayal of mental health services.

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### Cheaper by the Dozen (2003)

Zzzzzzzzzzz., 17 July 2010

5stars

When watching this movie one is reminded of the word insipid. This movie is appropriate for pre-school age children who have absolutely nothing else to do and would prefer watching images of kids and parents acting silly. Yes, silly is another word that applies to this movie. It is light fare, so

light that it floats like a feather, going from one silly scene to another. Oh, another word to describe this movie is cute. Cute is nice but is it entertaining? Is it dramatic? Is it funny? The answer to all three questions is an emphatic no. A movie that cannot be taken seriously is either campy or a comedy and while this movie is not campy it isn't particularly funny either. Other words to describe this movie are schmaltzy, hokey and corny. This movie has the dramatic power of a fair weather cloud. Even Steve Martin cannot rescue this movie from the clutches of banality which can bring even the resolute movie watcher to the brink of boredom and even beyond, to the world of sleep. Zzzzzzzzz.

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### Chicago (2002)

If It Wants to, Hollywood Can Still Make a Great Musical., 31 July 2005  
10 stars

This movie proves that if it wants to, Hollywood can still make a great musical. In "Chicago" the producers of the movies utilize a cast who are essentially dramatic actors and convert them into singers and dancers ... and it works. In addition, the story is fast-paced, funny and literate and the characters are likable and enjoyable to watch. Normally Richard Gere is associated with serious dramatic roles, so I was amazed by his transformation into a song-and-dance actor who sings and dances his way through the movie, and does it as deftly as Fred Astaire. For this movie would not have succeeded if not for Mr. Gere's remarkable performance. But the movie does succeed, and one can now be assured that the Hollywood movie musical genre is not a thing of the past, but has now re-emerged after years of being dormant. Maybe this movie marks the start of a new era of Hollywood musicals. Time will tell.

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### Cinderella Man (2005)

A Jewish boxer portrayed as a villain? NO WAY! What about Benny Leonard?, 30 July 2005  
4 stars

A movie about James Braddock? Why not? He seemed like a good man, the salt of the earth, who overcomes all kinds of adversity to become the heavyweight champion. Not a bad story at all ... but so what? But if Hollywood is going to make a movie about boxing champions, how about

making a movie about the life and career of Benny Leonard, arguably the greatest lightweight champion in the history of boxing? Or what about a movie about the life and career of Carlos Monzon, arguably the greatest middleweight champion in the history of boxing? Or what about a movie about the life and career of Barney Ross, who was world champion in three different weight classes and war hero? In fact, what about a movie about the life and times of Max Baer, who is portrayed as the "bad guy" in the movie, and who, by the way, wore the Star of David on his trunks, so how bad could he be? In fact, if Baer was such a bad guy, how could he have been the father of Max Baer, Jr. who played Jethro Bodine on "The Beverly Hillbillies"? Any man who was the father of the actor who played Jethro Bodine could not have been all that bad of a guy. Max Baer was a boxer, boxing is a violent sport and naturally, and unfortunately, the contestants do get hurt or worse. But to imply that Max Baer was gratuitously violent is unfair, even for a movie. So, if you want to watch a movie about James Braddock, then this is probably the movie to watch, but don't come away thinking badly about Max Baer. Remember, if it wasn't for Max Baer, there may never have been a Jethro Bodine.

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### **Citizen Kane (1941)**

Remarkable movie., 21 October 2007  
10 stars

Citizen Kane is a remarkable movie. It has withstood the test of time, meaning that the movie is not dated and presents a story that would resonant with today's audience, in fact even more so that when the movie was first released in 1941. The acting is great and the cinematography is astounding. Who really was Charles Foster Kane? He had so much money and was known as a man of the people yet was alone. The acting is great. Dorothy Comingore's performance is especially powerful. Her role is the key to the movie. Actually this movie could have more aptly been titled Mrs. Citizen Kane because of the central role of Ms. Comingore's character. The story is as much about her as about Kane. The movie is timeless, its themes universal and contains performances that cover the gamut of human emotions.

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## **City Island (2009)**

**A must watch for every actor or wanna be., 26 May 2010**

**9 stars**

**Although the acting is a little cheesy and stagy and the story a little contrived, this is an entertaining movie. Andy Garcia carries the story about a man with a dream, a dream that he dare not share with anyone. It's also about the acting industry itself, especially the audition process. Anyone who has ever answered an audition call, every wanna be who has ever waited on line for hours for their one minute shot at fame, will appreciate this movie. Indeed, the scenes depicting the audition process itself could have been made into a movie. Acting is one of the few professions left where one does not need a formal credential to work. The creators of this movie do a great job driving this point home. As for the main theme, how the lack of communication can cause havoc in a family, the movie seems to draw from Saturday Night Fever and any of John Cassavetes' movies, particularly A Woman Under the Influence, to makes its point. The movie comes off as a low budget fare but covers a lot of emotional territory, all of which is set on an island, which condenses the action. If this movie was made thirty years ago, it would have starred Peter Falk and Gena Rowlands. Confusion reigns as a man is pursuing an innocent dream but is doing it secretly. This results in misunderstandings that sometimes are amusing but are also sad as conflicts escalate and become violent. The message is clear: be proud of your dreams, share them with others, show up for auditions, and don't give up becau**

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## **City of Angels (1998)**

**Unexpected love. One of Meg Ryan's better performances., 18 February 2009**

**8 stars**

**Meg Ryan. For a while Ms. Ryan was the number one female movie star and in this movie she is at her best. She carries this movie, makes this movie not only watchable but enjoyable as her character goes on an emotional roller coaster ride, at times crying, other times consumed with joy as she struggles with life issues. Nicholas Cage plays a great straight man to Ms. Ryan and demonstrates a talent for maintaining a deadpan expression during even the most fantastic and intimate scenes, but this is Ms Ryan's movie and she makes the most of it. The story itself is somewhat contrived and at times becomes overtly sentimental as the two main characters reach out to each other, one believing that she is alone, the other trying to make a connection. Yet the movie successfully avoids corniness and maintains an**

even keel as she plies through the waves of emotion. Oh love, what a joy, made even sweeter when it happens unexpected.

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### **Clerks II (2006)**

**Raucous ... Crude ... Great, 31 July 2006**  
**10 stars**

The movie is raucous. The movie is crude. The movie is cheap. The movie is great. This movie makes a huge statement about people and about life. It pulls no punches and tells it like it is. The characters are funny and endearing. The acting is great; the dialogue is down-to-earth, unpretentious and real. The movie can offend, but if it does, that's your problem, not the movie's. This is the best movie since "Sideways." If you want to watch a romantic comedy or some highbrow statement on life, then this movie is not for you. If you want a movie that seriously explores the more esoteric features of the human condition, then pass on this movie. But if you want to watch a truly original movie, with endearing characters and humorous scenes, then this movie is for you.

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### **Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)**

**If you like movies about people getting into strange space ships, then watch this movie., 26 September 2005**  
**7 stars**

It's corny. It's contrived. It's silly. The phony-baloney special effects are a joke. Yet ... I liked this movie. Yes ... I LIKED this movie! I liked the idea of a bunch of people who receive some kind of telepathic message from who-knows-where and converge in the middle of nowhere in search of something that they can't even describe. THAT is an original story, and one that at least in this case Hollywood did not completely trash, though there are signs in this movie that they tried. Such as when the close encounter finally occurs. A huge spaceship shows up out of nowhere and before long the earthlings and the visitors are communicating through music - CORNY! Or what about earthlings lining up to get inside said spaceship - CORNY! Yet the story does survive these shallow attempts at evoking some kind of feeling of awe and wonder. Well, actually it did evoke those feelings, especially as I wondered why anyone would want to take off in that spaceship and awe that despite the theatrics of such a contrived scene, I still liked the movie.

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### **Comedy Central Roast of William Shatner (2006) (TV)**

**Hilarious., 19 April 2008**

**10 stars**

**This show is absolutely hilarious. It is nonstop laughter with arguably the greatest B actor in Hollywood history as the target for some of the most outrageously funny barbs ever uttered in a television show. What makes this show particularly amusing is that the guest roasters are spoofing an actor who is not one of the great performers but nevertheless has managed to become one of the most well-known stars in history which is an ongoing theme of this show. The one-liners come on fast and furious. Betty White is especially funny and George Takei is great. In fact this roast is spoof on the Hollywood roasts of the past except this one is a lot funnier and includes the kind of comments that makes the roasts of the past seem tame in comparison.**

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### **Coming to America (1988)**

**Eddie Murphy's greatest movie., 7 November 2005**

**10 stars**

**If "Trading Places" is Dan Ackroyd's greatest movie, then "Coming to America" is Eddie Murphy's greatest movie, and for much the same reasons. Although the movie may be considered a comedy, and indeed has its humorous moments, the theme of this movie is quite serious. For it's about a man who is willing to sacrifice money, privilege, power, and position in quest for personal happiness. This is a powerful role and Eddie Murphy is great in this role. This movie is proof that when given the chance, a comic actor like Eddie Murphy is capable of playing a complex character that is central to a story. The producers of this movie evidently knew that in Eddie Murphy they had a actor around whom they could create an excellent movie, and with this movie they were right.**

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## **Contact (1997)**

**The Hula Hoops movie, 3 April 2007**

**6 stars**

**This is the movie with the hula hoops. If you've seen the movie you'll know what I mean. The movie has an interesting premise and Jodie Foster is as usual excellent as a scientist who wants to prove that she has made contact with extraterrestrials, but the story itself is almost laughable and even allowing for literary license, which in this movie runs wild, renders the movie ultimately mediocre. The movie wants the audience to accept certain premises that so defy the laws of physics that when Ms. Foster's character is challenged as to the credibility of her findings, well, frankly, she fails so completely to make a case that the movie became pointless. One other thing, the movie portrays the construction of a contraption for space travel that resembles two huge hula hoops. Hence, I nickname this movie the Hula Hoops movie.**

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## **Control Room (2004)**

**Why a free and open press is essential., 2 February 2010**

**10 stars**

**When a documentary seems like a movie, then it has succeeded in capturing the audience's attention. It induces the audience to listen to and ponder the story that it is telling and here it is a compelling story, one that has to be told. By cutting through all the propaganda and blasting through all the spin the producers of this documentary provide a frank and comprehensive picture of how news coverage is distorted, depending on who controls the flow of information. And this is directly related to the the question of freedom of the press and how that freedom can be eroded if enough pressure is applied. This documentary also reveals several interesting facts relating to the Iraq War itself and the relationship between western and Arab news media, and their relationship with the U. S. military. Ultimately this documentary is about integrity and about why we must have a free and open press that will keep the public informed and shed light on the actions of the government.**

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## **Conviction (2010/II)**

**Egregious miscarriage of justice., 11 November 2010**

**9 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**The legal system is not perfect. That is amply illustrated in this compelling movie about a man who is a victim of a miscarriage of justice. There are so many things that can go wrong. Evidence can be withheld. Witnesses can be influenced. Evidence can be tampered with or lost. All this undermines the public's confidence in the judiciary, which is one of the three main branches of the government. If a court cannot dispense justice fairly and with impartiality, then the integrity of our entire political system is placed at risk. For this reason, this is an important and relevant movie. When a court convicts an innocent person, that signifies a breakdown of the system. This movie dramatizes such a breakdown. Hilary Swank and Sam Rockwell give strong, compelling performances as the sister and her victim brother. Melissa Leo gives a chilling portrayal of the police officer who led the initial investigation. The movie has a cogent, well-structured story and keeps the audience engaged. This movie is worth watching.**

**One of the problems raised by this movie is the reliance on DNA tests to prove or disprove guilt. The question is: how reliable are DNA tests? If other evidence can be tampered, why not the DNA samples?**

**Another problem is the reliability of witnesses. According to the movie not one, but TWO witnesses committed perjury. True, they may have been coerced, yet they lied, they knew they were lying, their lies became a matter of public record, and their lies created a lot of havoc, not only for the accused, but for the state itself. And why was their testimony given so much credibility? To me, this is the real crux of the story. Why do witnesses lie? Does the concept of perjury mean anything? At what point will someone decide to conscientiously deny an irrefutable fact?**

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## **Crash (2004/I)**

**Intense movie, 25 July 2005**

**10 stars**

**This has to be Sandra Bullock's finest movie. This movie marks her transition from a comic actress playing fluffy roles, to a serious actress**

whose performance must command respect. And this is why this movie is so great - the surprising performances. Tony Danza and Matt Dillon are wonderful in their portrayals of characters that are complex and not mere two-dimensional facsimiles of human beings. The Matt Dillon character is especially indicative of the intensity of this movie. Dillon plays an angry, bitter police officer who, despite his racist behavior and remarks, performs heroically and in the process redeems himself. For this movie is about people relating to other people on the basis of stereotypical beliefs that ultimately have no basis in fact. But the highpoint of the movie is Sandra Bullock's surprisingly compelling performance. Her character is so terrified and angry, and feeling so isolated and vulnerable, that she sinks to a depth of despair that is seemingly irreversible, yet she too survives, thus conveying a sense of hope and making this movie a powerful work of art.

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### **Crazy Heart (2009)**

High quality cinematic experience., 2 February 2010  
10 stars

Hollywood is full of surprises. Just when you're ready to throw in the towel and groan in despair that EVERYTHING Hollywood produces is trite garbage, along comes a movie like this one that not only is well acted but actually has a comprehensible and respectable story. Jeff Bridges gives a strong and masterful performance as a broken down singer whose life is in shambles. He succeeds in engaging and keeping the audience's attention and brings a complex and troubled character to life. It is a performance worthy of special recognition. The rest of the cast is also excellent, especially Maggie Gyllenhaal whose presence adds immeasurably to the movie's watchability. The chemistry between Jeff and Maggie is intense and remains so throughout the movie as the audience watches their cinematic relationship evolve. What makes this movie especially effective is that it avoids becoming just another piece of corny hokum and stays on course as the characters work through their situations. Plausibility and creativity are at work resulting in a high quality cinematic experience.

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### **Crimes and Misdemeanors (1989)**

**Excellent movie., 28 December 2005**

**10 stars**

**Let's give credit where credit is due. This is an excellent movie. It offers the kind of character development that not only is engaging, but is also relevant to the story, which makes the movie all that much more compelling, powerful and unique. A man lives a lie, lives a life of deception, is a coward and a hypocrite, yet one can feel empathy for this man who is struggling to come to terms with the consequences of his own duplicity. It almost makes the audience want to call out to the other characters: "Don't you know what kind of charlatan this man is?" "Don't you realize that this man you admire and love so much is a fraud?" A sad movie, but one worth watching.**

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### **Daisy Kenyon (1947)**

**A Hollywood curio that has not aged well., 12 December 2008**

**5 stars**

**Some movies age well, some don't. This movie has not aged well. Joan Crawford's acting is stagy, the story contrived, the story's mood gloomy and the film-noir style bleak and stark. Ms. Crawford was too old for the role. Daisy Kenyon is a young career woman, not a middle aged lady set in her ways. Also, the movie features two leading men, Dana Andrews and Henry Fonda which further weakens the story as Ms. Kenyon goes from one man, to the other, sometimes to both, then back to the other, etc. Real Hollywood pulp lacking substance, utterly vacuous, and above all dated. The movie is slow-paced and obviously filmed in a studio. Maybe this movie was popular in 1947 but in 2008 it's just another Hollywood curio that belongs on the shelf.**

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### **Days of Wine and Roses (1962)**

**Great Movie? - Maybe, 1 September 2005**

**7 stars**

**If you want to see an good movie about a serious subject then this is the movie to watch. Although the movie is kind of stagy and the story a little bit melodramatic, the performances are outstanding, the story compelling if**

somewhat contrived, the cinematography first-rate and the musical background powerful yet subtle. When watching this movie, one realizes that before Meg Ryan there was Lee Remick, whose performance in this movie was outstanding. But the star of this movie is Jack Lemmon. Here Mr. Lemmon gives one of the great portrayals of the acting-out drunk. Mr. Lemmon skillfully conveys the intensity, maniacal obsessiveness and anger of the out-of-control alcoholic who slowly and painfully comes to the realization that he has a problem which not only ruining his life but his wife's as well. The problem with this movie is that it also makes a case for drinking. Let's face it - who would you rather want to be with - the prim and proper Mrs. Clay when she is sober, or the fun-loving, gregarious, laughing Mrs. Clay who wants to party and have a good time when she is drunk? And what about Jack Lemmon's character? When sober, he is a rather bland person, but when drunk, look out! He's a dynamo of energy - he can even climb down trees and trash a rose garden - a get himself hospitalized where he can do all the screaming and acting out he wants. In this movie Jack Lemmon's character is really SICK, while Lee Remick's character is merely acting out in attempt to add some spice to her otherwise humdrum life of quiet drudgery. Isn't it significant that at the end of the movie, it's Lee Remick who leaves? To me, the message of this movie is: drinking is bad, but it's a good excuse for acting out and behaving like a child, and so if you want to act out, have yourself one ... or two ... or three ... or four ... or five or more drinks, get soused and then get rescued. It's a lot more interesting and fun than being sober ... and you might hook up with a pretty lady too.

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### Dead Poets Society (1989)

Sad movie except for Alan Pottinger's performance., 14 December 2005  
7 stars

Mr. Keating, a school teacher in a elite private school, uses his position to pursue a political agenda, namely to liberalize the school's curriculum, with tragic results. To achieve his political goals, the teacher encourages his students, all impressionable adolescents, to break the rules of the school, under the guise of promoting academic and personal freedom, and a group of his students respond by forming a secret society. These students have no idea that Mr. Keating is using them to promote strife between the faculty and student body, embarrass the school administration and thereby force change. As a result the students are placed in impossible conflictual situations that they are utterly incapable of resolving. Mr. Keating's manipulateness is so blatantly reckless that it leads to one student committing suicide. Perhaps if Mr. Keating had communicated his concerns through appropriate administrative channels without involving

the students, things would have worked out differently. But if that had happened, then there wouldn't have been a movie.

One bright point in this otherwise somber movie is Alan Pottinger's high-spirited and upbeat performance as "Bubba" the high-school jock.

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### **Death at a Funeral (2007)**

**Don't be turned off by the title., 15 September 2007**

**10 stars**

When the subject of great comedies comes up for discussion, this movie must be included. What a funny movie! Normally any movie that includes the word "death" in the title is a movie that is implicitly telling the audience to beware, it's going to be morbid. Well, this movie is not only not morbid, it is hilarious, not just in a black-comedy way, but in a straightforward matter that uses a funeral as the basis for generating some very funny scenes. The movie contains no morbidity. Rather, it is like an extended sitcom that portrays various people acting very silly and goofy. Everyone in this movie was funny, and one should not be turned off by the title because although death is a serious subject that should not be treated lightly, the movie really isn't about death at all, but actually about life and how silly and crazy people can act when the situation presents itself.

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### **Death at a Funeral (2010)**

**Shameless ripoff, 21 September 2010**

**1 star**

This movie is a shameless and unfunny ripoff of the 2007 British movie of the same name. Nothing in this movie even remotely approaches the humor of the 2007 original version. What makes this movie even more pathetic is how it even botches up those scenes that in the 2007 movie were hilarious. After watching the 2007 movie one left the theater with a smile; after watching this movie one leaves hoping that their funeral won't be as disastrous as the one in the movie. The cast featured some really good comic actors, but in this movie they are not funny. The acting was poor, Martin Lawrence and Chris Rock were unfunny (in fact, Mr. Rock was actually subdued), the dialog was flat, the story, as already indicated, entirely unoriginal, and the plot nonexistent. And as for Danny Glover, this movie has to be the low point of his acting career. The movie attempts to be goofy but winds up being contrived. But the worst element of this movie

is the story's utter lack of plausibility. In the original British version, the story works; in this ripoff version, the story collapses. As this movie proves, what may be funny in one movie may not necessarily be funny in a remake, even if the story is exactly the same. May this movie rest in peace in DVD land.

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### **Death Race (2008)**

**Unusual role for Joan Allen., 23 August 2008  
8 stars**

Excellent action movie. Joan Allen gives a tremendous performance. Jason Stratham is great. Good story, to the point, uncomplicated. Special effects do not get in the way of the story. Production design is consistent with sense of foreboding and danger that permeates the movie. Most characters are two-dimensional but for this kind of movie, it's okay. The movie is overtly violent, but not gratuitously so. The movie has an interesting and upbeat ending and serves as metaphor for the individual's vulnerability to manipulation. The production crew exercised creativity in casting Ms. Allen in a role that is unusual for her and she once again proves her more than ample theatrical talents. Kudos to Ms. Allen!

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### **Death Sentence (2007)**

**Popeye vs. Bluto 2007 or look out for the messenger!, 2 September 2007  
1 star**

This movie is a modern version of Popeye vs. Bluto, you know, the cartoon characters who are always fighting, with Popeye getting the worst of it until he eats his spinach and then he's indestructible. Well, in this movie Kevin Bacon is the Popeye character and the other actor, who plays the bad guy, is the the Bluto character. This movie is so absurd, simplistic and two-dimensional that it makes Spongebob Squarepants seem like Hamlet. The violence is not only gratuitous, it occurs in situations that would attract so much public attention that it would probably make national news. A gang going berserk in the middle of the day in the middle of large city? That would definitely attract attention. However, this movie seems to suggest that pandemonium can occur without anybody, including the police, taking any notice. A businessman is publicly threatened by a criminal posing as a messenger? That would definitely prompt an immediate and thorough investigation, not only by the police but by the company itself. As for John

**Goodman, his presence as some kind of underground gun toting pseudo gangster, pseudo gun runner, pseudo estranged father is one of the most flagrant examples of muddled miscasting in recent memory, and that's saying a lot for an industry where miscasting is practically the norm. Hollywood, please ... PLEASE ... get real, come back to earth, make movies with actual stories, with good acting and with artistic quality. It has been done, it CAN be done, and hopefully it will be done. If not, then there's always Popeye the Sailor and his pal Bluto.**

**The movie has its compelling moments, but ultimately it's just another distorted, contorted Hollywood revenge flick, with nonstop gratuitous violence and a thin storyline that defies credulity. The movie asks the audience to believe that a gunfight in broad daylight in the middle of the street in the business district of a large city will not attract the immediate attention of the police and that an illicit gun dealer operating in a large American city can do business without avoiding detection. The movie starts out well, and sets up a story with the potential for further development. But Hollywood being Hollywood, with its incessant drive to increase profits at the expense of artistic quality, the story gets more and more caught up in gratuitous violence with a predictable climax, thus becoming another potboiler. Kevon Bacon is a fine actor and here he gives a powerful performance as a businessman who is the victim of random violence and who lashes out in response, but the movie suggests that law enforcement authorities and our laws are inadequate to deter violence. Now one can say "it's only a movie," but that being the case, it should at least be a good movie with a substantive story. If one is interested in depictions of violence, just watch any documentary about World War Two, or about any other war, and then compare that with this movie, and then decide if violence is the answer to our social problems.**

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### **Deep Blue Sea (1999)**

**Respect the Shark., 11 August 2005**

**7 stars**

**This is an intense and exciting science fiction movie, with an interesting story. Also, the movie is well-acted, especially by LL Cool J, who makes this movie work through a great performance. Further, the movie has a useful message - not to tamper with nature and to respect the creatures who inhabit the planet with us. The shark is a fascinating but dangerous creature, to be admired - from a distance - and be respected too. When unprovoked, the shark is, well, a shark. But when man invades its habitat, then the shark reacts and conflict ensues. This movie does not improve the reputation of the shark, and in fact exploits our fear of sharks. For sharks**

are one of those creatures that defy man's attempts to control it, which is what this movie is about. Scientists want to study the shark, but the sharks refuse to cooperate. Shark enthusiasts may object to the way sharks are vilified in this movie. But no matter how you feel about sharks, the message of this movie is apparent - sharks are dangerous, should be respected and should be left alone.

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### **Defiance (2008/I)**

Remember, it's a movie, not a documentary., 24 January 2009

8 stars

Since this movie is allegedly based on a true story, this is what this movie "teaches" about being a Jewish partisan in World War Two: 1. it was a great opportunity to improve your social life, even to get married; 2. Jewish civilians were better soldiers than their German counterparts in the Wehrmacht; 3. Escaping from a Jewish ghetto was easy, just crawl through the hole in the wall while the guards are not looking; 4. it was a great time to learn how to play chess; 5. intellectuals were frowned upon; 6. Jews from time to time went around shooting up towns; 7. Jewish women looked great when cooking food for total strangers in the middle of a forest; 8. sometimes Jewish partisans thought about returning to the ghetto where it seemed safer; 9. Jewish partisans were able to destroy tanks and defeat heavily armed paramilitary troops; 10. Jews were able to walk through miles and miles of swamps without any ill effects. 11. Collaborators were paid 500 rubles for every Jew they turned over to the Germans. Hooray for the movies!

Now reality. This movie is excellent escapist fare that may make one feel better about being Jewish. The mere mention World War Two congers up images of Jews being arrested, deported and murdered by the score, by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the tens of thousands, by the hundreds of thousands and by the millions in facilities that were constructed specifically to systematically carry out a state sponsored policy of genocide. Fighting back was not an option. The victims were unarmed and defenseless civilians, a substantial number consisting of pregnant women, the frail elderly and infirmed and small children, including newborn babies. These were the enemies that the Germans had vowed to eradicate. These were the enemies that the German Wehrmacht fought against. And in every country occupied by the Germans, local inhabitants assisted the Germans in prosecuting their policy of genocide. As a work of fiction, movies have license to take liberties with the facts. But when a movie, such as this one, asserts that it is based on a true story, then the movie warrants further scrutiny regarding the veracity of the story and in this case the story

seems to be a romanticized account of events that have been schmaltzed up to make the movie more appealing. This movie is certainly worth watching but with this disclaimer: it's a movie, not a documentary. True, some Jews did fight back, such as in Warsaw, and some did organize themselves into partisan groups and when they had the opportunity trounced the Germans, but sustained resistance as independent fighting groups did not happen because it could not. Newborn babies do not make effective soldiers. Jews fighting against the Germans? That's pure Hollywood. It sounds good, looks good, feels good, but is it history?

The problem was not with the Jews, it was the Germans. What the Germans did under Adolf Hitler was insane and the question is not why did the Jews not fight back, but rather in what fantasy world were the Germans operating under to want them to fight the Jews?

Making a movie about Jews fighting back? Okay, what about this: a movie about the Germans in Hamburg fighting back as Hamburg is being pulverized then burnt by the British and the Americans. The point being, yeah maybe one or two Germans fired guns at the bombers and may have even scored a hit or two, but it was NO CONTEST! Or what about the "Battle of Cologne" in May 1942 when the British demolished the ENTIRE CITY! Okay, maybe the Germans managed to knock down one or two bombers, but again NO CONTEST! Why always show the Jews being mistreated? Show what happened to the Germans under their Fuehrer who they wholeheartedly supported. While Jews were scrounging for survival in a forest, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Dusseldorf, and scores of other cities were being systematically destroyed, yet the Germans failed to get rid of Hitler. What were they thinking? Indeed, were they even thinking?

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### **De-Lovely (2004)**

Let the music speak for itself., 6 November 2010  
8 stars

Cole Porter's music was great and Cole Porter was brilliant. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for this movie. A musical should be upbeat; this movie is ponderous. The musical numbers are fine; Kevin Kline is absolutely marvelous as Cole Porter but when the movie becomes a biopic it becomes stogy, melodramatic and slow and the music becomes secondary which is baffling since the movie is a musical. It's one thing to inject moments of sadness in the story; it is another thing to make those moments the cornerstone of a musical which is supposed to be upbeat, not downbeat. A musical should have the audience leaving the theater

humming the tunes, not feeling sorry for the composer. Moreover, regarding Cole Porter's sexuality: who cares? He wrote and performed songs; he was a bard, a modern day troubadour. With whom he cavorted is entirely irrelevant to his accomplishments as a performer. This movie would have been much more entertaining if it had devoted more time to the music, downplayed the personal stuff and ended with a bunch of upbeat songs. Hollywood had it right when the cast Cary Grant to play Cole Porter in 1946. Unfortunately, despite the marvelous music and Kevin Kline's superb performance, the same cannot be said for this movie. Let the music speak for itself.

The movie would have done much more justice to Mr. Porter if it had not relegated his songs to the background. His life was about music and music was his life. Like everyone, he had his personal issues but why dwell on that? Cole Porter was more than just a songwriter. He was a producer, composer, impresario, soldier, athlete and entertainer. He exuded joy, spread happiness and made people feel good through his work. His songs today are not only classics, they are icons for an entire culture. And this was recognized while Mr. Porter was still alive. Well-deserved accolades were expressed during his career. He became a living legend. Along with Irving Berlin and George M. Cohan, Cole Porter was top of the line, the best, the epitome of artistic quality.

Here's a few items about Mr. Porter life that the movie leaves out: He was born and raised in Indiana. He wrote over 300 songs while in college. He received musical training at Harvard. He was a musical prodigy as a child. He served in the French Foreign Legion.

If the judged sole by music, the movie rates a 10. However, for reasons noted above, it has been given an overall rating of 7.

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### **Demolition Man (1993)**

A sci-fi comedy, 24 September 2007  
8 stars

#### **Comment #1**

Is this movie classified as a comedy? Because if it's not, it should be. Not only is this movie a sci-fi thriller, this movie contains some great lines, most of which are said by Sandra Bullock and Wesley Snipes, who gives one of the great performances in the sci-fi genre. Simon Phoenix is an incredible character and Mr. Snipes performs the role to near perfection. This movie is not merely another sci-fi special effects potboiler, rather it

actually contains an interesting and engaging story with lots of action and humor which makes for an entertaining movie. And don't forget to be on the lookout for Associate Bob who is the ultimate brown-nosing, a--kissing flunky. Although AB is a fictional character, once you see him in the movie you will immediately recognize him because in life who hasn't ever come across an Associate Bob?

## Comment #2

It's not about John Spartan. It's not about Simon Phoenix. It's not about Lenina Huxley. It's about the character Associate Bob. Yes, this movie is about how a man is able to survive during times of change by bending in whatever direction the wind is blowing. Spartan and Phoenix are literally demolishing a city as they renew their struggle after thirty years of being frozen in a huge refrigerator-like machine and then being defrosted to fight each other another day, Spartan on the side of the "good guys" and Phoenix as the tool of a megalomaniac who wants to create a new society. And while all this is happening, Associate Bob - fat, greasy, effete, with a pompadour that never gets ruffled - offers his services to whom ever may be winning - and never gets rejected. Is there some kind of message here? Maybe. Is this the movie's way of telling us how to survive in an ever changing society?

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## Derailed (2005/I)

Those who seek trouble shall find it., 8 December 2005

9 stars

This is one great movie. It starts out slowly, seems predictable and then ZAP, here come the surprises. And what's better: there are no "good guys" in this story. Everyone is corrupt, only some more so than others. The guy getting ripped off is responsible for his own victimization. He goes out of his way to find trouble - AND FINDS IT! What makes this movie particularly entertaining however is Jennifer Aniston's character. Her character is central to the entire story and Ms. Aniston gives a great performance. And Victor Cassel is great as a wanton criminal who preys on the weak. Or is it on those who deserve it? Watch the movie and find out for yourself.

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## **Downfall (2004)**

**Great movie., 30 March 2008**

**10 stars**

**This movie probably provides the best dramatic treatment of Adolf Hitler. Unlike other movies that tend to present Hitler as a caricature, this movie opts to portray Hitler as a historical person and not as a clown. Although it is easy to reduce Hitler to a subject for mockery, this movie avoids that temptation and instead presents an Adolf Hitler the person whose actions are made even more sinister, baffling and amazing by the sheer banality of his existence. In this movie Hitler is shown not as a hysteric, not as the bombastic political actor, leader and rabble rouser familiar in all too many documentaries, but as a frail, broken, disillusioned man whose dreams have been shattered and whose closest advisers have all but abandoned him. Yet, even as Hitler himself realizes that his demise is all but inevitable, the movie shows how the cohort of secretaries, clerks and party flunkies who formed Hitler's personal staff refused to leave him and opted to stay with the Fuhrer to the bitter end. This level of devotion to a failed and doomed head of state is perhaps unprecedented in history. While the Third Reich was crumbling they stayed with the man who was responsible for the destruction of their country. Yet the same man who was capable of ordering the conquest of entire countries and the extermination of entire peoples was also capable of individual acts of kindness that makes his career all the more baffling to the audience. Can the personality and career of Adolf Hitler ever be fully explained? Maybe not, but this excellent movie at least provides a plausible glimpse of what Hitler may have been about and how his dreams of new world order came crashing down.**

**Also, special mention must be made of Bruno Ganz's uncanny resemblance to Adolf Hitler. Mr. Ganz gives what has to be the most outstanding cinematic portrayal of Adolf Hitlee. Mr. Ganz succeeds in portraying Hitler as a caricature and instead provides a credible and even-handed portrayal of a person whose actions have been the cause for the kind of scorn and mockery that obscures who Hitler was as a man.**

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## **"Desperate Housewives: Bang (#3.7)" (2006)**

**This episode has restored my faith in commercial television., 6 April 2009**

**Shockingly, amazingly, surprisingly, astonishingly, this is one of the best episodes ever shown in a TV series of any genre. When one is reasonably expecting fluff and instead is presented with high, and well-acted, drama, well, that is indeed a pleasant surprise. Not only does this series reach for**

something more than just the usual comedic fare, it achieves it. Lori Metcalf was great! the interactions between all the characters, wonderful and the story itself serious and substantive without becoming melodramatic. But what makes this particular episode so enjoyable is the way that all of the characters and all of the actors interact in a manner that heightens the drama and makes the story that much more interesting for the audience. Congratulations to all involved in this production.

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### Devil (2010)

Powerful, compelling, evocative,, 6 October 2010  
10 stars

There's a little bit of the devil in all of us. If you believe this statement, then this movie is for you because it's all about the devil. Yes, the devil can visit at anytime and for any reason to sow confusion and fear and to wreak retribution for terrible acts we humans are too cowardly to admit. Some may think of the devil as a malevolent spirit that operates to tempt and torment us; but perhaps the devil is a projection of our own fears. Who knows? This movie inspires the audience to ponder these questions.

This is a great movie for its genre. It grabs and keeps the audience's interest. There is solid acting, lots of tension and a climactic ending. Jenny O'Hara is great as the old woman. She is the same actress who played Doug's mother in the sitcom King of Queens. In this movie she is anything but benign. The special effects added to the tension, especially the use of sound effects which greatly enhanced the sense of something terrible happening. Beside being a "scare" movie, it's also a morality tale. There are those who may dismiss this movie as a minor cinematic work but this movie tells a powerful, compelling and evocative story of retribution. The characters in this story become unwitting instruments for forces beyond control and understanding. Whether one believes in these things is not point. Rather, the movie gives one cause to at least consider the possibility.

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## **The Counterfeiters (2007)**

**Nazi depravity., 6 May 2008**

**10 stars**

**Powerful, provocative, disturbing, well-acted movie, obviously not a Hollywood product. Unlike the usual sensationalist Hollywood drivel, this movie tells a compelling, unforgettable story that transcends the dismal background in which the story is set. However, like other movies about the Holocaust, the Jews are portrayed as victims who are in moral crisis. What price is one willing to pay to survive? This is the question posed by this movie and it's a question that's been asked time and time again in other movies. But the question really is not applicable to the victims who did what they had to do to try to survive. Instead the moral question is applicable to the Germans who perpetrated the crimes. At what point does an entire nation decide to scrap their culture and follow a path to their own destruction? At what point does a German who is not necessarily a racist or mentally deficient decide to become a Nazi? In the 20th century there was only one nation that became Nazi, and that nation was Germany. So what was their problem? What defect of character caused them, and them alone, to jubilantly follow Adolf Hitler - even as their armies and cities were being systematically destroyed? This movie shows that there were two kind of Nazis - first, one who was completely imbued with anti-Semitic hysteria and therefore completely incapable of rationale thought and second, one who knew better but nonetheless became a Nazi anyway. The former had no moral qualms - they were degenerate, utterly debased, possibly genetically defective, and therefore hopelessly lacking in consciousness. They would have thrown their own parents into concentration camps if ordered to do so. The latter however had a huge problem. They are the fools who CHOSE to become degenerate. How does a police officer transform himself into a smirking, paper-pushing terrorist? This is the question implicit in this movie. The Jews were the victims, their situation was set for them, the Germans the misguided charlatans who decided to make war against almost the entire world causing a conflagration they could not win and who supported a political leadership that is arguably the most discredited in history. The moral bankruptcy of the Germans is starkly portrayed in this movie. Their choices are bizarre and bewildering. To know right from wrong and still do wrong is the theme of this movie and one that the movie presents in a most direct way. How many of us could be an obersturmbahnfuhrer?**

**This movie also raises another interesting question: were the German Nazis even human? Yes they inhabited the earth in human form, but their behavior was so unique, weird and utterly baffling that it defies all psychiatric explanation. What did the German Nazis see that others did not? For an entire nation to support a plan to exterminate the Jews and**

enslave all the Slavs is so unreal that it suggests either an organic defect that effected perception and judgment or other more esoteric causes.

On May 31, 1942, over two years BEFORE the D-Day invasion, the British bombed Cologne, Germany, destroying the entire center of the city. It was obvious from that point on that German cities and civilians were open targets and that the Nazi government was incapable of defending the country against attack. Yet Germany kept fighting, and for what? This depressing mindset is portrayed in this movie as the German Nazis sink deeper and deeper into a moral depravity that drives them to concoct the most fantastic criminal schemes in a hopeless cause.

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### Four in a Jeep (1951)

Let's not forget Ralph Meeker., 14 November 2005  
8 stars

This movie is not exactly a household name. In fact, this movie may be one of the best kept secrets in the pantheon of movies. Has anyone ever heard of this movie besides me? I guess not. So I'm doing this critique for an audience of one - me. Oh well, might as well proceed. This movie is about four soldiers, one American, One Russian, One British and One French, patrolling in post-war Vienna, Austria, in the period immediately after the end of World War Two and how they interact with each other, and with a certain woman who wants to leave the Russian zone. The American is played by the excellent, and regrettably forgotten actor Ralph Meeker, which gets to the point of this essay. Ralph Meeker was a great actor and he proves it in this movie. Mr. Meeker is one of those stars who shown brightly for a little while and then for reasons unknown his stardom burnt out. This is an obscure movie, and perhaps does not deserve any more attention that it has received thus far, but if that's the case, it's not because of Ralph Meeker, whose performance in this movie deserves at least some consideration, even if the movie itself deserves none.

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### Dinner for Schmucks (2010)

A Steve Carell vehicle., 13 August 2010  
7 stars

After getting off to a slow start the movie picks up steam and becomes entertaining. Steve Carell again proves that he may the best comic actor in Hollywood today. He carries this movie. Without him the movie would have

been unwatchable. The actual story is simple to the point of inanity. The attempts at farce fall flat but Mr. Carell delivers his lines with such feeling that he makes even the most trite and inane comments sound convincing. The title itself indicates what this story is about, except that the schmucks are not who you think they are, which is what makes it a good movie. The movie causes the audience to ask: who are the schmucks? Most of the characters are goofy but not funny. Paul Rudd's straight man is weak and the female roles are unfunny. This movie is a vehicle for Steve Carell. It is his movie and he makes the most of it, weak material and all.

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### **Disclosure (1994)**

Where is Al Bundy when we need him?, 5 June 2009

2 stars

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

Imagine this: A beautiful, intelligent albeit cunning woman wants to have sex with a man, indeed **INSISTS** on having sex with the man, and not only does the man say no he has to fight her off while she is attempting to get him to perform and then sues her for sexual harassment - and wins the case! If you believe this is a plausible scenario, then this movie is for you.

The idea of a married man being sexually victimized by a hot, beautiful single woman who also happens to be his boss is so ludicrous as to be mind boggling and actually provokes laughter. A married man fighting off the a full-figured, highly intelligent, sexually aggressive young single woman, together with the wine drinking, the mutual caressing, the suggestive talking, and the woman openly insisting that he "do" her and do her good, with the man then fleeing for his life like a little boy who's been told not to put his hand in the cookie jar, even though he wants the cookies, followed by the now scantily-clothed sexually frustrated hot-blooded woman yelling at him to come back, or else, is just too much to accept, even for a Hollywood movie. She's making him an offer he can't refuse, and he refuses! What kind of movie is that? This scenario constitutes abuse of plausibility punishable by banishment to DVD-land where this laughable joke of a movie belongs. Where is Al Bundy when we need him?

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## District 9

Best science fiction movie in years., 15 August 2009

10 stars

It would be easy to poke holes in the story. What would be considered the most momentous event in human history, the arrival of aliens in a space ship, is reduced to the level of caricature as the aliens are portrayed as pests that have to be controlled and relocated. However, there is nothing implausible about that. Once the novelty had worn off, the presence of aliens probably would become something that would be taken for granted, especially if there were no way for them to leave. And furthermore, which country in the world would want to be responsible for having to deal with them? Hence, in the movie one country is stuck with having to deal with them, and that is not far-fetched at all. This movie is the best science fiction project produced by Hollywood in many years. The movie has an offbeat original story, great acting, lots of action, continuity and an actual beginning, middle and end. The plot is clearly spelled out and grabs and maintains audience interest. Also, the movie offers an innovative and sympathetic treatment of the aliens which further enriches the story. The movie inspires a short but profound question: what would we do if millions of aliens from who-knows-where showed up at earth and could not leave? Furthermore, the movie is without any pretentiousness and is presented in a straightforward, semi-documentary format which gives it an air of authenticity. The story may seem far-fetched but anything can happen and remember, what was once considered fiction in the past, such as devices allowing for instantaneous communication over huge distances and vehicles that can travel through space to other planets, is now reality today.

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## Doctor Zhivago (1965)

A true artist will not be bought off., 30 July 2005

9 stars

It's amazing how one's perceptions of something can change, such as one's opinion of a movie like Doctor Zhivago. Heretofore this movie had seemed to be overly long, stagy, pretentious and boring. But after watching the movie again, this is another take on the story. The movie is about creativity in times of turmoil, about artistic integrity and about a man's desire not only to survive but to do so on his own terms. The main character, Doctor Zhivago, could have easily sold out to the Bolsheviks but at the price of his artistic integrity, which he would not surrender at any

price. Far from being stagy, the acting is powerful, the scenes intense, the conflicts well defined. Throughout the movie the Doctor has choices to make and his choices are always on the side of what is good for those for whom he cares. Zhivago's half-brother, Yuri, serves as a metaphor for what the Doctor would have become if he had towed the line, just another bureaucrat. This movie offers an inspirational story about a man who stays true to his beliefs while under immense pressure to conform. Wonderful movie.

If someone is suffering from insomnia or some other kind of sleep deprivation disorder, permit me to recommend a dose of Doctor Zhivago. Now this statement may come as a surprise to any history aficionado who has ever studied the Russian Revolution in which the story of this movie takes place. Few, if any, events in human history were more exciting and dynamic than the Russian Revolution. But after this movie gets through with the Russian Revolution, you may never want to study history again. In this movie the Russian Revolution is relegated to being a mere back-drop for some kind of convoluted love-triangle, or love-square, or love-something, all revolving around the character of Yuri Zhivago who has to be the weakest central character ever contrived in the history of Hollywood. Now, a dramatic movie is not a documentary and one should not expect more than the usual Hollywood treatment of great events in history. But this movie is so banal and the characters, with the exception of Komorofsky, so weak, unlikable, pretentious and forgettable, that one may lose all interest in history and make believe that the Russian Revolution never happened. But at least you'll get a good night's sleep.

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### "Dog Whisperer with Cesar Millan" (2004)

A dog is a dog., 6 January 2006

This review is for all the maladjusted and acting out dogs. Woof ... woof ... woof, woof ... grrrrr ... arf, arf, arf ... grrrrr ... arf!! arf!! ... woof! ... arf! ... woof, woof, woof ... arf, woof, growl ... growl, arf, woof ... woof, growl, arf!!!

What do you when your dog seems to be mentally disturbed? Call Cesar Millan. Now, although this show is intriguing, Mr. Millan, or is it Doctor Millan (is he a veterinarian?) takes on problem dogs that seem to be temperamental but not particularly vicious. It seems that all of the dogs on this show that are "treated" are spoiled by owners who are unwilling to make the effort to place limits on the behavior of their pets. So the problem isn't the dog, it's the people who own the dogs. After all, a dog is ... a dog, and given the chance, a dog will act like a dog. What else is new? Indeed,

there's one episode in which the dog is given food and then starts snarling every time someone approaches the bowl. Well, if you were a dog, and someone approached your bowl while you were eating, wouldn't you snarl too? And then there's the episode about the dog that couldn't stop walking. Frankly, who cares?

2 out of 60 readers found my comments useful? Okay. Let's reexamine the pros and cons of this television show. On the pro side, the show is entertaining and the dog-whisperer is a friendly and engaging character who really seems to care about the dogs he is trying to help. Now on the con side, the show suggests that dogs should behave like human beings and these expectations are not only unfair to the dogs, which are not human beings, but generate unrealistic expectations among their human owners who are confused and made to feel inadequate. Dogs are wonderful creatures. Their relationship with man extends back to antiquity. Their place in history is profound. They are man's closest animal companions. But for goodness sake, let's not forget that dogs are animals and not facsimiles of human beings and should be respected and admired for those qualities that make them so special.

A dog is a dog.

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### **Donnie Brasco (1997)**

Johnny Depp is not believable in this movie., 7 June 2009  
7 stars

There is something sad, indeed pathetic, watching actors playing racketeers. Even more pathetic is the portrayal of a police officer actually infiltrating a gang without being found out by the gangsters. Asking the audience to empathize with a gangster is a tall order. Okay, gangsters are people too and have their good sides but to ask the audience to believe that an undercover police officer and informant can actually develop some kind of fondness for the target of his investigation is stretching things a bit far. Johnny Depp was woefully miscast for the role of the undercover officer. There is no way that Mr. Depp's character as played by Mr. Depp would not have been quickly found out. He just does not come across as a tough guy which is what he would have to have been in a world populated by tough guys. His character is too polished and stands out like a proverbial sore thumb. Al Pacino gives a far more credible performance as one of the tough guys. Indeed, he should have played Brasco. In Stalag 17 the informant was the soldier who everyone trusted. Why? Because he fit right in with all the other soldiers. The same cannot be said for Donnie

**Brasco in this movie who is so obviously not a gangster that it's almost laughable.**

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### **Doomsday (2008)**

**Great movie., 21 March 2008**

**8 stars**

**I am tempted to rag this movie, to make fun of this movie, to mock this movie, to deride this movie, to trash this movie, to utterly lash out at this movie with all of my literary might, but I won't and why not you may ask? Well, I'll tell you why not: this is an entertaining movie and definitely one of the better movie of the science-fiction genre. Okay, the director liberally borrows from other movies like Mad Max and Alien, and the story gets a little muddled, but the end product is something that is part goofy, part campy and all entertaining. What is best about the movie is the acting. Craig Conway gives one of the great over-the-top performances in any movie. Mr. Conway's performance actually carries the movie. Also, Ms. Rhoda Mitra is absolutely wonderful in the leading role. She could be the next Sandra Bullock which is saying a lot because Sandra Bullock is a great actress. Also the movie maintains a high energy level and offers an interesting subplot of family conflict which although far-fetched works for this movie.**

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### **Double Indemnity (1944)**

**Office bureaucrat as hero., 25 January 2008**

**10 stars**

**The movie was made in Hollywood which means that the movie should have plenty of things wrong with it. Since the movie was made by Hollywood, one could reasonably expect the movie to be intellectually shallow, poorly acted, contain an insipid love story, and be altogether entirely forgettable. In other words, another potboiler. But as much as I wanted to, I couldn't find anything wrong with this movie! This movie is terrific! Fred MacMurray (the gentleman from My Three Sons) plays one of the great heels in Hollywood motion picture history. Barbara Stanwyck ( who was from Brooklyn, New York) is at her sinister best. But the real star is Edward G. Robinson. His performance as the the insurance actuary Walter Neff is incredible. How many movies are there that portrays an office bureaucrat as a hero? That is what makes this movie so unique. This movie is a tribute to all the office workers of the world who push the papers,**

compile the facts, analyze the information and keep things going. Maybe if NASA had listened to their Walter Neffs, the 1986 Challenger disaster would have been averted. Who knows? But after watching this movie, one thing is certain: respect your office workers because someday they may save your life ... and your business.

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### Dracula (1992)

A slow, ponderous piece of celluloid., 29 April 2008  
5 stars

Zzzzzz ... zzzzzzz ... zzzzzzz ..... oh, the movie's still on (yawn) ... zzzzzzz ... zzzzzzz ..... Oh, the movie's still on. I'm going back to sleep (yawn) .... What an incredibly slow and boring movie. Interminable talking. The movie attempts to take the Dracula story in a new direction and gets lost on the way. A simple, straightforward story is made into a convoluted, complex melodrama. After Bela Lugosi, who else can really play Dracula? Gary Oldman gives a good performance of Dracula ... in slow motion. It's not his fault, it's the material he has to work with. Dracula is an overpowering force but in this movie he is a more introspective, almost human character, still powerful, still menacing, but somehow in this movie not nearly as shocking as previous versions of the movie. The movie does have its moments but all in all it's a slow, ponderous, dull, plodding piece of celluloid.

Beware of a movie that relies on narration to tell a story. Case in point: this movie. Don't talk it, show it.

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### Dragnet (1987)

Hilarious movie., 17 February 2006  
10 stars

What an incredibly hilarious movie. This spoof on Dragnet is absolutely entertaining. Dan Ackroyd's performance as Sgt. Joe Friday is outstanding, along with Tom Hanks performance as Sgt. Friday's partner. In this movie Mr. Hanks shows his ability to perform comedy, as a straight man to a character whose pomposity is exceeded only by his inflexibility. In this spoof of the original Dragnet series, Sgt Friday is a puffed up martinet whose behavior is so absurd that it is actually funny. The original Sgt Friday probably would have been puzzled and chagrined over his

transformation into a petty buffoon, but when Dan Ackroyd is playing the role, be prepared to laugh.

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### **Due Date (2010)**

**Downey Jr. and Galifianakis may be the new Laurel and Hardy., 5  
November 2010  
10 stars**

**Absolutely funny movie. Robert Downey Jr. and Zach Galifianakis are wonderful together. They are the modern day Laurel and Hardy. One is fastidious and pompous, the other a witless but lovable oaf. They get into all kinds of jams and of course whatever they do just makes things worse. There are many great one-liners and what is even better, the story is dynamic as the fellas are on the move - literally. They bicker, they fight, they yell, they laugh, they make up, they care about each other, they're friends. It's a cross country comedy. Along the way they meet all kinds of interesting and amusing characters which add to the movie's upbeat mood. This is a zany movie, one that keeps the audience's attention and makes the audience laugh. If you like slapstick comedy and want to watch a movie that is pure escapism then this movie is for you. It's worth the time. And if this movie spawns a sequel, hopefully it will star the two lead actors who did such a wonderful job in this first-rate comedy.**

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### **Duplicity (2009)**

**Avoid this movie., 23 March 2009  
4 stars**

**What is this baffling movie about? There is good chemistry between Julia Roberts and Clive Owen but it all goes for naught in this meandering, confusing, mishmash of a movie. The movie takes the audience on a tour of some of most popular travel spots on the planet but leaves the audience trying to figure out what they actually watched. What makes watching this movie even more challenging is the repeated use of flashbacks which just destroys whatever little continuity the movie contained. Further weakening the story is the outlandishly ludicrous prize that is at stake which when revealed is such a letdown that even the characters in the story laugh at it. If you are fan of Julia Roberts or Clive Owens, you will find the movie barely watchable. Otherwise, avoid it.**

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## **Eagle Eye (2008)**

**Respect the cell phone., 3 October 2008**

**9 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**You are being watched. This movie offers a compelling story that takes invasion of privacy to an extreme. This movie is like an updated version of The Forbin Project or 2001 A Space Odyssey, both of which offer sinister portrayals of the dangers of technology out of control. The story is told in a frantic manner, with lots of noise and action, and the acting is equally frantic with everyone conveying various levels of anxiety. But the real stars are the myriad cameras, microphones, telephones, and other electronic devices that are used with such merciless effectiveness as tools of terror. After watching this movie you will have a far greater respect for your cell phone, which may be not only be a communication device, but also an instrument for collecting information for unknown and all-powerful third parties whose motives are shrouded in secrecy.**

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## **Earth (2007)**

**They're animals, not humans., 23 April 2009**

**7 stars**

**This is a good documentary with some impressive scenes but offers nothing new that has not already been shown in numerous documentaries shown on television. Also, the attempt to dramatize the life of the animals depicted falls flat. No matter how much one may want to go about anthropomorphizing the lives of animals, they are still animals. For instance, a whale swimming with her young calf is an interesting and even impressive sight, but that's all it is; it is devoid of any drama. The whale is just being a whale. It's not showing off, not trying to make a point about life, it's not acting, and not trying to make a statement. It's life is about eating, swimming and performing certain bodily functions. That is it! To make a movie that suggests that there is something more is disingenuous and unfair to the animals who basically just want to be left alone. The best thing that can be done for our fellow creatures is to admire them, respect their right to live and to care for them but for goodness sake, not to humanize them.**

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## **Eastern Promises (2007)**

**WARNING: Any resemblance between the Russians portrayed in this movie and actual Russians is purely coincidental, 21 September 2007**

**3 stars**

**First, before you watch this movie please be advised that any resemblance between any Russians portrayed in this movie and any actual Russians, living or deceased, is purely coincidental. Now that Russians are portrayed as being a bunch of degenerate, child-abusing, vodka swigging, mindless cutthroats (literally), let's leave fantasy-land and go to the facts. The same people who this movie portrays as being lower than the lowest Nazi thugs thwarted and repelled the insane attempt of 3 million Nazis to destroy the Soviet Union. By December 1941 the Russians had stopped the Nazis in their track and by 1944 had evicted the invaders and then literally chased them back to Berlin which the Russians without any outside help then proceeded to systematically conquer and pacify - and did this against fanatical Nazi opposition. Indeed, the Battle of Berlin is now legendary. There's more! The Russians were the first to launch a satellite into orbit; the first to launch an animal into space; the first to launch a man into orbit; the first to launch a woman into space; the first to accomplish a space walk; the first to launch a space station; the first to place an object on the moon; and the first to place an object on the surface of another planet. During the Depression of the 1930s the U.S. unemployment rate was estimated at being 25 percent while in the Soviet Union, where Russians were the majority of the population, unemployment was zero. Indeed, while the West was sinking deeper and deeper into economic quicksand the Soviet Union was experiencing a period of massive industrialization and economic expansion. Even today Russia commands respect and is a country to be reckoned with. The point of this historical retrospective is to provide a more balanced picture of the Russian people who have produced some of the greatest novelists, composers and artists in history. Okay, now back to the movie. This movie can be best described in one word, bizarre. The violence is graphic and the characters, including the ones who are supposed to be nice, are nasty, except for the baby who is very cute and always smiling. This movie seems to be a take-off on The Godfather, but without the polish and finesse that marked that excellent movie. The music was oppressive and the ending was anti-climatic. Vigo Mortensen gives a powerful performance which is not matched by the other actors. If you like movies that have gratuitous violence, such as an incredible fight scene in a sauna, unlikeable characters, graphic portrayals of degenerate acts, including statutory rape, and ponderous scripts then this movie is for you. What makes this movie even more ludicrous is that the story takes place not in Moscow or some other Russian venue, but in London, England. So after watching this movie, all you British people be on the lookout for vodka-guzzling, gun-totting Russian-speaking cut-throats because one of**

them may be your neighbor. And for goodness sake, next time you take car service please make sure that the driver isn't carrying a dagger because that driver may actually be hit-man for the Russian mafia. DUH!!!!

February 1, 1943: The New York Times reports that the Russians captured 16 Nazi generals and the entire German 6th Army at a place called Stalingrad.

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### **Easy Living (1937)**

Another wonderful movie featuring Edward Arnold., 3 May 2008  
9 stars

This is an amusing, entertaining Hollywood antique featuring a number of actors who became Hollywood icons such as Jean Arthur, Ray Milland, and Edward Arnold. Before Ed Asner there was Edward Arnold. Mr. Arnold was one of the greatest actors in Hollywood history. His performances were consistently great and through him a weak script became good and good script great. He was one of those actors who dominated the screen and could play a wide range of roles opposite some of the most famous Hollywood players. As for Jean Arthur, she specialized in a style of acting that established a precedent for Lucille Ball, except that Ms. Arthur did not have to act goofy. Movies from the 1930s were made in a certain style that was unique to that period. Black-and-white, simple, engaging, upbeat stories, lots of action, and optimistic about life - all this during the Great Depression. This is another Preston Sturges gem and definitely is worth watching.

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### **Edge of Darkness (2010)**

This movie needed Charles Bronson., 14 February 2010  
3 stars

Is this movie for real? This has to be the worst movie of Mel Gibson's acting career. Mr. Gibson's phony Boston accent. Pot boiler story. Conventional plot. This movie was an excruciating experience. Nothing about this movie worked. This movie is formula Hollywood at its very banal worst. The sensational aspects of the story are completely buried by Mel Gibson's inane acting which is unbelievably bad. Where was the director when Mr. Gibson was saying his lines? Never has there been a greater need for a dialog coach than for this movie. Never has there been a major

**motion picture that needed a re-write than this movie. The story is completely transparent and devoid of any originality. As soon as Mel Gibson opens his mouth this movie is in trouble. It lacks plausibility. Nothing in this story is believable. Let's face it: This movie needed Charles Bronson but instead had to settle for Mel Gibson. Well, Mr. Gibson is no Charles Bronson. Why was this movie made? If it was made to resurrect Mel Gibson's floundering career, it failed. Watching this movie is a waste of time and money. Creativity and originality are swept aside in this avalanche of sensationalist mediocrity featuring a discredited actor.**

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### **Eight Below (2006)**

**It's about the dogs., 15 March 2006**

**9 stars**

**The acting in this movie is weak. Now that I got that out of the way, let me tell you why this film is worth watching: the outdoor photography and the dogs. This movie contains some of the most impressive outdoor cinematography that one can hope or expect to see in a Hollywood movie. This movie shows the awesome and forbidding beauty of icebergs, ice flows and glacier-covered mountains. Compared to these magnificent edifices of nature, man is rendered almost utterly insignificant, a mere dot in a wilderness of ice that is almost endless. Indeed, the scenery is spectacular. That's one interesting part of the movie. But the main part of the movie are the dogs - eight of them. This movie offers a wonderful story about eight brave and stalwart creatures which are determined to survive in the polar wilderness. Having been abandoned by their owner, the dogs must fend for themselves, and they do so, by staying together, working as a team, looking out for each other and caring for each other. They set an example for us humans to follow. That's why this is a movie that's not about us, but about those wonderful dogs.**

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### **Elizabeth (1998)**

**Queen Elizabeth - one of a kind., 27 November 2005**

**9 stars**

**Enough is enough! One day Hollywood will drop this propensity for focusing on the personal quirks of historical figures and actually focus on what they DID. The story of Elizabeth the First is way more than who she had affairs with, but what she accomplished as Queen. When decisions had to be made, decisions on which the survival of her country depended, she**

made these decisions ... and her decisions were RIGHT! Elizabeth was never prepared or trained to rule a country. But she did the job and did it so well that to this day her name has become synonymous with leadership, accomplishment and service. Queen Elizabeth was a hero; Queen Elizabeth was great. Under her outstanding leadership Britain defeated the Spanish Armada, then the biggest naval force ever assembled. That alone warrants a movie. Elizabeth was emotional and tempestuous. That she suppresses those traits and transforms herself into the "Virgin Queen" is fantastic. This movie is about that transformation. If you're interested in the life of Elizabeth the First, then watch this movie. But remember, it's what Elizabeth DID which is what counts.

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### **Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007)**

Cate Blanchett is wonderful, 12 October 2007  
10 stars

This movie approaches the brink of becoming another corny, hokey Hollywood travesty but recovers to become an incredibly powerful and unique portrayal of Elizabeth I and her closest advisers and the political situation in Western Europe in the late 16th century. Cate Blanchett offers a masterful, powerful and provocative portrayal of the Virgin Queen which unlike most Hollywood portrayals of historical personages does not devolve into a laughable caricature. Elizabeth has feelings too and cares about ALL of her people, not just those who are of her religious persuasion. Also, the movie offers a credible portrayal of Elizabeth's relationship with her cousin Mary as well as a credible and comprehensible explanation of King Philip's decision to go to war against England. Whether Spain in 1585 was the most powerful country in the world as the movie purports is a matter for debate but the fact that there was a time in history when Spain actually wanted to invade England is amazing and is a story in itself. This movie is worth watching.

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### **Empire of the Sun (1987)**

Wartime captivity from a young boy's perspective., 16 September 2005  
8 stars

Hollywood's treatment of the Japanese in World War Two movies is always harsh, maybe deservedly so. According to many published histories, the Japanese treated American and other Allied POWs with cruelty bordering on outright barbarism. Incidents, such as the infamous Bataan Death

March, are cited as examples of Japanese cruelty. Yet this movie attempts to portray the Japanese in a more balanced and less stereotypical way. True, in this movie too, there are scenes of Japanese beating POWs and forcing the POWs to live in conditions of abject squalor, but to the young boy in the movie, he perceives the Japanese differently. He sincerely respects the Japanese, for their dedication, tenacity, and discipline and in response the Japanese come to respect him too. The movie shows how the young boy went so far as to learn some Japanese, my point being that this movie succeeds in offering a far more sympathetic portrayal of the Japanese than found in other movies of this genre. I'm sure that some POWs who had to endure months and even years of captivity under the Japanese may object to such a portrayal, with valid grounds for feeling that way. Nevertheless, this movie is worth watching.

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### Enemy at the Gates (2001)

A Potentially Great Movie Rendered Mediocre, 30 July 2005  
6 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Stalingrad. The largest single battle in recorded history, or maybe in the history of the universe. Two huge armies fighting over control of a huge industrial city with factory complexes one-mile long located in one of the most inaccessible parts of western Russia. The outcome of World War Two hinges on the outcome of this stupendous battle. The battle itself should have been more than sufficient to render this movie great, or at least nearly great. But, alas, that does not happen. Instead, this movie attempts to give us an "up close and personal" account of the battle of Stalingrad in the form of some kind of contest between one German soldier and one Russian soldier to prove who's the best sniper. Well, who cares? At least a million soldiers and civilians died in this battle, so what's the fuss about two individual soldiers? The beginning of the movie is most compelling, but when the story evolves, or devolves, into some kind of personal struggle, then, if you take this movie at face value, maybe the Battle of Stalingrad was nothing but a big soap opera, the outcome of which just happened to change the course of history. Oh, by the way, there's also a love scene in this movie. (Imagine having a love scene in Guadalcanal Diary.)

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## **Everybody's Fine (2009)**

**A brilliant performance by a great actor., 4 December 2009**

**10 stars**

**How many times have you ever asked, or ever were asked the question: How are things? Invariably, one replies, "everything is fine," except of course it's not true. The response is a polite brush-off. This movie is about how a man decides not to accept the brush-off, this time coming from his own children and as a result makes some interesting discoveries. This movie contains Robert DeNiro's strongest role in years. The entire story revolves around his character and he really brings the character to life. A brilliant performance by a great actor. This movie is like Robert Young in *Father-Knows-Best* deciding to really connect with his children after years of just being around. What's even better is that the movie avoids becoming trite and effectively brings the audience into this family's world as the story explores themes that are relevant to all families. Children grow up, leave the home, go their separate ways, leaving behind memories. A wonderful movie.**

**Ah, platitudes. We're all guilty of using them. They're a polite way of telling someone to buzz off, that you don't want to talk to them, that they are unworthy of your time. This movie is all about platitudes, most cruelly applied when it's least needed or wanted. In this movie a man wants to initiate communication with his children, all of whom are adults and have long since left the home, and he and his children go through a lot of changes as they attempt to bridge the gulf that separates them. This doesn't mean the children don't care about their father, they do. But the emotional closeness was never there and this is what this movie is about: breaking down barriers to establish an emotional connection. This movie is a Robert DeNiro vehicle. It is his re-emergence onto the Hollywood scene after years of cinematic oblivion. His performance is a tour de force; he deserves at least an Academy Award nomination for best actor. He carries the movie. Drew Barrymore also gives an impressive performance as one of Mr. DeNiro's daughters. Ms. Barrymore shines on the screen and proves once again that she is one of the premiere actresses in Hollywood. Sam Rockwell and Kate Beckinsdale also are excellent. What a great movie! Never cold-shoulder your father.**

**This is the best Robert DeNiro movie in years. His strong acting carries this sentimental story about a man trying to reconnect with his children. The movie places a strong emphasis on family relationships and does an excellent job in engaging and keeping the audience's attention as Mr. DeNiro's character embarks on an odyssey of emotional discovery. At times the story verges on becoming openly maudlin but succeeds in avoiding that pitfall. The movie also avoids becoming hokey and corny and**

succeeds in staying on course as the DeNiro character continues on his journey. All in all, this is a wonderful movie featuring a strong performance by Robert DeNiro. After watching this movie, you will think twice before telling someone "everybody's fine" unless you mean it.

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### **Fast & Furious (2009)**

Thumbs up for Laz Alonzo, but ya gotta show more of the ladies!, 4 April 2009

7 stars

Okay world, we have a new bad guy, a new nemesis, a new Hollywood heavy, Fenix Rise played by Laz Alonzo. Although billed as a supporting cast member, Mr. Alonzo carries this movie. He saves this otherwise routine action movie from cinematic complacency. The movie has a flimsy story, a ridiculous plot, and good if not exceptional acting from the two leads. Vin Diesel is always wonderful, but he's not the same great character from the original. However, the beautiful Jordana Brewster gives a credible performance but the incredible Michelle Rodriguez is practically nowhere to be found, which further weakens the movie. Why Ms. Rodriguez is given so little play is puzzling and her absence lowers the temperature of this movie by several degrees. Actresses like Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster are meant to be seen and admired, so, Hollywood, please showcase them because they are wonderful ... and hot.

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### **Fatal Attraction (1987)**

Dumb movie, except for the part with the rabbit., 26 September 2005

5 stars

When I first saw this movie in the 1980s, I thought it was really a great movie. Recently I had an opportunity to watch this movie again and, alas, this time I thought the movie was really contrived and dumb. Not only the story ridiculous, the acting was way overdone, or should I say overbaked or overcooked (like the spaghetti in the movie). Further, I kept asking myself, "What are they actually arguing about?" I also said to myself, "Who cares?" A married man and a single woman have sex, the woman gets pregnant and wants to the man to take responsibility and when he brushes her off she gets angry. So what? A man and a woman squabbling! Wow, what an original idea! (I'm trying to be sarcastic.) The producers of this movie use this shallow and unoriginal storyline as a pretext for showing scene after scene of gratuitous violence which is intended to shock and

which after a short while becomes so tedious and predictable that it renders the movie almost laughable. After a while I thought I was watching Elsa Lancaster and Boris Karloff in "Bride of Frankenstein." However, I did feel sorry for the little girl and her bunny rabbit. That was sad.

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### **Father of the Bride Part II (1995)**

**Steve Martin is great in this movie., 9 May 2010  
7 stars**

As much as I want to rag this movie, make fun of it, call it all kinds of names, belittle it, mock it and otherwise totally trash it, I can't and that is for one reason: Steve Martin. Mr. Martin saves this movie from cinematic oblivion, allows this movie to survive, function and prosper. He is proof that an actor can save a sorry script, can raise the level of a story, can make a movie watchable. Mr. Martin proves once again that he is arguably the finest comedy actor today. He can take the dumbest line and make it sound brilliant; he can take the most insipid scene and raise it to the level of comedy or drama. Kudos to Steve Martin for his sterling performance. As for the other star, Diane Keaton, her performance is wonderful too, but it is Mr. Martin who carries this movie and once again proves that he is the star.

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### **Love and Anarchy (1973)**

**Great movie. This movie deserves an 11., 18 December 2008  
10 stars**

Excellent movie. Fast-paced, witty, earthy, entertaining dialog that tells a compelling story. That coupled with excellent acting, great continuity, and an unconventional setting makes this movie a special entertainment event. The movie also dramatizes the life of those on the margins of society and takes the audience on an emotional ride, generously spiced with conflict, arguments, squabbles, reconciliations and above all comradeship and friendship as the story takes a group of otherwise unsavory characters and elevates them to the level of real, but unsung, heroes who, hiding behind their masks of moodiness and bravado, have consciousness and really do care and are willing to act on it. Can a foulmouthed prostitute and a half-deranged peasant be heroes? Is a brothel a legitimate setting for hatching political conspiracies? Are those who society usually despises capable of heroism? This movie is about love and heroism and shows that even the

most downtrodden are capable of great acts of personal selflessness.  
Great movie.

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### **First Blood (1982)**

Misunderstood vet., 8 October 2005  
8 stars

Sylvester Stallone knows how to pick his roles because this role was meant for him. Here he plays a troubled Vietnam War veteran who cannot adjust to a civilian society that rejects him for the very service that he rendered on behalf of his country, and now treats him as if he is the enemy. One can reasonably ask: Is this any way to treat a soldier who simply did his job? This question is implicit throughout this movie. The poor guy is hounded, harassed, mistreated, humiliated and ultimately spurned for no reason other than "he was passing through" and looked like he could be a "troublemaker." And what's even worse is that even the U. S. Army itself ignored him. As Rambo himself complains, he called his Colonel but was told the Colonel wasn't in. And when the Colonel finally does respond, it's too little too late. Rambo has reverted to his soldierly ways in order to defend himself - this time against his own country.

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### **Flags of Our Fathers (2006)**

Two reviews, one good the other ....., 2 November 2006  
7 stars

Two reviews

1. This movie calls attention to the fact that in 1945 the United States fought Japan over a six square mile piece of nothing called Iwo Jima, a battle which is all but forgotten. Every American involved in that battle was a hero and there thousands died so that the United States could win a war against an implacable enemy that was refusing to surrender. Whatever you may think about the movie, one thing is certain, the Battle for Iwo Jima occupies a special place in history and should not be, indeed must not be, forgotten. Yet, this movie offers more than just a history lesson. It provides a glimpse into the men who fought this momentous battle. And who were these men? They were guys from all walks of life who basically were no different than anyone else. Yet they were there and they did their duty and they fought and they died. And this didn't happen hundreds or thousands of years ago. It happened 61 years ago, which may seem like a

lot of time, but there are people still alive today who took part in that battle and vividly recall the carnage and the heroism of those who fought there.

2. Here we go again. Another Hollywood extravaganza that relegates a major historical event to the level of a mere back drop as the movie maker attempts to convey some kind of message. It's a good try, but it just does not work. The Battle for Iwo Jima is the kind of event that does not require dramatization. The event speaks for itself. That heroic soldiers became fund raisers is an interesting subject, but to use it as a foundation for an entire movie just misses the mark. The United States was at war, the country was totally mobilized, and these soldiers were doing their duty. But unless one has some prior knowledge of World War Two and particularly of the Battle for Iwo Jima itself, the audience could very well watch this movie and say: So What? Why were American troops fighting the Japanese in the first place? To find the answers to the questions, watch a documentary about Iwo Jima instead.

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### **Flyboys (2006)**

**Weak movie ...important subject, 1 October 2006  
6 stars**

**Flyboys. This is NOT the greatest movie ever made. This is NOT the best acted movie, nor is it the best scripted movie or the the most inspiring movie. Indeed, parts of this movie are incredibly boring, which, for a war movie, was quite surprising. Actually, this movie is so bad that it is hard to find a place from which to begin taking this movie apart. Even the movie's title is ridiculous. A more appropriate title for this movie would have been "Heroes of the Air" or "Air Aces of the Past." But one the thing that saves this movie from being a complete waste of celluloid (or for this movie digital) is the subject matter itself. If this movie is weak as entertainment, it does reveal that a long time ago there was once a war called World War One and Americans actually fought for the French who were once on the front lines in the defense of freedom. Yes ... France. The same country that today is the butt of numerous jokes. The same country that in June 1940 capitulated to the Germans in one of the most rapid, remarkable and devastating military defeats in history. But in 1916 France was at the forefront of the struggle for democracy and Americans were part of that struggle, even before the United States entered the war. So when watching this movie, try to put aside the movie's technical flaws and keep in mind that this movie, although a work of fiction, is based on historical facts that deserve consideration.**

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### **Food, Inc. (2008)**

**Expose on the food industry., 25 April 2010**

**8 stars**

**There is a saying that goes something like this: we are what we eat. If this is true, then according to this documentary, we are in deep trouble. This documentary provides a candid but slanted portrayal of the food industry in the United States, slanted because the producers of this documentary seem to be using the agriculture industry to promote an anti-corporation anti-big business agenda. Nevertheless, their argument, that the food industry is more interested in making profit than in producing high-quality food products, is a convincing one. It is true that food production is an industry; the question is: is this industry putting our health at risk? This documentary suggests that in its quest to maximize profits the agricultural industry is churning out adulterated slop at cut-rate prices to meet what they believe to be consumer demand. Now that we have been alerted to the problem, the next question is: what do we do about it? Demand better quality food but pay a higher price or settle for the cheap, and sometimes not so cheap, slop that fills our bellies, satiates our appetite but makes us sick? Ultimately, the choice is ours.**

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### **Footlight Parade (1933)**

**Is this a great movie - or what?, 14 September 2005**

**10 stars**

**It has singing. It has drama. It has comedy. It has a story. It's one of the greatest movies ever made ... period. If you can't enjoy this movie, then you must be either asleep or in some kind of mental disarray. In "Yankee Doodle Dandy" James Cagney sings and dances his way to an Academy Award; but in this movie he is BETTER! This is James Cagney at his quissential BEST! He's fast with the one-liners! He's fast with his feet! It's nonstop action. And the song-and-dance skits are classics, especially "Shanghai Lil." And the supporting cast is great; and the entire movie is upbeat, fast moving, and exudes confidence. And even though this movie was made over 70 years ago, it's still watchable, even today. And of course, this movie features Miss Ruby Keeler (who was married to Al Jolson). She is the perfect partner for James Cagney ... and Dick Powell too! If you like upbeat, fast paced movies, with lots of singing and dancing, this is the movie to watch.**

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### **Forrest Gump (1994)**

**Powerful performance by Gary Sinise, 18 July 2006  
10 stars**

**This movie is special, and for one reason: Gary Sinise. Mr. Sinise's performance as Lt. Dan is one of the great performances in U. S. cinematic history. His poignant and powerful portrayal of a human being wallowing helplessly in the deepest recesses of despair is uncanny. Lt. Dan is the personification of suffering, of emotional desolation, of a man who is bent on self-destruction but deep down still wants to survive, still harboring a glimmer of hope that things may turn his way, that he may attain salvation and a measure of happiness in a life that has been ravaged by war. Because of Gary Sinise, Forrest Gump is a great movie.**

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### **Frankenstein (1994)**

**De Niro is okay; can't say that for the movie., 8 May 2009  
4 stars**

**This movie presents the "human" side of the Frankenstein creature. Unlike other productions which portray the creature as a horrible, despicable monster, this movie attempts, with some success, to show the creature as a victim of circumstances. Although at some points in the movie the dialogue is ridiculous, Robert De Niro's performance as the creature is credible. What is not credible, however, are the performances of the other members of the cast. Victor Frankenstein is hysterical and his lady something of a shrill. They inspire little sympathy and the horrible acts perpetrated by the creature are almost glossed over to the point that one can reasonably ask: what is all the fuss about? The creature had a right to be upset. After all, he didn't asked to be manufactured. But plausibility is stretched to the limit by asking the audience to believe that such a foolish, emotionally labile man as Victor Frankenstein could actually have the ability to create life from death ... and then do it AGAIN?**

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## **Freeway (1996)**

**Three cheers for Reese Witherspoon., 14 February 2010**

**10 stars**

**Great movie, easily one of Reese Witherspoon's best performances. The main character of this story is sassy without being obnoxious, smart without being overly booked learned, and likable, even though she does bad things. Kiefer Sutherland gives an amazing performance as a serial killer who becomes a victim and is even lauded as a hero. The story has a biting edge to it but without losing its strength as a satire. The main character, Vanessa, is wonderfully portrayed as both a perpetrator and victim. It is the duality of this character that makes this movie especially interesting. She is bad but also nice; she is nasty but also vulnerable. Three cheers for Reese Witherspoon. This movie succeeds as a parity of action movies and a strong dramatization of the degenerate side of modern society.**

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## **From Here to Eternity (1953)**

**Donna Reed's Best Movie, 31 July 2005**

**10 stars**

**"From Here To Eternity" takes place right before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Thus, it's really not a war movie. Actually its more of a soap opera with Burt Lancaster putting the make on Deborah Kerr and Frank Sinatra having a fight with Ernest Borgnine and Montgomery Clift having a tryst with Donna Reed, which brings me to the element of the movie that I really liked: Donna Reed's character. In the movie Donna Reed plays a prostitute who wants to earn enough money to go home, but by the end of the movie circumstances have transformed her from cynical prostitute to fiancé and bereaved victim who has lost her man, and for whom things would never be the same. To me, this is what a good movie is all about - powerful and compelling character development within the context of a story that is credible and makes sense.**

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## **From Paris with Love (2010)**

**Not the usual John Travolta role., 5 February 2010**

**7 stars**

**It's John Travolta like you have never seen him before. Here he is Mister Action, the ultimate Tough Guy, the new Bruce Willis but with more flair. The story itself is not particularly noteworthy. But there is lots of action as Travolta shows everyone who's boss in this action-packed special effects extravaganza. Also there is non-stop violence with Mr. Travolta leading the way. If you like movies with stories that feature nonstop violence, then this movie is for you. If you like John Travolta, this movie is for you. But in terms of the story, don't expect too much from this movie. Remember: it's a commercial product so at some point artistic merit inevitably gives way to the usual dose of special effects that Hollywood spews out like clockwork. Hooray for John Travolta and Hollywood!**

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## **Frost/Nixon (2008)**

**For \$600,000 a politician might say just about anything., 27 December 2008**

**9 stars**

**Imagine this scene. You're in a theater, the lights are dimming, the curtain is rising, the spotlight brightens the center of the stage and into that bright spotlight enters ... Richard M. Nixon. Then the spotlight widens and reveals another man, David Frost. They both bow to the audience and then take a seat and start a conversation about Richard Nixon. It's not journalism, it's theater. It's not candid, it's rehearsed. It's not spontaneous, it's been meticulously planned by Frost and an entire production company which has been selling air time to pay for Mr. Nixon's fee. Then after the interview both men go their separate ways, one with a check for \$600,000 in his pocket, the other with a newfound career as the entertainment impresario, all this under the guise of journalism, affording it a degree of legitimacy demanded by historians and political scientists. Unlike his 1960 television appearance with the dapper and confident John F. Kennedy, which was not theater but a political debate, Mr. Nixon is cool, calm and gets flustered only when the intensity of the interview begins to sag, necessitating something dramatic to generate audience interest in what is an otherwise humdrum affair. For who cares what Mr. Nixon has to say? And besides, how long can anyone be expected to listen to the disgraced ex-President drone on and on about his family, his checkered political career, his almost laughable debate with Chairman Khrushchev, his strange relationship with Mr. Kissinger and his meetings with Chairman Brezhnev and Chairman Mao, before falling asleep? And Mr. Frost knows this and he communicates**

his concerns to Mr. Nixon who obliges as a good performer should, for he is after all Mr. Frost's paid employee who has been given a golden opportunity to emerge from his exile, a chance for one last appearance before the public for which the disgraced ex-President and pardoned wrongdoer is grateful. Then years pass and someone decides to invest millions of dollars in time and money to make a movie about the staged "coming out" of this unusual and troubled man. Strange indeed but Hollywood has done a lot worse and besides a dose of Richard Nixon, properly packaged, is something the public may enjoy provided the dose is not too big, not too strong and not too offensive. Careers have been made and destroyed trying to figure out the life and career of Richard M. Nixon and this movie is but the latest addition to the Nixon genre, once again leaving the audience to wonder: was he really such a bad guy? Did he really have to resign?

There is Richard Nixon as politician. Nixon as crook. Nixon as president. Nixon as an historical figure. And now: Nixon as stage actor. For that is Mr. Nixon's role in this dramatization of a series of interviews produced, staged and conducted not by a journalist, not by a scholar, not by a writer, but by a TV impresario who secures the services of a well-known performer, who happens to be a disgraced ex-President of the United States, to put on a good show. The story maintains a high level of suspense as the film maker causes the audience to wonder how well Mr. Nixon will play his role. Will Mr. Nixon be a dramatic flop who drives away the audience or will he rise to the occasion and thereby help the show achieve high ratings. Whatever the case, this movie admonishes the audience to great take care not to confuse journalism with showmanship and as such anything that Richard Nixon said has to be taken with the biggest grain of salt. After all, for \$600,000 a public figure, even a disgraced public figure, might come out of hiding and say just about anything. Nevertheless this is an excellent movie. It offers interesting and engaging portrayals of the two main characters, Frost and Nixon. Frank Langella's resemblance to Richard Nixon is uncanny. The movie also highlights the ludicrous hypocrisy of the pre-interview grandstanding engaged by Frost as he shamelessly hypes up his project to attract an audience. Frost's effort to sell the interviews to networks and sponsors underscores the theatrical nature of the project. Remember: Richard Nixon was PAID to perform, and he gave an excellent performance worthy of a truly gifted actor. Whether Nixon was being candid with Frost is of course another question.

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## **Funny People (2009)**

**Moments of comedy interspersed in a sad story., 11 August 2009**

**6 stars**

**Funny people? There is little that is funny about this movie. The story includes some comic scenes but essentially is a drama about a sad man who uses comedy to act out his cynical attitude toward people and life. It is the character's cynicism that undermines any effort to keep the movie on a comedy tract. Adam Sandler gives a strong performance as a troubled comic who is struggling with some serious issues. Seth Rogen is also strong as the comic's sidekick and flunky whose presence provides some comic relief. The movie includes amusing stand up comic routines by both Mr. Sandler and Mr. Rogen, but after these scenes it reverts to its dramatic and rather drab theme. Eric Bana is wonderful as the jilted husband but even his energetic performance does not rise to the level of comedy. This movie is proof that combining comedy and drama can be risky project and if not done properly can lead to a wishy-washy cinematic product.**

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## **Gallipoli (1981)**

**Good movie but misses the mark., 24 September 2010**

**7 stars**

**Epic events require epic treatment. This movie fails in that respect. What could have been an outstanding dramatization of a military disaster is reduced to a backdrop for a story about two young men. The young men are nice enough but their story is not nearly enough to provide the kind of dramatic punch that the Gallipoli operation requires. The battle of Gallipoli is one of those major events in history that has been inexplicably and unfairly swept under the rug. To portray such an operation requires an approach that includes an explanation of the strategic aim and historical context of the operation which this movie does not provide, leaving the audience to speculate as to its relevance or importance. The facts are that the Turks repulsed a major invasion of their country. The British were soundly defeated. Soldiers on both sides died, by the thousands. Was it a waste? Did they die in vain? Was the operation a complete fiasco from the start? These are questions that the battle of Gallipoli raise. Whether this movie answers these questions is an entirely different matter.**

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### **Gentleman Jim (1942)**

**A great sport's movie., 27 September 2008**

**10 stars**

**This is one of the greatest sports movies ever made by Hollywood. What a wonderful story about one of the great sports figures of American history. What makes the story of James J. Corbett especially interesting is that Mr. Corbett introduced the style of boxing that continues to this day. In that respect James J. Corbett was truly innovated. But getting back to the movie, all the performances were excellent. Alexis Smith was beautiful. Indeed, she looked like Nicole Kidman. And although it's a period piece, the story withstands the test of time; it has not gone stale. Ward Bond's portrayal of John L. Sullivan has to be one of the great portrayals of an actual sports figure in the history of movies and the boxing scenes are realistic, well-staged and highly effective. That coupled with a great script makes this movie a must.**

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### **Get Smart (2008)**

**Hilarious, nonstop laughs., 21 June 2008**

**10 stars**

**This movie is hilarious, nonstop laughs, over-the-top humor, goofy, endearing, laughable, a good time movie, a wonderful cinematic experience, upbeat, silly but in a good way, farcical but not dumb, great comedic acting, excellent script, comic acting at its best, one of the few movies that makes you want to say "I wish the movie was not over", Steve Carell is great, Ann Hathaway is outstanding, Alan Arkin is at his funniest and the entire cast is like a well oiled laughter machine. This movie is proof that Hollywood is not quite yet a complete creative desert. This movie is based on a popular TV show from the 1960s yet it is original and unique and not simply a rip off of the TV show. If you like movies that are fun, then this is the movie for you.**

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## Juliet of the Spirits (1965)

Beautifully photographed; weak story,, 23 May 2010

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Whenever one looks at their watch while watching a movie, that's a sure sign that there is a problem with the movie. It's a long movie made to seem even longer when one has to deal with subtitles. In all fairness, a movie should be judged in its own language or when dubbed; not when one has to read subtitles. With that understanding, this movie is critiqued. The movie attempts to dramatize the plight of a middle aged mousy looking woman who is experiencing some kind of personal crisis involving her husband. Although the premise generates interest it is dramatically a dud. In trying to seek the truth the woman experiences all kinds of visions and has flashbacks recalling people in her life, all of whom are caricatures. The caricatures are very amusing, which is a part of the movie which is charming, and the husband, who is really quite likable, is revealed for what he is, a cheat. Yet the movie is dramatically flat due in part to the leading lady who, although quite likable, simply is a blank. The movie is beautifully photographed. If you want a movie with a great cast, this is it. If you want a movie about marital faithlessness, skip it. Actually, at second thought, the movie doesn't work because Juliet is so frumpy looking that it's not surprising that her handsome husband would stray.

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## Gladiator (2000)

There are not enough superlatives to describe this movie., 3 October 2010  
10 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Some movies are made to be watched over and over again, that's how good they are. Gladiator is one of those movies. It has all the elements that makes for a good movie. There is a compelling story, an altruistic hero, a sinister villain, a damsel and her young son, excellent musical score, great cinematography, great support cast, strong dialog and a solid finale. The movie has become a Hollywood icon. Its characters have achieved legendary status. Jaquin Phoenix is superb as the Emperor Commodus, who is reviled by everyone, including his own sister. (Yet this does not stop the indefatigable emperor from doing his paperwork.) Russell Crowe gives a tour-de-force performance as Maximus, the hero general who refuses to cave in to the vindictive and jealous emperor. Oliver Reed, in

his final performance, is great as Maximus's friend and ally. The scenes in the Colosseum are spectacular; the Colosseum itself is shown in all of its grandeur, a fitting venue for the kinds of spectacles that became symbols of Roman decadence and cruelty. All in all, this is a wonderful movie, one that deservedly is a classic.

The part of the movie where Maximus reveals himself to the emperor is one of the greatest scenes in the history of Hollywood cinema. This is the scene that every director strives for, dreams about and rarely attains. Ridley Scott must have felt great to have put together such a stunning and evocative scene. The corrupt emperor and his erstwhile general, facing off, in front of the crowd, witnessed by the Senate, and the emperor's sister, indeed, by the entire world. Wow! Now THAT'S entertainment!

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### Gods and Monsters (1998)

Yes, there was a war called World War One., 21 April 2006  
10 stars

James Whale was one of the pioneers of the Hollywood movie industry. The problem with this movie, however, is that it glosses over that important fact about Mr. Whale's life and, as is typical in Hollywood movies, concentrates instead on his personal life, which ends tragically. Of course, if one wants to watch a dramatic exposes about the life of a famous people, then this movie is perfect. But I was expecting, or at least hoping, for something more substantive, something more informative about what Mr. Whale accomplished, and not about the turmoil of his later life. That Mr. Whale was a POW in World War One, that he directed such classic movies as *Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man* and *Show Boat* (perhaps the best musical ever made in Hollywood), is more than enough to encompass not only one but several movies. That he had his personal quirks and his share of emotional ups and downs is interesting and says something about the man, but for me, what is meaningful about Mr. Whale's life is what he accomplished. Despite these criticisms, I still rate this movie a 9 for these reasons: the subject the movie, Mr. Whale; the excellent acting, especially by Ian McKellen; the excellent cinematography; and Brendan Frasier's surprisingly strong performance in a dramatic role.

Intense movie, about invisible wounds that never heal, about loss that is unspoken, about anger repressed, about personal growth, about reaching out for understanding, about rejection. James Whale was one of Hollywood's great directors, a true artist, certainly not a hack. This movie dramatizes the plight of the World War One veterans who fought in a war

that is now all but forgotten. Mr. Whale survived, his companions did not. Enough said.

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## **Godzilla (1956)**

**Godzilla vs. Predator: Who do you think would win?, 25 October 2007**  
**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

No matter how cheap the special effects, how amateurish the cinematography or how ludicrous the story, this is a classic sci-fi movie and for two reasons: Raymond Burr and the character Dr. Serizawa who has to rate as one of the maddest of scientists ever to appear in a commercial movie production. This mad scientist is literally playing with scientific dynamite without anybody knowing what he's up to, except his girlfriend, and then the hapless Japanese wind up having to go to this crazy guy to kill a humongous freak of nature that makes the largest whale in the world seem like a goldfish. As for Mr. Burr, his role as the journalist who explains what's happening injects what little clarity that can be found in the story. But if you are able to make allowances for the movie's limitations then you may find this movie to be entertaining in a laughable sort of way.

I wonder how Predator would have fared against Godzilla.

**Godzilla: 500-foot tall reptile; breaths fire; completely fearless; lives on land and in water; apparently doesn't need food; utterly aggressive; destroys everything in its path.**

**Predator: Crab-faced humanoid; extremely ugly; cunning; uses stealth; utterly merciless; excellent swimmer; armed with an incredible array of high tech and low tech weapons; hunts for sport; will track prey across the universe.**

Okay, now who do you think would win?

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## **Golden Boy (1939)**

**Wonderful Movie, 26 July 2005**

**8 stars**

**This is a wonderful, compelling, emotionally charged movie, with characters that are both interesting and likable. Of course, the central character of the movie is Joe Bonaparte, played by a young, gifted actor named William Holden. Joe's conflict, between his quest for fame as a prize fighter and his father's wish to become a concert violinist, although seemingly corny and contrived, actually works in this movie. And this can be attributed to the fine acting of all the players - Barbara Stanwyck, Lee J. Cobb, Adolph Menjou, and William Holden - who prove that high quality acting can transform a good script into a great script. One particularly intense scene is when Joe tries to play the violin - and he can't, leaving him devastated in the knowledge that he had squandered a gift and in the process had disappointed his father. This is a movie that is worth the time to watch and to enjoy.**

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## **Gone Baby Gone (2007)**

**Good movie., 7 December 2007**

**7 stars**

**This movie starts off rocky, with a long, rambling monologue which is usually a sign of worse things to come, but incredibly the movie veers away from the brink of cinematic disaster and evolves into a watchable movie with a good ending. Most of the characters are forgettable with the exception of two: the child's mother, played by Amy Ryan, who gives an excellent performance as a hostile, cynical, drug-addicted substance abuser, and Morgan Freeman whose presence is, as usual, commanding. The story picks up in tempo and makes interesting twists and turns as the characters reveal more about themselves and are forced to make decisions that will affect the little girl who is the object of the search. Except for the first 15 minutes which are talky and slow, this is a good movie.**

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## **Gone with the Wind (1939)**

Read the Book then Watch the Movie., 12 August 2005

7 stars

Am I the only person who ever read the book, "Gone With the Wind" by Margaret Mitchell? Because I read the book - the ENTIRE book - and movie should not be confused with the book. The book is about a brave and resourceful woman living in a time of momentous social change and determined to survive. Unlike in the movie, in the book the character Scarlett is strong and there is nothing about her that is shrill or infantile, but the movie transforms the character into someone that is almost childish. Now I understand that a lot has to be condensed into one movie, but after reading the book the movie seems superficial. Nevertheless the movie is entertaining and worth watching and offers performances that have become part of movie legend.

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## **Goodbye, Columbus (1969)**

Good movie ... sad story, 1 October 2006

7 stars

A young man meets a young woman and falls in love. Then as the relationship develops the man discovers that the young woman, who is beautiful and charming, is a confused shrill who is using him to act out against her parents. Now the man has to make a decision: stay or leave. This movie is remarkable for one reason: Ali McGraw. Thirty-five years ago Ali McGraw was a mega-superstar and is a truly great actress. Ali McGraw makes this movie watchable. Her performance, in this noteworthy movie, was great. This is not an upbeat movie and does not have any heroes. None of the characters in this movie are particularly likable, especially the Richard Benjamin character whose perpetual scowl reflects a condescending arrogance that adds to the movie's negativity. But that does not mean that this is a bad movie. Quite the contrary. It's a well acted, well-scripted movie that tells a story. But don't expect a happy story.

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### **Good Night, and Good Luck. (2005)**

**Weak story ... and why all the chain-smoking?, 21 October 2005**

**7 stars**

**This movie, which is presented in the form of a semi-documentary, is meant to dramatize the showdown between Edward R. Murrow and Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1954. But, sadly, this movie fails to hit the mark. It's all show and no substance. It promises a lot and delivers little. In short, this movie is pretentious. Edward R. Murrow is portrayed as a nervous, chain-smoking shell of the reporter who was the most famous war correspondent of World War Two. Further, the vaunted showdown between Murrow and McCarthy doesn't happen. They don't even speak to each other. Instead the movie uses old stock footage to vilify Senator McCarthy, yet in much of the footage McCarthy sounds quite reasonable and makes a case for ferreting out subversives in the government. The fact is that in 1954 the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in the Cold War and Soviet agents were operating as spies in the United States. Okay, Senator McCarthy may have accused the wrong people of being Communist subversives, but was his claim of Communist infiltration into the U. S. government so much off the mark? Was there not at least some cause for concern? And by the way, what's with all the chain-smoking in this movie?**

**Nevertheless the movie does succeed in conveying the postwar hysteria over communist infiltration and the paranoia that spilled over into the mass media itself.**

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### **Gran Torino (2008)**

**One of Clint Eastwood's better performances., 12 February 2009**

**9 stars**

**This is not only a good movie, it may be one Clint Eastwood's better performances as as an actor. Rarely has Mr. Eastwood been more effective and entertaining, and for a career as successful as his, that's saying a mouthful. The movie itself is good, although there are some glitches in the plot and some overly contrived dialog. But the basic story is solid, with themes relating to social change, ethnic tensions, gang violence, aging, family tensions, and immigrants. Most interesting is the portrayal of members of the Hmong community who at first seem utterly out of place in its American setting but soon becomes apparent that they too share American values, both positive and negative. The movie also does an effective job of dramatizing ethnic tensions between minority groups. The main star, however, is Mr. Eastwood and his character Walt Kowalski**

around whom the story revolves. This movie is certainly worth watching and provides good entertainment.

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### **Grease (1978)**

Entertaining movie, 26 July 2005

8 stars

Okay, the acting is not the greatest, the story line is somewhat shallow, adults playing teenagers - that's stretching credibility a bit far. But who cares? This movie WORKS as a musical, as a tribute to a bygone era, when characters like those in the movie actually existed, when do-wop was king, when the Dodgers were in Brooklyn, the Giants in New York and the Athletics in Philadelphia, when the Cleveland Browns were the best team in football. Here it's the music and singing and dancing that matters, nothing else. If you want serious drama, this movie is not for you, but if you want a musical, you've come to the right place. A movie should entertain, and this movie entertains. The movie is upbeat, optimistic, funny, fast-paced, and with lots of singing and dancing. I liked it. Maybe you'll like it too.

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### **"Great Performances: Sting: Songs from the Labyrinth" (2007)**

Impressive retrospective of music from the past., 11 August 2008

8 stars

Sting sings medieval English songs? Interesting. This low key production showcases the talent of the entertainer Sting. This show also introduces the audience to a genre of music from 500 years ago and not surprisingly the music stands the test of time. The songs, though obscure, are quite charming and as performed by Sting brings alive some really beautiful music. This show also offers a further example of how fleeting is time and gives one cause to pause and think about how bards of the past who are now all but forgotten were in their time the stars of their day, traveling throughout Europe. Congratulations to Sting and company for showcasing an impressive retrospective of music from the past.

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## **Green Zone (2010)**

**A war based on a lie? You decide., 12 March 2010**

**9 stars**

**This movie is Hollywood's attempt to moralize on the Iraq war and to a large degree it works. By now it is common knowledge that the pretext used to justify invading Iraq, that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, was a fabrication. The question is, what is a soldier supposed to do when he discovers that his mission is based on a lie? That is the crux of this movie and Matt Damon gives a strong performance as a soldier who decides not to be part of a cover up. The movie makes one really wonder why the U. S. bothered to invade Iraq, a country completely divided along sectarian lines and in total disarray and why the Iraqi army was disbanded. After all, the army was the only institution in the country that could hold the country together, yet it was dissolved, resulting in chaos that continues to this day. Greg Kinnear plays an uncharacteristically sinister role as an American diplomat who chooses expediency over truth and the other supporting actors give excellent performances that help make this movie not only a work of art but a statement about truth and honor in time of war.**

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## **Grizzly Man (2005)**

**Journey to self-destruction., 27 February 2006**

**10 stars**

**This movie confirms the need for programs to ensure that psychiatric patients who are non-compliant with treatment receive the treatment that they require to enable them to function in society. In this case, the main character, Timothy, is an alcoholic manic-depressive who, according to the movie, not only refused to take medication for manic-depression, but actually wanted to maintain his symptoms, which led to tragic results. Further, the movie does a disservice to the conservation movement by portraying a mentally ill man as a champion for environmentalism when actually he was using environmentalism as a pretext to act out his delusional fantasies. That Timothy chooses to "protect" grizzly bears, the largest carnivores on land, is further evidence of the depth and intensity of his mental illness and the extent to which his judgment was impaired. Yet those who knew Timothy, and knew how disturbed he was, did nothing to intercede. Then again, perhaps there was nothing that anyone could have done except to watch, in amazement, as a man embarked on a journey to self-destruction.**

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## **Groundhog Day (1993)**

**Excellent movie. Bill Murray's best., 5 December 2007**

**This movie is easily Bill Murray's greatest work. Ostensibly this movie is a comedy, but it's really a drama with comedic features. The story is uplifting, inspirational and entertaining without becoming mushy. Yes, one can get stuck in life while wallowing in anger that is masked by a veneer of bitter cynicism. The movie's premise is simple yet its message is profound. How does one deal with the emotional obstacles that distort and inhibit communication? And do you really know the person you're with? Angry people have stories too and sometimes we can read people wrong. Metaphors abound but without the clichés. Life goes on ... or does it? Excellent movie.**

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## **Grown Ups (2010)**

**Good movie but too many players, 12 July 2010  
7 stars**

**This is a good movie. Rob Schneider excels; he carries the movie. David Spade is also solid. The other three main players are so-so; the female roles were superfluous. If this movie had confined itself to being a reunion between the Rob Schneider-David Spade characters, then this movie may have been great. The other players got in their way. The problem with this movie is that it tries to bite off more than it can chew, so has cinematic indigestion. Too many characters, too much schmaltz. Remember: Abbott and Costello and Laurel and Hardy didn't need anyone else to be funny. The Three Stooges were not the five stooges. The same applies to Schneider and Spade. Team them up together, give them a goofy script, and they will be funny. Add in an ensemble cast and they will get lost in the crowd, which is what happens in this movie. The movie is humorous and some scenes are hilarious, but parts of the movie drag, especially when the guys and gals and gathered around the fire.**

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## Guadalcanal Diary (1943)

Great movie, 26 March 2006

10 stars

This is one of the all-time great classic movies of its genre. Unlike most Hollywood movies that use historical events as backgrounds for sappy and insipid love stories, the main "character" of this movie is the event itself. For the Battle of Guadalcanal is one of the key battles in all of history. This momentous event, which took place at the same time the Soviet Union was battling the Germans at Stalingrad, marked the end of Japanese expansion in the south Pacific and the beginning of the process that would lead to Japan's ultimate defeat. It should also be noted that the Battle for Guadalcanal was entirely an American operation, fought several thousands miles away from home and against an implacable enemy that had months, if not years, to prepare their defenses. Moreover, this battle took place just months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The acting is great, the story compelling and is all-in-all a movie that is definitely worth watching.

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## Guarding Tess (1994)

Doug: Stop complaining and do your job., 27 November 2005

8 stars

It's hard to believe that the same actress who starred in "The Apartment" now stars in this movie. In this movie Shirley MacLaine plays a cranky late-middle aged lady who just happens to be a former First Lady of the United States. As such, she is guarded by a contingent of Secret Service agents supervised by the Nicolas Cage character "Doug" who doesn't like the assignment and lets the ex-First Lady know about it. The problem with this movie is the storyline itself. This is an easy assignment, and nobody else is complaining, so why should Doug be any different? Plus, the ex-First Lady LIKES Doug, so what's the fuss? Moreover, Doug is a supervisor who could direct his subordinates to deal directly with the lady. And what's wrong with the lady wanting Doug to serve her breakfast and make small talk? Actually, Doug is one of the more annoying characters in modern-day filmdom. He whines when he has no legitimate cause to complain and manufactures conflict with a defenseless widow who is fully entitled to the protection Doug is sworn to provide. Doug: stop complaining and do your job.

Nevertheless, the movie contains some strong acting by the entire cast, especially Nicholas Cage and Austin Pendleton who is absolutely superb.

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### **Hallelujah I'm a Bum (1933)**

Highly entertaining., 21 April 2008  
10 stars

If anyone doubts that Al Jolson was one of Hollywood's greatest and most versatile performers, then watch this movie. Everything about this movie is excellent and entertaining. The movie has a great story, excellent, spirited acting, and an engaging, dynamic script, most of which is said in rhyme. The movie is also a remarkable commentary on social and economic inequalities in modern society as the "bum" is not only a victim but a hero who offers hope for the downtrodden and encourages all not to lose heart, to stay engaged and to try to enjoy life with as few worries as possible. Especially surprising was Frank Morgan who gives a powerful portrayal as a big-city mayor who is in love. Nothing in this movie is corny. It tells a story, has lots of action, has wonderful characters and is both uplifting and highly entertaining.

Another interesting feature of this movie is that it is performed by actors and actresses who, for the most part, are all but forgotten today. Al Jolson is still an icon, but Harry Langdon, Madge Evans, Chester Conklin, Edgar Connors ... they were excellent, and all but forgotten. A really marvelous movie.

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### **Hancock (2008)**

Superman with an attitude? I don't think so., 9 July 2008  
4 stars

The special effects are quite intriguing. The problem is: this movie, like most Hollywood potboilers, is devoid of any intellectual content. In other words, this movie verges on the brink of outright banality. Not good, not bad, not anything. Why even make this movie? Why not a cartoon instead? Now the movie's main character is supposed to be a hero. Okay, let's talk about heroes. On June 6, 1944, American soldiers invaded Europe on the coast of northern France at a place called Normandy Beach. Their objective: to establish a beach head and begin the liberation of Europe from Nazism. Everyone of those valiant soldiers who participated in that historic event were heroes. So there is no need to for Hollywood to make up heroes. All one has to do is read history books and you will find all the heroes, villains, good guys, and bad guys you want. This movie is proof that Hollywood is now stretching the Superman genre to its limits.

Superman with an attitude? Duh. By the way, as good an actor as Will Smith is, he is no Christopher Reeve, or George Reeves for that matter, and Mr. Reeve WAS a hero - a real life hero.

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### Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay (2008)

Good laughs., 26 April 2008  
8 stars

Some of the humor is raunchy, some of the humor falls flat, but all-in-all this a funny and at times hilarious movie. Kal Penn is especially impressive. There is no question that he is a gifted actor who could probably handle drama as well as he does comedy. The scene with President Bush is absolutely hilarious and generates nonstop laughter. Most surprising is the performance of Neil Patrick Harris who proves that he can do comedy. Mr. Harris is extremely funny and his scenes are among the funniest in the movie. This movie is goofy, irreverent, sometimes pedestrian, occasionally provocative, but always interesting and at times quite funny. Some aspects of the film may be considered offensive by some but remember it's a comedy so take it with a grain of salt and have yourself a good laugh.

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### Hart's War (2002)

Colin Farrell and Bruce Willis's best movie., 27 February 2007  
10 stars

Okay. I know what you're thinking. A movie with Bruce Willis and Colin Farrell. How good can the movie be? You're thinking, "Just another special effects flick." "Don't expect anything particularly special." Admit it, that's what you would think. Well, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT!!!! Yes, I was channel-surfing and came across this movie and said to myself, "Let me watch this movie to see how bad it is." Wow, was I in for a surprise. This movie was EXCELLENT!!!! Not only is the movie well-acted, it actually has an excellent story with interesting characters with depth. This movie is about sacrifice, about duty and about loyalty. This movie is proof that when given good material, Bruce Willis and Colin Farrell will come through with flying colors. It is their best movie.

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### **Heaven Can Wait (1978)**

**Wonderful movie; Warren Beatty at his best., 11 December 2005  
10 stars**

**A man undergoes a major personality change and nobody knows why. The man is a rich, obnoxious, insensitive, spoiled and self-centered. He doesn't care if he hurts people; he just cares about himself. In short, the man is nasty. Then miraculously the same man becomes generous, warm, personable, considerate and interested in sports. He even wants to be a pro quarterback. Nobody in the movie can figure out the reason for this dramatic change ... except the audience, which is what makes this movie so great. The audience shares in the joke. Warren Beatty is wonderful as the rich guy who undergoes the transformation. Well, it's really not a transformation, but I don't want to spoil the movie. But watch it, you'll like it.**

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### **Hellboy II: The Golden Army (2008)**

**Ugh! First rate junk,, 19 July 2008  
2 stars**

**What a dumb movie. Real junk. Hollywood at its glorious worst as comic-book characters get comic-book treatment. What else would one expect? Appealing to the lowest-common-denominator is alive and well in this movie. The plot is dumb, the acting plodding, the special effects not so special (and there's lots of them too), and the main character is a joke. Just because the main character is taken from a comic-book doesn't mean he can't be given some dignity. The good vs. evil conflict is weak, the good guys are clueless, the bad guys are travesties. Why not have Hellboy rescue inmates from a concentration camp or help defend innocent defenseless people who are victims of violence? This movie once again proves that when given the chance Hollywood will churn out mediocrity from that creative potboiler that spews out the garbage that's supposed to pass for entertainment. In addition, this movie is as long as its mediocre and to watch this movie without nodding off is a challenge. And please, what's with the opening monologue? Don't tell a story, show it! It's a movie not a play.**

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### **Hello, Dolly! (1969)**

**Why Hollywood stopped making musicals., 20 February 2007**

**4 stars**

The movie has its moments when it is actually entertaining, but this movie has to be one of the reasons why Hollywood soon stopped making musicals. The miscasting is obvious. The staging is gaudy. The movie is too long. Barbra Streisand makes a strenuous effort to carry this movie but even her presence cannot compensate for an inane story that is devoid of any intellectual depth. This movie was made during a time of great turmoil in the United States and the world. The market place was obviously changing. By 1969 this movie was already passé and 38 years later is an antique that inspires amazement over how this movie could have been made in the first place. This story belonged on the stage, where it had a long and dignified run on Broadway and not on the screen where it was transformed into something that could be a subject for ridicule or pity.

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### **Hereafter (2010)**

**For Hollywood there is still hope., 2 November 2010**

**10 stars**

This is a surprisingly good movie. Instead of being hokey or morose, the story is actually engaging and in its own way upbeat. The theme of the story is mortality, a heavy, serious topic and one which Hollywood usually botches, but this movie explores the subject in a way that keeps the audience's interest. The acting is wonderful. The directing is superb. The movie was probably a huge risk for Clint Eastwood. After all, when Hollywood delves into sensitive or controversial topics, the results can be pathetically laughable, which is not surprising given the huge amount of cheese that Hollywood produces on a steady basis. So when someone in Hollywood actually attempts to make movie about something serious, look out! But this movie succeeds in avoiding that outcome. Instead, as the story evolves, the movie stays on course, avoiding the usual cinematic pitfalls like unnecessary and contrived melodramatics, laughable overacting, corny subplots, gratuitous special effects and, of course, huge doses of violence, resulting in a powerful, moving, respectable, intelligent and watchable cinematic event. People suffer loss, they are traumatized and they are alone. To reconnect with a lost loved one, to know that somewhere their spirit is alive, is a source of tremendous comfort. This movie is about hope. It is about believing in something no matter how

improbable it might seem because you know it is real, and for anyone in Hollywood to even think about wanting to take on a topic like that, much less actually make a movie about it, means that for Hollywood there is still hope. Perhaps one day a movie will be made about a failed director who is desperately wanting to reconnect with his old successful movies from twenty years ago (which in Hollywood time is equal to a million years) and finds a reluctant screenwriter with a certain gift who resists the director's pleas for help because he knows it will only bring anguish to the director who can never bring back those old movies since the audience tastes have changed exponentially over the years, but at least gains the satisfaction of knowing that they are out there, somewhere, in a better place.

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### **He's Just Not That Into You (2009)**

**Innocuous., 18 February 2009**

**6 stars**

A weak story coupled with an uninspiring script and forgettable acting marks this disappointing attempt to portray the joys and pitfalls of contemporary male-female relationships. The main problem with this movie is that whenever something dramatic is about to happen, the director pulls back, completely diffusing the tension, as if the movie was meant not to offend, which it does not. The main character is a 20s something young lady suffering from low self esteem and around her revolve sub-plots involving other innocuous people seeking that special someone. Even the scenes of marital infidelity are played down to the point that they lose all dramatic punch. It's too bad because the movie had potential to make some substantive statements about contemporary relationships but potential is not the same as action as this movie so aptly shows.

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### **High Anxiety (1977)**

**Three Cheers for Mel Brooks!!!!, 15 August 2007**

**9 stars**

Thirty years after this movie's release in 1977, it has aged very well. This movie is as funny and enjoyable today as it was thirty years ago. The movie offers nonstop humor, lots of laughs, great comic acting and a good story. This movie contains some of the funniest comic actors ever produced by Hollywood, such as Mel Brooks, Cloris Leachman, Ron Carey, Howard Morris and the incomparable Harvey Korman as Dr. Montague. And some

of the scenes are outright hilarious, with memorable characters, all of which adds up to one absolutely entertaining movie which is as watchable today as it was thirty years ago. Three cheers for Mel Brooks!!!!

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### Hollywoodland (2006)

Good movie; strong performance by Ben Affleck., 3 October 2006  
8 stars

This is a good movie, which includes a strong performance by Ben Affleck as the late George Reeves. His death was tragic; the movie suggests that the subsequent investigation into the cause of Mr. Reeves' demise was nothing more than a cover-up. Of course, this is all innuendo and grist for the screenwriters. The movie suggests various theories to explain what happened to Mr. Reeves. Well, what DID happen? If you decide to watch this movie, do so with the understanding that it's a movie, and although based on certain true events, is a work of fiction. But one thing is for certain: although George Reeves is gone his legacy lives on as the actor who created one of the most well-known and often-copied roles in cinematic history and became a cultural icon whose aura has lasted to this day. George Reeves WAS Superman.

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### Hollywood on the Tiber (2009)

Those were the days., 13 April 2010  
10 stars

Those were the days as the saying goes. The movie stars were glamorous. Italy was the place to be. Production costs were low, profits were high, everybody was making money and the Italian cinema industry was booming. You had American actors in Italian movies. They were having fun. They were all on the top of the world. Life was good. Everyone was laughing; they were eating, drinking, playing, doing it all, living the life of real "Hollywood stars," when the term meant something. And of course they had their adoring fans and the paparazzi, just as pesty than as they are now. And all this was happening in Italy just a few years after the war. One can only marvel at the high level activity as some of the most well-known movies in history were made, not in Hollywood, but in Italy. Those were the days.

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### **Hotel Rwanda (2004)**

**What a wonderful, marvelous, inspirational movie., 15 February 2006**

**10 stars**

**From time to time one can come across a movie that transcends the ordinary or commonplace and rises to the level of being special. This is one of those movies. The story here is not only about a man who rises above his circumstances to become truly heroic, nor only about the seemingly pointless conflict between two groups of people, but primarily is about the human condition in general. This movie challenges one to ask: Is there any hope for humanity? This movie can generate feelings of deep despair, yet it does not, and for one reason: the main character, Paul, magnificently portrayed by the excellent actor Don Cheadle. Paul convinces us that in tumultuous times when people are being cruelly mistreated and uncertainty abounds, men like Paul are there to lead, to inspire and to serve. What a wonderful, marvelous, inspirational movie.**

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### **Hot Rod (2007)**

**Inane, 15 August 2007**

**3 stars**

**Alright, friends, a serious movie buff is expected to watch all kinds of movie, the bad as well as the good, and this movie put me to the test. I won't mince words. This movie was bad. The story was bad. The acting was bad. The always wonderful Sissy Spacek did nothing to make this movie better. Indeed I asked myself why did I even bother to see this rotten trashy movie? Why did I waste my time and money on something that I suspected would be bad? The answer is, of course, that I am a movie buff and therefore cannot avoid what otherwise should be avoided. I will not waste your time explaining what exactly was wrong with this amateurish movie, except to say that the quality of the acting was, to put it politely, subpaar. A serious movie buff may want to take on the responsibility of watching this movie. Otherwise. stay home, don't waste your time, read a book, take take of chores or have yourself a good sandwich.**

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### **Hot Tub Time Machine (2010)**

**A comedy that can make you want to cry., 3 April 2010**

**6 stars**

**This movie was unexpectedly unfunny, not bad, just not funny. What would you do if you could undue the mistakes you made in your life? Not a happy theme, something that many may not want to deal with. Many of the scenarios are rather sad and definitely not funny, such as when one of the characters gets stabbed in the head or another complains, with justification that he has no friends. The main characters are pathetic but not worthy of sympathy. They are losers but not lovable. The least unfunny character is the token African-American but his performance is hampered by the story. The fact is that a comedy is funny when the audience can feel superior to the the characters who are the source of the humor, but in this movie the characters are too close to the audience for comfort, their failures too real and plausible, and therefore its nothing to laugh about because by laughing at them, you are really laughing at yourself and your own mistakes and that can make you want to cry.**

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### **Hysterical Blindness (2002) (TV)**

**Wonderful movie, 13 September 2006**

**9 stars**

**This is a wonderful, well-acted, movie. In fact, it is quite a pleasant surprise. What I anticipated to be just another made-for-TV soap opera was a movie with a story about people whose lives seem ordinary but are actually special. The characters are likable and the action centers around a bar in New Jersey where the main characters, two women searching for relationships, go to meet men. This is a scenario that a lot of people can relate to, especially in a society where people are increasingly isolated and are alienated from the the community around them. For this movie is about the devastating effects of social isolation on people who don't want to be alone and after a lot of struggle finally realize that all they have are each other.**

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## I Am Legend (2007)

Watchable, but not great., 4 January 2008

6 stars

It's not a great movie but it's a good movie. The premise is simple (thank goodness), somewhat far-fetched (hey, it's Hollywood), and Will Smith is no Tom Hanks (the movie is kind of a take off on Castaway). However, except for a brief lull about two-thirds of the way through the movie where the Neville character is trying to make a point using the music of Bob Marley (which I'm sure will create a surge in people wanting to buy reggae music), the movie is watchable. As usual with most Hollywood movies, special effects are way overblown and after awhile are almost laughable. The dark seekers are frightening, at first, but what's somebody supposed to do when a bunch of them infest your house? This movie shows that if you get sick but lose your mind and regress into something resembling the cross between a screaming banshee and a housefly, you will not only survive but will flourish. Also, Will Smith was miscast for this movie's central role and his character's behavior and overall good mental and physical shape is completely inconsistent with his circumstances which are dire and life-threatening at best. Despite these shortcomings, the movie tells a story and for that reason is worth watching. But Will Smith is not Laurence Olivier and this movie is not Shakespeare. So if you're expecting something with a deep philosophical message, move on to something else.

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## Idlewild (2006)

Great movie., 5 September 2006

10 stars

This movie is part operetta, part gangster movie, part drama and all entertainment. This movie has it all and dishes it like's it going out of style. This movie is proof that when it wants to, Hollywood can still put together a musical that actually entertains. The acting is wonderful, the dancing is great, the music is excellent and the story, for a musical, is credible. The leading lady is beautiful, the leading man is heroic, the supporting cast is great and all-in-all this movie definitely worth watching. This movie is a hip-hop, rap music operetta. This movie has good guys and bad guys, has tragedy, has romance, and none of it is corny, and all of it adds up to one great movie.

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## **I Love You, Man (2009)**

**Mildly humorous., 21 March 2009**

**6 stars**

**This is one of those mildly amusing but otherwise forgettable movies that tries to bring humor to an otherwise humorless subject. A guy trying to find a friend? It's not exactly a subject that provokes mirth but who knows? Everyone has different tastes for humor and apparently the producers of this movie felt that this story would cause an audience to laugh. They were wrong. The movie does succeed in inducing a few chuckles but no way does it even come close to making one guffaw. The blandness of the material is equaled only by the weakness of the acting. Paul Rudd reminds one of a second-rate Dustin Hoffman and the rest of the cast is equally insipid. But it's not their fault. Material is material and even the most inspired acting could not have saved this movie from the jaws of mediocrity where it most surely belongs.**

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## **Inception (2010)**

**This movie may put you to sleep, 16 July 2010**

**7 stars**

**The problem with this movie is that the plot is too convoluted, thus diverting attention away from the movie's basic premise, that of how the brain functions during sleep. This is a fascinating, esoteric subject but like all fascinating subjects, when Hollywood gets a hold of it, look out! You may be in for a ride, to a place we know not where. A story works best when it has a beginning, a middle and an end. When you tamper with that structure, such as by starting a movie with a flashback, you're inviting confusion and frankly, who wants to go to the movies to be confused. Stories should be told straightforwardly, but that is not the case with this movie. Is Mr. DiCaprio in a dream or not? After a while, it becomes a moot point as the movie just keeps rambling on and on to its inevitable conclusion. Nevertheless, the movie does explore some interesting subjects such as idea formation, mind manipulation, the subconscious and mental activity during sleep. Where the movie stalls is in plausibility and structure. Yet, despite these drawbacks, the movie is worth watching because of Leonardo DiCaprio who once again gives an excellent performance as a stalwart yet troubled mind prober. He carries the movie which alone makes it watchable.**

Once again Hollywood has taken a perfectly good idea for a movie and has watered it down. Brainwashing is a fascinating subject. It is a key element in *The Manchurian Candidate*. How do we know that our ideas are actually ours and not planted into our heads? That is the underlying theme of this movie. The problem is, the story itself is so muddled and confusing that at times it becomes a distraction. Leonardo DiCaprio is excellent as a mind prober with emotional issues which get in the way of doing his job. The premise of the story is interesting, especially as it relates to questions of consciousness and unconsciousness and the formulation of ideas during sleep. But then the movie loses focus as the DiCaprio character gets more and more hung up on his emotional problems, thus diverting attention away from the movie's original premise. However, this is a good movie and is worth watching but with this disclaimer: it may put you to sleep.

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### **Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull (2008)**

A long, dumb movie., 28 May 2008

2 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Is this movie science fiction? Action adventure? A pseudo-documentary on archeology? A statement about UFOs? If a movie can be said to reflect the director's state of mind, then the director must have been muddled. This movie is part *National Treasure*, part *ET*, part *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, part *Wild Bunch*, part *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, part *Keystone Cops* and part *The Mummy*. The story is dumb, the special effects are laughable, the acting is stilted and literary license is taken to an extreme. It is hard to believe that Stephen Spielberg actually directed this cinematic cacophony. It is hard to believe that anyone directed this tribute to artistic banality. This movie represents the current low state of artistic creativity in Hollywood. Bad story? No problem! Just give the audience a strong dose of special effects! They'll love it! (Yeah. Right.) If you like scenes with monkey-like humanoids, rampaging Soviet spies, swarming ants, defoliation of a jungle (with the Soviets as the culprits), a college professor who instantly goes from being senile to articulate, and probably the most embarrassing performance in Cate Blanchett's career, then this movie is for you. One other point. This movie portrays the Russians as brutish, gun totting idiots. This kind of cultural insensitivity is simply unfair. For all of you who are weak in history, the Russians were VICTIMS of Nazi aggression, and were ALLIES of the United States during World War Two.

Actually this movie most closely resembles the 2004 movie *Alexander* in terms of its oddity, scope, weirdness and mediocrity. Lots of effort to make

a block buster but with little to show for it except lots and lots of ludicrous special effects.

Whose idea was it anyway to have Cate Blanchett play a nasty Russian? It did not work; was not even funny. (How about this for a suggestion: Why not have a Russian actress play the nasty Russian? Oops! Sorry. That would have meant having to re-write parts of the script, re-do certain scenes, re-do other cast parts and actually portray the Russians in a less hysterical manner.

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### **Inglourious Basterds (2009)**

Good but somewhat overblown., 21 August 2009  
6 stars

The movie is a bit long, drags in the middle and has a corny, hokey comic book story style, nevertheless the movie is good but definitely not great. Instead of an action packed movie focusing on a bunch of angry Jewish soldiers going after vicious, unrepentant Nazis, the audience is given a complex story with plots and subplots that are pursued to the point that the Basterds are almost shunted to the sidelines. There is solid acting, with Brad Pitt demonstrating a definite flair for comedy and Christopher Waltz giving a commendable performance as a suave but sinister SS colonel, but the muddled, absurd story is what keeps this movie from achieving anything approaching cinematic greatness. Solid acting coupled with a goofy story does not make for good cinema. This movie also continues the now time honored tradition of bashing Germans, which is nothing new in Hollywood cinema. Once again the Germans are portrayed as hapless buffoons. Yet despite the fact that they started and lost the war, and that it is highly tempting to mock their outrageous conduct, it is a stretch to present the Germans as bumbling fools. They might have been fools but they were far from bumbling and what they did in Word War Two was not a laughing matter. If someone wants to make a movie about inglorious basterds then make a movie about inglorious basterds and place them squarely on center stage where they belong.

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### **Rory O'Shea Was Here (2004)**

**Michael and Rory are great!, 26 March 2009**

**10 stars**

**This movie is wonderful. Great acting, solid story, inspiring theme, endearing characters (even with all of their faults). As the story unfolds more and more is revealed about the characters and how they evolve, even during times of conflict. For this movie is about mutual respect and support and how unity of effort can produce remarkable results. Two young men form an improbable but powerful bond that enables them to break the bonds of institutionalization and regain control of their lives. What a story! Far from feeling sorry for these fellows, they are deserving of admiration and respect, which is what this movie is about. Michael and Rory. What a team! They are great! Three cheers for them!**

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### **I Ought to Be in Pictures (1982)**

**I Liked This Movie, 6 September 2006**

**7 stars**

**What's a daughter to do when she wants to get in touch with her father who she hasn't seen in 16 years and lives 3,000 miles away? Answer: watch this movie and find out. It would be easy to rag this movie, to cite all its flaws, to point out its corniness, to dwell on Dinah Manoff's incredibly loud performance; to emphasize all the schlock, dreck, schmoozing and kvetching that identifies this movie as another example of 'ethnic' humor. Yes, one could easily rag this movie, but I won't do it. Not here, not in this website, not on the pc. Why? Let me tell you: I LIKED THIS MOVIE!!!! Yes, I admit it. THIS WAS A GOOD MOVIE!!!!. So what if the acting was a bit strained! So what if the story was as stale as a corn beef sandwich that's been sitting in the refrigerator all night! This movie is about a father and daughter who re-establish a relationship and that's something that cannot be ragged. No way. So what if the daughter talks with a certain ethnic inflection! So what if Walter Matthau reminded me of Oscar Homolka in "I Remember Momma." So what if this movie contains what has to be Ann-Margret's most forgettable role!! So what if this movie is like a pastrami sandwich with a lot of fat!!! So what if this movie's most inspiring character is a deceased grandmother!!!! I liked this movie and you will too if you just keep an open mind and remember: IT'S JUST A MOVIE!!!**

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## **I Remember Mama (1948)**

**This movie is a joke!, 28 April 2006**

**5 stars**

Normally I don't make reference to other people's comments about movies, but for this movie I must make an exception. I don't know what movie other commentators may have watched, but it wasn't the same movie I watched. This movie stunk. With the sole exception of Irene Dunne, who was the sole redeeming feature of an otherwise overrated, tepid, maudlin, poorly acted, stagy and dated antique, this movie was profoundly mediocre. The most remarkable feature of this barely watchable movie was the incredibly irritating performance of Oscar Homolka in what has to be one of the most obnoxious supporting roles ever concocted by a Hollywood screenwriter. After watching this movie, I learned that drinking coffee can make you into a "black" Norwegian, i.e., into a Uncle Chris. Indeed, this movie proves that timing is everything because if this film was made twenty-five years later, Uncle Chris becomes Archie Bunker, and this movie becomes a sitcom, which brings me to the fundamental flaw of this ponderous production, that it brings together in one movie of some of the most insipid, forgettable and uninspiring characters ever to appear together on a Hollywood sound stage. That, and the cheap special effects and Uncle Chris's crummy Model T Ford contribute to making "I Remember Mama" a movie that gives new meaning to the term "mediocrity." Also, Philip Dorn's performance as Mr. Hanson reminded me of the Ward Cleaver character in "Leave to Beaver." Finally, any similarity between the actual experience of immigrants in the United States and the portrayal of that experience in this movie, which purports to be about an immigrant family, is purely coincidental.

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## **Iron Man (2008)**

**Moral behavior sometimes takes courage., 9 May 2008**

**10 stars**

Excuse me while I recover from the shock and amazement caused by my extreme surprise that this is an excellent movie. I expected the usual vacuous Hollywood hokum with the usual Hollywoodish heavy handed combination of outlandish special effects masking a superficial story and two-dimensional characters and instead was treated to an actual well-acted, well-crafted science fiction story with actual character development within the framework of an interesting plot. Robert Downey gives a marvelous, surprisingly powerful performance as a hugely wealthy,

arrogant arms merchant who undergoes a major personality transformation - for the better. This movie is entertaining from start to finish and is worth watching.

This movie is, for Hollywood, a rare combination of special effects extravaganza combined with a substantive story that actually has some dramatic content. This movie dramatizes the problems caused by industrial activity that gains profits through war and how special interests can completely drive and distort a country's foreign policy. That there are some in our society who reap huge profits off the suffering of others is a sad commentary, which is a theme of this movie. The Iron Man is representative of what happens when someone decides to take the high moral road. To survive, the main character has to literally wear a suit of hard metal to fend off the attacks from those whose profiteering schemes are now threatened.

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### **Iron Man 2 (2010)**

Scarlet Johansson is fantastic in this movie., 11 May 2010  
8 stars

This is one of the best science fiction movies Hollywood has made in many years. The middle of the movie drags a little, but it finishes strong. Robert Downey is great but the real star is Scarlet Johansson. She is beautiful; she is fantastic; she is wonderful. Her fight scenes are incredible; her overall performance is magnificent. Also she definitely has a flair for comedy. In short, Ms. Johansson is a great performer and proves it in this movie. Ten stars for Scarlet Johansson. Mickey Rourke is also excellent as the bad guy. The cgi's add to the story. This movie is actually better than the original. The Tony Stark character is further developed and the audience learns Pepper Potts' first name. This movie is a welcome addition to the science fiction genre. The movie tells a story; has interesting characters; and except for the middle part, the story moves along quickly and ends with the audience having been entertained.

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### **It's Complicated (2009)**

Good movie, worth watching., 19 January 2010  
8 stars

From time to time Hollywood comes up with a surprise product and this movie is one of those surprises. This movie was actually good. It had an actual STORY. The movie is a comedy but has its serious moments. Meryl

Streep was great, Steve Martin was toned down in a support role, but the real star is Alex Baldwin whose presence props up this movie and transforms it into a good if not great cinematic work. As much as the director tries to make this movie a Meryl Streep vehicle, Mr. Baldwin steals the show. This has to be his best movie in years, maybe in his entire career. He is a combination of amusing, charming, and serious and whenever the movie starts dragging a "dose" of Mr. Baldwin is enough to get it back on track. What a wonderful performance by an excellent actor. Parts of the movie are hilarious, such as the bedroom scene with Ms. Streep, Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Martin (it's not what you think it is) but generally the humor tends to be at the level of chuckles instead of guffaws. Good movie, worth watching.

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### **Jakob the Liar (1999)**

Not great but watchable., 21 April 2008  
7 stars

It's easy to rag this movie as being just another Holocaust movie with corny, improbable and fantastically unrealistic plot which glosses over the horrors of the Holocaust and minimizes the suffering of its victims. But ... BUT ... this is still a good movie. Robin Williams gives one of his better performances as a Jew who tries to instill hope in an otherwise seemingly hopeless situation. True the film offers a stogy and almost romanticized version of life in a Jewish ghetto in World War Two, but the film includes some harrowing scenes of the Germans rounding up the Jews as well as other abuses which remind the audience of the criminal nature of the Nazi German regime. It's not a great movie but it's still watchable.

A surprising feature of this movie is how Robin Williams is made to look like a downtrodden Jew. He not only acts the role, he looks it too. Also there is a poignancy in this film which may seem out of place for such an otherwise depressing setting and the inclusion of the ten-year-old girl is an obvious contrivance, but still the movie is good and avoids the pitfall of trivializing the horrible conditions that so many innocent people were forced to suffer. One can only imagine the utter despair of the ghetto victims, made worse by their isolation. This movie dramatizes what happens when the people are given hope, no matter how slim. It kept them alive.

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### **Jane Austen's Mafia! (1998)**

**Funny movie, 4 December 2007**

**8 stars**

**I was channel surfing when purely by accident I came across this movie being televised on a local channel. Well, what a surprise! This is one of the better movie satires. Goofy scenes, great one-liners, great comic acting, all combined to make this movie an amusing and enjoyable entertainment experience. It's surprising that this movie is not better known because it deserves more recognition. The movie is funny without being pretentious and pokes fun at gangster films without being nasty or cruel. The characters are endearing and the actors perform their roles with great comedic skill. The humor is lowbrow, but that's good because lowbrow humor can be funny.**

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### **Jarhead (2005)**

**The movie makes a point but not a good time for mocking the military., 15 November 2005**

**8 stars**

**Below are two critiques of the movie "Jarhead." Now, before you take the time to read these critiques, please note this: the main problem with this movie is not that it mocks the Marines, but rather the timing of this movie, being released at a time when over 2,000 Americans have been killed and thousands more injured in a war that has been going on for over two years, thus seriously undermining the movie's credibility and calling into the question the judgment of the producers who for reasons probably known only to them decided to release a movie mocking an organization whose members are being killed almost on a daily basis.**

**"Be All That You Can Be." That's what the commercial says about joining the military. Along with the message are images of soldiers looking sharp and handsome, clean cut, ready to serve their country proudly and with honor. And then there's the military according to the movie "Jarhead." In this movie, once you join the military, in this case the Marines, you have immediate license to become, and indeed are expected to become, a complete, unmitigated, unmistakable, certifiable degenerate. If this movie doesn't convey any other message, it conveys that one, loud and clear or should I say "front and center"? According to "Jarhead" which means empty-headed, like no brain or no intellect, only the misfits of society become soldiers. Anyone with a brain, or with any sense at all, is doing something else, like, for instance, f----- your girl. And when you come home**

from the war, which in this movie lasts four days, after six torturous months of waiting in the middle of nowhere, the only person who personally greets you is a Vietnam Veteran of questionable mental stability. According to "Jarhead" not only are the enlisted soldiers of questionable moral and intellectual fiber, the officers are even worse - they won't even let the soldiers fight. Indeed, according to "Jarhead" being a soldier means using profanity, denigrating women, being irritable, being prone to impulsiveness, mocking your fellow soldier, and being a basic screw up. And the last is shown by what happens to the soldiers when they go home after their four-day war - they are all outside the mainstream of society, unable to adjust, incapable of adjusting - complete screw ups. According to "Jarhead" joining the military means a life of unbearable tedium and boredom interspersed with episodes of in-group violence and drunkenness, egged on by non-commissioned officers who have nothing better to do than torture their own troops with meaningless details like piling up sand bags and then taking them down - in the rain. Duh! According to "Jarhead" names like Tarawa, Iwo Jima and Okinawa mean absolutely nothing. The exploits of the Marines in years past are simply forgotten. According to "Jarhead" if you'd mention D-Day, the modern-day Marine may say: "D-Day? Duh! What's that? Don't bother me with history, just give me my beer! I wonder if Jodie is f----- my girl? Ugh! Who cares anyway? I'm not worth waiting for." Where's John Wayne when we need him? Where's Robert Taylor? Where's Lloyd Nolan and William Bendix? Where's Dana Andrews and all the other movie heroes that glorified the military and made the audience swell with pride at the mere sight of the American flag? If you asked a "Jarhead" Marine, he'd probably say: "DUH! Gimme a beer you f-----g idiot and stop wasting my time. Who the heck are those guys anyway? And WHO CARES?" Although mocking the military is nothing new, doing so during a time of war is, to put it mildly, poor timing and in bad taste. Maybe the war in 1991 was four days old; the current war has been going on for two and a half years with no sign of abetting, and during that time the U. S. has lost over 2,000 killed and many thousand's more injured. Let Hollywood make a movie about THAT!!!

"Jarhead" is the perhaps the most unflattering portrayal of military life in the long annals of Hollywood movies. According to this movie, once a person puts on the uniform he immediately regresses to the level of a five year old child - impulsive, tempestuous, violent, irritable, acting-out, yet dependent on higher authority for direction and survival. Moreover, this regressive and pathological behavior is not only condoned by the military, it is positively encouraged. Further, this movie also suggests that once you are in the military you are no longer a part of mainstream society and are treated accordingly by others outside of the military. In addition, this movie also suggests that the military gives license to behavior that is so maladaptive that it's almost laughable. Further, this movie suggests that large armies are now obsolete as wars are now fought not for territory but

to achieve certain political or economic objectives that have little to do with actually having to conquer and occupy land. Far from being one of the foundations of our society, the military, as portrayed in this movie, is little more than a depository for all the social misfits who cannot fit into normal society. In fact, in "Jarhead" there isn't even much of a war. But that's in 1991; in 2005 the situation is far different. By the way: What's wrong with hurrying up and waiting? Better to wait, be bored, do your gripping and go home disgruntled but alive and well than fight and die for nothing. If someone is thirsting for glory, let them rent "Sands of Iwo Jima."

Even though the movie conveys an unfair and negative message about the military and seems to have a certain political slant, this is still a powerfully compelling movie about the brutalization of soldiers who are expected to fight and die - even if there's no enemy. Accordingly, I give this movie an 8.

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### **Jaws (1975)**

Classic movie., 19 August 2008  
10 stars

It's a classic. It is one of those timeless movies that contains all the elements of a great work of art. The story is simple, straightforward yet profoundly powerful, with outstanding performances by every member of the cast. This is the kind of movie that Hollywood no longer makes, CAN no longer make and no longer wants to make. It's a movie with a story, devoid of any computerized special effects, depending entirely on the actors to bring the script to life. This movie is so effective that it has become an cinematic icon. The images from this movie have been incorporated into American culture. The impact of this movie on the public has been profound, enduring and unquestionable. Roy Scheider gives one of the great performances. Robert Shaw's performance is equally powerful. They are the stars of this special movie, but the entire cast is excellent. Bravo to Jaws.

### **Jerry Maguire (1996)**

Corny, contrived, shrill., 21 September 2005  
8 stars

This movie is about two guys, both of whom are on the fringes of their respective professions, neither of whom are particularly liked, both of whom who are angry and disillusioned, who transcend their racial

differences to form a bond of friendship. This movie strives to achieve greatness, and fails. If it wasn't for Tom Cruise, this movie would have been entirely unwatchable. Just another pretentious movie.

Ever watch a movie the first time and like it, then, some time later, watch the same movie a second time, and not like it? Well if that's happened to you, then you will understand where I'm coming from. After watching this movie the first time, I was really impressed with the story and with the acting, and overlooked some major annoyances in the story. But while watching this movie a second time, the annoyances and contrivances were so glaring that they could not be ignored. The relationship between Jerry and his co-worker ... no, his secretary ... no, his girlfriend ... no, his partner ... or whatever, was so awful that it made me cringe in embarrassment; nor was the girlfriend particularly attractive or smart. What was worse was the girlfriend's son, whose role was played by an actor who has to be one of the most bizarre-looking and bizarre-acting child actors ever in the history of Hollywood. This kid made Spanky and Alfalfa seem as normal as apple pie. Then there was Jerry Maguire himself. Who in their right mind would want to have anything to do with a loser like Jerry Maguire? Yet the director apparently wants the audience to believe that Jerry is really a good guy, even after getting punched on the nose and kicked in the stomach by his fiancé, who couldn't take Jerry's erratic behavior anymore. Not exactly the stuff for an entertaining movie. The one character I did like in the this movie, however, was Jerry's one and only client, an angry football player who, unlike Jerry, had reason to be angry and who demands that Jerry get his act together, do his job and show him the money. Yet the relationship between Jerry and his client is so contorted, contrived and improbable that even allowing for literary license, it's hard to buy (get the pun?), even for a movie. After watching this movie for a second time, my advice for any would-be professional athlete is to avoid a Jerry Maguire and represent yourself instead --- you'll get a better deal.

Nevertheless, this movie contains strong acting by Tom Cruise and Cuba Gooding Jr. as well as an interesting and at times provocative take on the sports entertainment industry. The movie also shows what happens when someone gets in touch with their feelings and starts being true to themselves.

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## Jersey Girl (2004)

Surprisingly good movie, 2 December 2006

9 stars

This movie caught me by surprise. I didn't expect a movie that deals with the subject of grief and how it can effect a person and everyone around him. Grief, especially that caused by the sudden loss of a close relative or friend, can be devastating. It the kind of subject that does not easily lend itself to cinematic interpretation, but this movie makes that attempt, with credible results. Ben Affleck gives a convincing performance as a bereaved husband and George Carlin is great as Mr. Affleck's father. Personal loss is hard to bear. If you don't understand that, then watch this movie. It could make you a better person.

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## Joe (1969)

Generation Gap, 11 August 2005

9 stars

This is a classic movie that dramatizes the plight of a man who cannot adjust to changes taking place in society and feels more and more alienated, which leads to violence. Joe is a worker, and he is dissatisfied and angry, and all he is needs is a pretext to lash out, which is what the story is about. Alone, Joe is quiet; together with someone else, he becomes lethal. And what makes the character of Joe even more chilling is that he fully rationalizes his violence so that to him it's not only not bad, it's necessary. For Joe projects his own violent tendencies onto those who he considers "the enemy" and therefore considers himself to be in a war, and in this movie, the "generation gap" is portrayed as a war. But it is a war in Joe's mind only, because "the enemy" in this case is in his imagination. Nobody wants to fight Joe, but Joe feels he must defend himself. Although this movie was released in 1970, it's message is as relevant now as it was then as society continues to undergo major changes which lead to the kind of intense alienation that the movie effectively dramatizes.

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### **Johnny Dangerously (1984)**

**Funny movie, 14 December 2006**

**9 stars**

**What ever happened to Michael Keaton? What a great actor and he proves it in this movie. This movie is actually FUNNY! And the reason why this movie is funny is for two reasons: an excellent script and Michael Keaton. This movie is one of the funniest comedies in the history of Hollywood. This movie is the ultimate spoof of gangster movies. In this movie, Hollywood actually pokes fun at itself by using the the gangster movie genre as the basis for a truly original comedy. The rest of the cast is funny too, especially the supporting cast. If you like to laugh and want to watch a movie that contains nonstop humor, then this movie is for you.**

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### **Julie & Julia (2009)**

**Ugh! Took away my appetite., 18 September 2009**

**1 star**

**If you like movies about the life and times of hair stylists or nail manicurists or body masseurs or other types that create careers catering to the self-indulgent, then this movie is for you. Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins but you would never know that from watching this inane movie. The portrayal of Julia Childs can best be described in one word - inane. Ms. Childs is portrayed as being little more than a giggling, frumpish, frivolous woman with mannerisms that are so annoying as to cause one to wonder why anyone would have wanted to spend any time with her, not to mention want to sleep with her in the same bed. If the movie had just stayed with the "Julie" character it may have been at least watchable, but Meryl Streep's performance is a joke. It has to be her worst performance in a movie. Her gross overacting reduces the person of Julia Childs to that of a comic caricature, and frankly there is very little that one can find amusing about Julia Child's life, especially her focus on food. Was Julia Childs really a carefree spirit as the movie suggests? Ugh! Who cares? And what is worse, part of this movie is set in France, 1949, four years after the end of World War Two and frankly who cares about post war France? If you are a fan of Julia Childs, go buy one of her cook books and cook away, but to watch a movie about her, that's another story, and not an interesting one.**

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### **Julius Caesar (1953)**

**Excellent rendition of an iconic play, 24 May 2008**

**9 stars**

**Yes, friends, there was a time, long ago, when Hollywood actually made movies that had class, were well acted without being stagy, and were literate. Oh how times have changed. Hollywood couldn't recreate this movie if it tried. Imagine Hollywood making this movie today? Ha! It would be a joke, a travesty, an unintended comedy, an embarrassment, and ultimately campy. Is there any Hollywood actor today who could play Julius Caesar like Louis Calhern? Or Cassius like John Gielgud? Or Brutus like James Mason? These actors **COMMANDED** the screen, **DOMINATED** the story, and brought Shakespeare to life, for all the world to behold. The movie that comes closest to approximating this movie is Franco Zefirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968. What makes this movie particularly effective is that it stays true to the the play with every line delivered with strength and conviction. The story of Julius Caesar is well known and is well told by this movie. Yes, beware of your friends for they may be your worst enemies and turn away from the flatterer whose flowery words may get you into a lot a trouble.**

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### **Jumper (2008)**

**Good movie, 29 February 2008**

**8 stars**

**To my utter amazement, indeed shock, I must admit that ... this was a good movie. I was expecting the usual Hollywood special effects junk and what I watched instead was an entertaining sci-fi flick with an actual original story which made good use of special effects. What I liked most about the movie was how it combined special effects with the story in such a way that the special effects actually made the movie better, which is usually not the case with a Hollywood movie. The characters were likable and there is one fight scene that was really unique, taking two of the characters literally around the world. If you like travel brochures then this movie is definitely for you.**

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## Jurassic Park (1993)

Science+Profit = Trouble, 13 November 2005

10 stars

When I first watched this movie years ago, I didn't like it. I thought the movie was one big special-effects extravaganza with theatrical and uninspiring acting (except, of course, in the scene with the lawyer sitting on the toilet who's gobbled up by an out-of-control and hungry Tyrannosaurus Rex. I don't know if that scene was meant to be funny, but I recall that it provoked a certain amount of laughter.) Subsequently, I didn't give this movie a second thought. Then recently I happened to be watching television and lo-and-behold I switched to a channel that just happened to be showing Jurassic Park. So I watched the movie and this time I liked it. Indeed I thought this movie was great, and I'll tell you why. Despite the overblown special effects and contrived script and the almost laughable acting, especially by "Newman" from Jerry Seinfeld in one of the worst cases of miscasting in the history of movie making, this movie successfully and effectively deals with a serious theme - what happens when highly sensitive, highly experimental and potentially lethal scientific knowledge and technology gets into the hands of people who want to exploit this knowledge and technology for profit. This movie shows how the technology of cloning, when used irresponsibly and with little of any thought for possible consequences, can produce disastrous results, in this case, dinosaurs running amok with no way to control them. It seems far-fetched, but really no more so than the possibility of people being able to fly or communicate electronically over huge distances. It only seems far-fetched until it becomes a reality and then it's like it was always meant to be. But getting back to this movie, now that the dinosaurs are unleashed, the question is: how can they be controlled? They were supposed to be placed on display in a park, but it doesn't quite work out the way it was intended. Instead of the dinosaurs being confined, they literally go on a rampage, completely trash the park and in the process reveal a level of intelligence and cunning that is entirely unexpected, with dire consequences. The raptors, for instance, are not mere reptilian brutes but rather are cunning and highly intelligent creatures which makes them even more dangerous. And the humans who unleashed these creatures are simply no match for the ferociousness and strength of creatures that are now beyond all control. Compared to the dinosaurs the humans puny and helpless bystanders who are literally running for their lives when not caught and devoured. The humans' weapons are absolutely no match for the ferociousness of these creatures, who easily overpower and out-think the humans. The movie ends with the surviving humans getting out while they can, leaving the dinosaurs in charge of the park. Now, what happens if the dinosaurs escape from the park? Could the human species survive?

In a way, this movie is akin to the stories "Frankenstein", "The Invisible Man" and "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" which also deal with issues relating to consequences of irresponsible scientific research.

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### **Just Friends (2005)**

Another movie about the war between men and women., 27 June 2010  
6 stars

This movie is about a woman who plays hard to get and about a man who is stupid enough to be let himself be jerked around. If a woman likes you she will let him know it, in no uncertain terms. Unfortunately, if a woman does not like a man, the signs of that may not be so obvious as the woman plays the man for whatever selfish reasons may motivate her. If the man is deluded or muddled enough, he may not pick up on the signals and will be taken for a ride, an EXPENSIVE ride. This is what this movie is about: a man who lets himself be taken for a ride. Is this movie funny. NO! Rather, it is tragic because it is a commentary on how men and women use sex to manipulate each other. She is pushing the guy's buttons and the guy is letting his buttons be pushed. Really sick. Indeed, this movie shows how messed up men and women can become, especially when their sexual hormones are flowing. The movie itself is not bad; it's the theme of the story that is so negative yet so true. When a man lets a woman know that he likes her, REALLY likes her, he is setting himself up to be zonked because women tend to harbor disdain for men who actually like them and WILL play hard to get. And why not? If the guy is willing to take the woman to dinner, at expensive restaurants no less, take her on trips, buy her presents, and lavish other gifts on her, what woman would say no? What woman in our materialistic world would say no? And in return, what does the guy get? Maybe a kiss on the cheek. The Beatles wrote a song, Can't Buy Me Love. Well, they were right. A man can't buy love, but he can buy disappointment and aggravation, especially if he is too dense to realize where the woman is coming from. But if a woman is smitten with a man, then the woman will do anything to please him; the sky's the limit. Of course, that can change at anytime, without warning. So guys, if the woman is hot for you, enjoy it while it lasts and remember, she will expect something in return.

This movie is tries to make light of a serious and complicated area of behavior, human sexuality, and does an interesting yet ultimately unsatisfying job of it. A woman sends out conflicting sexual messages and men get angry, frustrated and confused. This movie is basically about a woman who is a sexual tease and hiding behind an innocent facade, manages to cause havoc as men are literally falling over themselves in

their quest to win her over. The question is: is it worth all the fuss? This movie sends out a rather disturbing message: that women use sex to gain attention. Well, this is nothing new, but to try to make a joke of it just doesn't work, at least not in this movie. The Ryan Reynolds character is so unbelievable that it destroys the plausibility of the story. There is simply no reason why this character should be paying any attention to a woman who emotionally tortured him during high school. He really loved her, revered her, and she responded by patronizing him and publicly humiliating him. The message of this movie is clear: beware of the woman who says she just wants to be friends because to pursue her is a sure prescription for trouble. Any guy that does otherwise deserves everything he gets.

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### **Kid Galahad (1937)**

**Bette Davis makes this movie happen., 23 October 2010**  
**9 stars**

Bette Davis was HOT! If anyone doesn't believe it, watch this movie. This movie features a lot of great actors but none of them even come close to matching Bette Davis. She is HOT! She makes this movie happen. Much of the movie is stogy and predictable, but Bette Davis is like a diamond. She sparkles. She shows what she's got and what she's got is a lot. She was ALL woman. Voluptuous. Pouting lips. Big, round eyes. Lovely hips. She had it all and wasn't afraid to show it off. And she could act! No wonder she was in so many great movies. Looks and talent. No wonder she's a legend. Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson were great as tough fight managers. Wayne Morris was also impressive in the title role. He really looked like a prize fighter and the whole movie exudes the atmosphere of the arena and locker room where much of the action takes place. When you watch Wayne Morris in this movie, you have to like him. A real star. But all that takes second place to Bette Davis in what had to be the hottest role of her career. It must have been a wonderful experience to be part of the production crew and watch Bette Davis act or just to be around her. She was a star.

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## **Killers (2010)**

**A cinematic travesty; however Ms. Heigl does have a nice cleavage., 21  
June 2010  
3 stars**

**The brainlessness of this cypher of a movie is directly proportional to the size of Kathryn Heigl's ample chest, which is prominently displayed in this sad excuse of a movie. The question here is not how could any studio put together such a laughable concoction, but why would anybody even want to waste their time doing it. Okay, some people actually went out of their way to pay to watch this movie, but who's fault is that? Ashton Kutcher is supposed to be one of America's great comic actors and Ms. Heigl is ... well ... she has those nice bosoms. They speak for themselves. Yet together these two actors generate zilch, not even a chuckle.**

**This may be the first major Hollywood movie to succeed in producing a product that is completely devoid of any intellectual content, and for a Hollywood product, that is saying a lot. In addition, this movie succeeds in achieving something that maybe no other Hollywood movie has ever achieved - a complete absence of acting. The actors perform their roles but are not acting; they are going through certain motions that approximates acting. As Kathryn Heigl prances through a scene early in the movie clad in a bra with Ashton Kutcher ogling at her, it becomes obvious that this movie has dispensed with any pretense at being a work of art. The movie might have retained a modicum of self-respect if it were campy, but that would have required a certain amount of skill to pull that off and skill, with the exception of Ms. Heigl's ability to stick out her chest, is something that is sorely lacking in this production. Ashton Kutcher is a comic actor with a good screen presence and Kathryn Heigl, cleavage and all, is a rather charming and quite attractive actress, but in this movie both are just going through the motions, saying their lines, getting through their scenes, and doing so in a way that brings new meaning to the word tedious. Give these two players some good material and strong direction, and keep Ms. Heigl more modestly clad, and they may be funny (Ms. Heigl could be wonderful in a sitcom) but don't expect them to carry a movie because that takes real talent. The movie deserves a rating of 1, but because of Ms. Heigl's impressive cleavage, albeit gratuitously displayed, it gets a 3, not so much to entice people with voyeuristic tendencies to watch the movie but frankly because Ms. Heigl's chest is the only thing this movie has going for it.**

**PS: Ashton Kutcher has a nice body too, which is also prominently displayed in this movie, but one must beware of movies that try to showcase actors as pretty boys. It's a sure sign that the director has thrown in the creative towel. Showcasing actresses, however, is an entirely**

different story. There, a cute face and a wonderful figure can do wonders for any actress's career, even one with limited acting skills. The same however cannot be said for men. A pretty boy still has to be able to act.

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### King Kong (1933)

A classic., 11 December 2005  
10 stars

From time to time Hollywood manages to put together a movie that is not just a commercial product but is actually a work of art, and this is one of those movies. This movie easily could have become little more than a laughable joke, but that is not the case here. This movie is a fantasy about what happens when a majestic creature who is king of his realm is attacked, kidnapped, bound up in chains, and transported to a totally alien environment. The results are sad and tragic. By nature Kong is not wantonly violent, but once placed among people, he is doomed for destruction. Kong's relationship to the beautiful Anne Darrow is one of a protector defending his doll-like friend against all foes, human or otherwise. But the real star of the movie (besides Kong) is Robert Armstrong as Carl Denholm. Mr. Armstrong's performance must rate as one of the great performances in the history of Hollywood movies. There have been, and no doubt will be, remakes of this movie. They will be flashier and be much more expensive, but the essential story and the acting will never be surpassed because this movie is a true one-of-a-kind classic.

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### King Kong (2005)

Never mess with a 25-foot tall gorilla who's in love. Also, this movie shows that love is "a many splended thing," even for a gorilla., 20 December 2005  
6 stars

The 2005 version of King Kong is arguably the greatest love story between a human and an animal ever produced in the history of Hollywood. Unlike the original 1933 movie where the lovely lady Anne Darrow is truly terrified of the huge ape and wants nothing to do with him, here in this movie this Anne Darrow not only befriends the hapless creature but develops an attachment to the grunting giant that blossoms into a full-fledged relationship. Who can ever forget that timeless scene where the pretty lady entertains her newly befriended behemoth on the edge of a cliff hundreds

of feet above the ocean or the scene where they are innocently frolicking on the ice in Central Park, completely oblivious to the fact that the U. S. Army wants to blow him up into smithereens. This movie proves that love indeed is "a many splended thing," even between a woman and a gorilla. My only objection to the movie is that instead of the beast dying, I would have ended the movie with Anne Darrow teaching the lovestruck creature how to speak and then enrolling him in school where he would learn how to write poetry and become a "man about town." If apes could talk in Planet of the Apes, then why couldn't Kong?

It's way too long; the special effects are often gratuitous; the story, obviously, is predictable, like in the movie Titanic; and the relationship between Anne and Kong is, to put it mildly, contrived and corny. Nevertheless I like this movie. It tries to stay true to the original story and offers a dignified, if not entirely plausible, portrayal of a creature that is treated as being more than just a brutish animal. For Kong is more than just a dumb beast. He is the majestic king of his world ... and he knows it. Left alone, Kong is docile. He goes berserk only when provoked, like when he's robbed of something that's precious, such as a pretty blonde lady who can sing and dance and make him laugh, and cares about him. Any creature, human or otherwise, that can derive joy from watching a pretty lady dance and juggle can't be all bad. After a while, watching Kong being attacked, abused and exploited simply becomes oppressive. All the poor ape wants to do is protect his girlfriend, who in turn wants to protect him. Maybe if Kong had been able to talk (aren't gorillas capable of sign language?) the movie may have had a different ending. Instead of being gunned down like a cornered fugitive, Kong would have had a chance to explain himself, pour out his feelings and possibly make some friends. He bonded with Anne, didn't he? But one thing is for certain: don't mess with a 25-foot tall gorilla who's in love. It could ruin your day ... and his too.

Oh, there is one glaring inconsistency in this movie that deserves special comment. Kong fights three T-Rexes, each one of which bite him hard. Yet apparently the stalwart ape does not suffer even a scratch. Meanwhile, what three huge T-Rexes could not do, namely kill Kong, a squad of puny World War One bi-planes succeed in doing, within minutes, using bullets that pierce the skin that is so tough it can thwart the repeated bites of a full-grown 30-foot long T-Rex armed with razor-sharp teeth that are the size of tusks.

The sad thing about this movie is that it's about a creature that just wants to be left alone with his lady friend. I guess stardom does have its price.

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## **Knight and Day (2010)**

**Let's say hello to Hollywood's number one comedy team - Cameron Diaz and Tom Cruise, 25 June 2010  
8 stars**

**This may be the first major motion picture where the story is completely jettisoned, or made so paper thin as to render it invisible, in order to showcase the comedic talents of the lead actors who, in this case, are quite entertaining. Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz may be the Hollywood comedy team of the year. They are wonderful together. Both are funny and are really enjoyable to watch. Tom Cruise has a definite flair for comedy and Ms. Diaz is the modern day Goldie Hawn. Both enliven an otherwise trite script and are proof that good acting can carry a movie. Sometimes when someone's acting career is floundering, a good comic role, properly performed, may be enough to get their career back on track and in this movie Tom Cruise may have found his niche. This movie is a parody, a goof, of some of Hollywood's most iconic action movies and it works because of the presence of Hollywood's number one comedy team, Cameron Diaz and Tom Cruise. Now that it is public knowledge that Tom Cruise can do deadpan and Cameron Diaz can act dippy, the question is: how will Hollywood exploit it. There is little doubt that this movie will spawn at least one sequel. And let's not be surprised if Hollywood decides to do a remake of Private Benjamin with Ms. Diaz as Judy and Tom Cruise winds up starring in the movie version of The Office.**

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## **Knowing (2009)**

**A slow sci-fi flick., 8 April 2009  
6 stars**

**For a movie that deals with the apocalypse, it was really quite a bore. Numbers ... disasters ... fate ... destiny, these are themes of this seemingly long and dragged out movie. This has to be one of the longest two-hour movies made by Hollywood. The action drags, the acting is humdrum and the story is devoid of any suspense. Even the scene with the airplane crash quickly loses its initial dramatic impact. Nicholas Cage gives a solid but uninspiring performance as a college professor with a secret that cannot possibly grab anyone's interest. The best part of the movie is right before the final scene when the earth ... well, if you really want to know what happens go watch the movie, but if you leave the movie feeling a little let down or just plain tired, don't blame me because I told you so.**

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### **March of the Penguins (2005)**

**Impressive documentary, but let's not forget, it's about a bird, 21 April 2006  
8 stars**

**The emperor penguin has a rough life and its survival in the harsh Antarctic climate is a virtual miracle. This, to me, is the message of this impressive documentary. However, after watching the movie a question remains: What's the point of the movie? What the emperor penguin has to do to survive is incredible, but the same can be said for numerous species of animals. The grizzly bear hibernates through an entire winter; whales dive to depths of thousands of feet in search of food; birds fly thousands of miles during migrations; termites and ants build huge nests; redwood trees survive for thousands of years; the dung beetle survives in dung, etc. Technically, this movie is superb. Its story is compelling. But let's not forget: the emperor penguin is a bird, and any resemblance to a human being is purely coincidental.**

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### **Laurel Canyon (2002)**

**It's a touchy-feely movie. You've been warned., 14 March 2010  
6 stars**

**A Hollywood touchy-feely movie that has all the subtlety of a lead rock. It doesn't take much to soon figure where this movie is taking the audience. The sexual threesomes or foursomes or twosomes or whatever soon dominate the story as the audience is asked to accept a whole range of implausibilities in order for the story to work. The mother, the son, the girlfriend, the musician, all clichés, all unbelievable, all annoying, most of all the son, played by Christian Bale, in a glaring example of miscasting that is egregious, even for a Hollywood movie, which is saying a lot. The setting itself is contrived, as if Laurel Canyon is some kind of stage, a place that's so special. C'mon! It's L.A. Nothing special about that. It's not even Hollywood. Nothing in this movie works accept the final scene where the two main male characters get into a fight. Only then does the movie come to life. This movie is further proof that Hollywood should stay away from the touchy-feely stuff and stick to what it does best - producing c-g action pictures with cartoon-like characters. After all, isn't that what the public wants?**

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## **Life Is Beautiful (1997)**

**A poignant movie., 5 October 2010**

**10 stars**

**This a beautiful movie. Why? Because it is well acted, well filmed, well written and well done. It's serious without being pretentious. It tells a story. It's about courage, loyalty, caring, and family. Horst Buchholz is wonderful. His performance as the doctor was powerful. What a great actor! Also, the movie avoids becoming an expose on the horrors of the concentration camp and instead manages to stick to the story about the family. Instead of moralizing on the injustices and ill-treatment suffered by the hero, the movie presents a story of sacrifice and spirit which remains strong even in the most dire of circumstances. The movie offers a glimpse of the concentration camp from a little boy's perspective. For the little boy, who is too young to understand the true nature, purpose and implications of the concentration camp, the camp is just a bad place. It's only years later that he truly appreciates what the camp was about and how his father's bravery saved his life.**

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## **Lawrence of Arabia (1962)**

**Good Hollywood Treatment of a Historical Subject, 30 July 2005**

**8 stars**

**When considering the history of the relationship between the Arab countries and the West, it would be worth your while to watch this movie. This movie portrays a moment in history when the Arab people and the West were actually ALLIES, fighting together against a common enemy. Here a British soldier, Lawrence, actually risks his life in the cause for Arab independence. This is an incredible revelation. Peter O'Toole play Lawrence. Although O'Toole is at least a foot taller than the actual T. E. Lawrence, he nevertheless gives an outstanding performance as the enigmatic and heroic figure. Of course, one should not confuse this movie with a documentary, so don't cite this movie if you're doing a paper on the subject. But if you want to watch a credible dramatization of historical events and characters relating to the role of the Arab people in World War One, then this is the movie for you.**

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## Leaving Las Vegas (1995)

A Movie About Devotion, 4 August 2005

9 stars

A man decides to end his life, and decides to do this by going to Las Vegas and drink himself to death. This alone is not a particularly original premise for a movie. But introduce a woman whose character is as equally unusual as the man's and this transforms the story into something noteworthy and worth watching. How can a man, who is intent on slowly committing suicide, and a woman, who is a hardened street prostitute, relate to each other? The man arrives in Las Vegas and the woman approaches him, wanting to have sex with him for money. And what happens? In an act of utter contempt, not for her but for life itself, the man literally throws money at her, and the woman immediately responds to this gesture not with scorn, or anger, or contempt, but by moving in with him to try to get him to have sex, and the more she tries, the more he drinks, which makes her try even harder. Yet she doesn't try to stop him from drinking, nor does he stop her from prostituting. Instead they develop a relationship and although he is spiraling downward, she won't leave him, which is the beauty of this story. This man is suffering, and this hardened prostitute becomes his devoted companion in his final days. Nicolas Cage and Elizabeth Shue are wonderful in this movie, and their portrayals make this movie work. It's not a happy movie, but it shows that behind a cynical facade may be a person who actually cares.

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## Legion (2010)

Forget about the movie, read the Bible instead., 28 January 2010

4 stars

Once again Hollywood has ventured into a region it does not belong, this time being interpretation of biblical scripture. In this movie, the treatment of the subject of the apocalypse is so simplistic that it is embarrassing. Has Hollywood no shame? Is there anything the movie moguls will not film in their quest to make a buck? Everything about this movie is ludicrous, from the acting, to the art direction, to the ridiculous special effects, to the story itself. Yet somewhere someone thought this story good enough to invest money in this project, which proves once again that, the current economic hardships notwithstanding, there's plenty of money out there. Yet the movie does feature some interesting and amusing scenes, such as the old lady who crawls on the ceiling and throngs of possessed people stumbling around with spinning heads. But enough said. If you want to learn more about the bible, pass on this movie and instead read the book.

What is one to do when a old lady enters a restaurant, orders a raw steak and then proceeds to crawl on on the ceiling? This is one of the interesting questions explored in this offbeat but entertaining take off on the apocalyptic theme. The movie has its flaws, such as its rather pedestrian interpretation of Biblical scripture and its rather laughable special effects which could give some in the audience a headache (to appreciate this better one must see the movie). If mankind is at the brink of extinction and must rely on one hero to save it, then we can only hope that that hero is NOT the angel Michael depicted in this movie. Angels are supposed to be powerful all knowing messengers of the Almighty and should be depicted as such. To depict them as being something else is not only stretching literary license to the limit, it distorts the biblical message and reduces the movie to being just another fx extravaganza, interesting to watch but dramatically empty.

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### **Le grand voyage (2004)**

Outstanding movie., 6 June 2009  
10 stars

This movie is great! This movie is beautiful! Finally, a movie that portrays Moslems as PEOPLE, no stereotypes here. This movie is driven by the story, by the acting and above all by its theme, that of cultural affirmation and discovery. They may seem like clichés but they are not, at least not in this movie. The vista of the Grand Mosque of Mecca is absolutely stupendous and the audience is given a glimpse of a side of the Moslem world that is rarely of ever shown in the West. Here the people are caring, supportive, devout, tolerant and devoted to each other. What a welcomed and way overdue departure from the usual negative portrayals of Arabs. Outstanding movie.

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### **The Wages of Fear (1953)**

Amazing movie., 10 October 2010  
10 stars

The movie starts off slowly but then rapidly accelerates. Yves Montand is brilliant in the lead role. Given his background as a singer, his performance is almost uncanny. The story is strong, compelling, simple yet profound. Men risk their lives and nobody really cares. Men reduced to scrounging will do just about anything to make a buck. This movie is about every deck

hand, lineman, truck driver, construction worker and blue collar worker on this planet who makes a living by doing the hard, dirty, dangerous work that society still demands. Somebody has to do it. Four thousand years ago workers were hauling and lifting huge blocks of stones to build temples; the same work is being done today. These workers are taken for granted, forgotten until they are needed and then they are heroes, for the moment. This movie is a tribute to the courage of those whose work puts them in harms' way. This movie should be recognized for what it is: a director's personal statement about the condition of mankind, divided along class lines, the exploiters and the exploited, the indifference to human life in the quest for profits and how there are always those who come forward and do the heavy lifting, even when they know that they may not survive.

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### **Let Me In (2010)**

Excellent movie of the sci-fi genre., 19 October 2010  
9 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

What is going on with Hollywood these days? They are actually producing high quality movies such as this one. Don't get fooled by the title or the plot or the slew of little known actors. This is a solid movie of the sci-fi genre. This movie offers an interesting interpretation of the vampire legend. Instead of an austere aristocrat the vampire now takes the form of a young innocent-looking girl. With her are her devotees who love her and serve her unconditionally. Without their help the vampire cannot survive. Although violent, she is not a wanton killer. Although not human, she is capable of love. Although fundamentally a malevolent spirit, she is capable of defending others. In short, she is not a repugnant creature. Lethal, yes! Dangerous, yes! Repugnant, no! After all, how could such an innocent-looking little girl hurt anyone?

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### **Life on Jupiter: The Story of Jens Nygaard, Musician (2002)**

Great musician., 8 November 2005  
10 stars

This is an excellent documentary about a musician who refused to compromise his artistic integrity and never gave up in his struggle to promote music as a means of improving the lives of people, especially the

less fortunate in our society. Jens Nyggaard was truly one of a kind - a gifted musician whose appearance and mannerisms belied an artistic brilliance which he readily shared with the public. Moreover, Mr. Nyggaard, who organized and conducted his own symphony orchestra, performed much of his work in a church located next to Lincoln Center in New York City. He did this after stints at Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall where his music was met with artistic acclaim. Now, Mr. Nyggaard could have continued his career in the big concert halls, but instead took his music directly to the people, and for that he deserves a place of honor in the annals of music history.

Also, congratulations to Martin Spinelli for bringing to our attention the life and career of one of the great musicians of our time. Such documentaries keep alive the talents and accomplishments of persons such as Jens Nygaard whose work would otherwise soon be forgotten.

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### **Lions for Lambs (2007)**

**Is this movie supposed to be entertaining?, 10 November 2007  
4 stars**

Miscasting again raises its unwelcome head in the form of Tom Cruise's listless performance as an ambitious U. S. Senator. Mr. Cruise is unbelievable as a rising political star on the national political scene. And the movie itself, although interesting from an academic point of view, is dramatically weak, as it sacrifices drama in favor of pursuing a pseudo-intellectual theme more appropriate for a documentary. To the movie's credit, it tries to explore U. S. foreign policy but does so in such a half-baked simplistic manner that it leaves the audience trying to figure out the actual point of the movie. It is an axiom that Hollywood is weak in the area of examining complex foreign policy issues. After all, Hollywood film makers are not academicians. So, when making forays into subjects that require in-depth analysis, such as the pros and cons of U. S. foreign policy since the the Vietnam War, Hollywood will invariably botch it up, like it does in this movie. This is to be expected because a movie is first and foremost a commercial entertainment product, not an academic treatise, which is crafted to appeal to the widest possible audience. Mr. Redford should be praised for making an effort to present an intelligent and balanced discourse on U. S. foreign policy, but does so in such a weak and tenuous manner and by the end of the movie, one may ask: did this movie entertain me? When that question has to be asked, then that's sure sign that there is something wrong with the movie.

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### Live Free or Die Hard (2007)

Excellent action movie with a serious message, 23 July 2007

9 stars

To my great surprise this was an excellent movie. Not exactly Shakespeare or anything highbrow but definitely a full entertainment package that will please all who enjoy action thrillers that border on the science-fiction genre. But when you get beyond the special effects and all the noise, the movie poses serious questions: Is the United States vulnerable to computer-based terrorism? Has computer technology become the Achilles' heel of modern society? Bruce Willis gives another excellent performance as John McClane but also impressive is Maggie Q who could be the next Sandra Oh. Ms. Q doesn't say much in this movie but her actions definitely speak volumes. She's all business and she's dynamite.

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### Lord Jim (1965)

Contrived story, long, boring, excellent movie if you have insomnia., 11

August 2008

5 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Long. Pompous. Pretentious. Boring. Another drawn out Hollywood clunker. As a morality tale, this movie fails. What exactly did Jim do that was wrong? He left a ship AFTER the Captain had already abandoned it? He was part of the crew, not the guy in charge. True there were passengers still on board but what was Jim supposed to do? Go down with the ship? The premise of movie, of a man trying to redeem himself, would have far more effective if Jim had been the first to jump ship, not the last. Be that as it may, the movie drags on almost interminably. The pontificating quickly becomes tedious as the action slows to a snail's pace while the various characters try to sort things out. What will Jim do? Like who cares? He didn't do anything wrong in the first place, so what is all the fuss? The issue posed by this movie would be like an airline stewardess deciding whether to stay or exit a plane with passengers on board that seems to be about to crash ... and the pilot and copilot have already jumped out of the plane ... and screaming at the stewardess to get out of there too. It's the Captain who is supposed to go down with the ship, not the crew, and if the Captain orders you to jump ... you jump! And that's what Jim did and for that he feels shame and guilt for having abandoned the passengers. But he was ordered to do just that and if Jim had remained on the ship, the first

question that he would have been asked is: who told you to stay on the ship?

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### **Lord of War (2005)**

**Why not make a movie about a real "Lord of War" - Joachim Von Ribbentrop?, 20 September 2005  
10 stars**

**This bizarre, troubling, yet excellent movie is about a sociopath masquerading as a legitimate businessman who is so deluded, cynical and out of touch with his own feelings that he is able to effectively rationalize his own criminality without giving it a second thought. Indeed, according to this movie, the way to make a "fast buck," and to marry the woman of your dreams, is not through hard work, or being a law-abiding citizen, but by being a gun runner - and a gun runner who snorts cocaine and flaunts all laws whenever it suits his criminal purposes. But what makes this movie even more chilling is the outstanding performance by Nicolas Cage who aptly portrays a man who on the surface projects an image of civility that belies his sinister activities that promote war. And what is worse, the character works in collusion with government officials of other countries, further underscoring the corruption that marks his nefarious enterprise.**

**This movie brings to mind the career of Nazi Germany's notorious Foreign Minister and war criminal, Joachim Von Ribbentrop. Like the Nicolas Cage character, Von Ribbentrop was also a warmonger, and also like the Nicolas Cage character, was socially adroit, fluent in several languages, a fancy dresser and had a successful marriage to a beautiful woman and had a nice family. Yet anyone familiar with the history of Nazi Germany knows the havoc Von Ribbentrop caused and how his suaveness was a mere facade for a man who was an irresponsible opportunist who promoted war and recklessly helped lead his country to total destruction. The Nicolas Cage character fits the Von Ribbentrop mold. Joachim Von Ribbentrop was the "Lord of War" who engineered the infamous Nazi German-Soviet Union Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, which is arguably the biggest single example of outright warmongering in history, where two countries, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, connived, in secret, to obliterate a third country, Poland, and then, to the utter amazement and disbelief of the entire world, DID IT, marking the the start of World War Two. So what about making a movie about Joachim Von Ribbentrop? Or what about making a movie about an actual historical case (a pun, get it?) of gun-running, such as, for example, Lend-Lease where the United States, acting as the "Arsenal for Democracy," shipped weapons to the British while ostensibly remaining neutral, or the Soviet Union's amazingly reckless decision to**

sneak nuclear armed missiles into Cuba, which almost caused a nuclear war? What WERE the Soviet bureaucrats and militarists thinking when they concocted THAT crazy scheme to sneak missiles into Cuba? What WAS that arch-warmonger and real "Lord of War" Joachim Von Ribbentrop thinking when he concocted that insane treaty with the Soviet Union which all but guaranteed a war? These might provide interesting material for a movie.

P.S.: That both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union no longer exist is evidence that even in our war-ravaged world, justice occasionally still does prevail.

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### **The Bear (1988)**

Respect the bear., 11 January 2006  
10 stars

This is a great movie. No, this is a fantastic movie. It is one of the best movies ever made. And it stars - a bear. A big grizzly bear who protects a small orphan cub from the hunters who get their come-ponce and are humbled in the process. The bear is a hero, and a creature to be admired and respected, not only for his size and strength, but for his courage. When you watch *The Bear*, you gain a greater appreciation of this creature within its natural habitat and to treat this animal not as a dumb beast, but as the magnificent and intelligent creature. This movie is a cinematic gem, deserves much wider recognition, and unlike a lot of the boiler-plate material churned out by Hollywood, this is a thoughtful as well as entertaining adventure movie.

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### **Lucky You (2007)**

If you like poker, then this movie is for you., 8 May 2007  
6 stars

Drew Barrymore is an actress whose talent has not yet been fully tapped. Eric Bana is good but, as usual, Ms. Barrymore is wonderful. She proves once again that she has developed into a wonderful actress. Robert Duvall is also good. What was not so good was the story itself. The father-son conflict is contrived and ultimately fails dramatically. Also, Eric Bana's character is an insipid loser and not particularly nice, so there is nothing about him to inspire empathy. He takes money, squanders it, disrespects his father, steals from his girlfriend, acts irresponsibly and does stupid

things. But if you want to learn a few things about poker players, then this is the movie to watch. Actually, the real story is the poker game itself. Some of the players at the table seemed to be much more interesting than Mr. Bana's character and if the movie dealt (no pun intended) more with them, then maybe this movie would have been more entertaining. Nevertheless, having Drew Barrymore in this movie makes it still worth watching.

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### **Lucy & Desi: Before the Laughter (1991) (TV)**

**Bad case of miscasting., 28 October 2005  
7 stars**

The lady who plays Lucille Ball did a fine job; the gentleman who plays Desi Arnaz, well ... that's another story. His accent is so grating and so phony that it was laughable. Yet I must ask myself: Why am I even bothering to comment about this movie? What is it about this movie that caught my interest? The answer is this: "I Love Lucy." TV sitcoms come and go and are quickly forgotten. Yet this show, with its improbable cast of characters, lingers on in the collective memory of American TV memorabilia. A "B" movie actress and her band leader husband become American TV icons. I watched this movie to find out how could this happen. How could these two individuals attain such a high status? There seemed to be absolutely nothing about them that suggested that they would become the most popular and famous TV couple in history. According to the movie, Lucille was vain, insecure, temperamental and at times hysterical while Desi is portrayed as being a shallow, cheating philanderer who is totally dependent on Lucille for financial support. Yet this improbable couple made entertainment history.

**When will there be a movie about Vivian Vance and William Frawley?**

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### **MacGruber (2010)**

**Consistently mediocre, 31 May 2010  
4 stars**

Those who choose to parody a genre should know what they are doing before they proceed. The producers of this movie did not know what they were doing. Proof of that is this movie. The humor is flat, the lead actor not funny, the supporting cast unimpressive and it's not even campy. But at least the movie is consistent - consistently mediocre. It's never quite bad

enough to write it off as a total loss but it never rises to the occasion either as a funny movie. The movie attempts to be silly but instead it's boring. It tries to borrow from other action-adventure movies but succeeds in being a travesty. This movie fails where a movie like Tropic Thunder succeeds. Why this is the case is a matter for speculation. But one thing is for certain - this movie is destined for a quick trip to DVD land, the place where even a bomb like this can finally have its chance to explode.

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### **Machete (2010)**

Great movie., 7 September 2010  
10 stars

This is one of the great movies. It's campy, it's goofy, it's noisy, it's incredible. Despite the violence the movie entertains. Robert DeNiro is great. It is his best performance in years. He shows a definite flair for comic acting. Michelle Rodriguez is stunning. She is beautiful. She is spectacular. Why she isn't in more movies is baffling. She is such a strong actress. Her presence improves any movie. Lindsay Lohan was HOT! And she is funny. Ms. Lohan definitely would be great as a lead in a television sitcom. But the best performance is by the lead actor, Danny Trejo. When Academy Award nomination time arrives, his name deserves to be on the list of nominees for Best Actor. This movie has the "feel" of a spaghetti western but is actually a well-crafted production. The movie offers nonstop action, snappy dialog, impressive special effects and catchy music. If you like movies that actually entertain, then this movie is for you.

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### **Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985)**

Tina Turner's Greatst Movie, 3 August 2006  
10 stars

People!!!! This is a GREAT MOVIE!!!! This movie makes a strong statement about people and society. And Tina Turner is HOT!!!! She is GREAT!!!! She IS this movie. And what about the Master-Blaster? Two guys who become one, and try to impose their control over what is a microcosm of modern society. The analogy is obvious and well-stated. Yet this is a movie with few words, but when spoken, they resonate with meaning. For Mad-Max is a pawn in a power-struggle, the resolution of which I will not reveal. It's an action movie and a sci-fi movie with a message, yet is entertaining too, which is why this movie is worth watching.

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## **Mamma Mia! (2008)**

**Rocky start but recovers; Streep and Baranski are great., 16 August 2008  
7 stars**

**Okay. It's not the 1936 Show Boat, it's not Footlight Parade, it's not Yankee Doodle Dandy, it's not Stormy Weather, it's not Carmen Jones, it's not Oklahoma, it's not West Side Story, it's not Zorba the Greek, it's not Oliver!, it's not Grease, it's not Chicago, it's not Idlewild - all great Hollywood movie musicals - but after a rocky start, with a story that at first seems hokey to the extreme and brings the movie to the brink of cinematic oblivion, it recovers to become a good, if not great, movie. How does that happen? Almost miraculously, Meryl Streep's performance, which at first is incredibly stale and flat, undergoes a remarkable transformation and becomes great! It is as if someone interceded with her in the middle of the movie, injected her with a large dose of spirit, got her to turn around her performance and saved the movie from taking a cinematic dive. Along with Christine Baranski, Ms. Streep sings, dances, laughs, romps with gusto, and carries the movie. She becomes the star and makes this movie a Meryl Streep vehicle where she gives one of her stronger performances which transcends the corny story, improbable setting, and an ensemble of male actors who are almost laughingly miscast (Pierce Brosnan in a musical? C'mon! This is a movie that needed Anthony Quinn, Howard Keel and Rosanno Brazzi). After struggling to establish itself, the movie becomes an entertaining cinematic experience with catchy songs, snappy dancing, and dynamic performances by the female leads, led by the great, fabulous, beautiful and talented Meryl Streep.**

**This movie is proof that making a good musical is a daunting task and one best not done if it's not done right. Just like Les Grossman interceding with the director in Tropic Thunder, someone in the front office of this movie must have pulled the director aside and told her "Look, turn this movie around or this production is history!" Otherwise, how did this movie make such a dramatic recovery?**

**The first section of this movie is so bad that it causes one to wonder: why me? The mushy, wishy-washy dialog, the contrived conflicts, the unimpressive Greek scenery (why not set this movie in Long Island?), and dumb characters makes this movie a classic in how not to begin a movie. But a movie can survive a bad start just as long as it has a strong finish, and this movie finishes strong.**

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## **Manhatta (1921)**

Great documentary, 21 November 2009

10 stars

This wonderful documentary offers a glimpse of New York City from a bygone era, when the city had factories, and steam ships we docked in the harbor and when steam and smoke was bellowing into the sky, a time of industry, of power, and economic might. The documentary suggests an industrious people, a mass of humanity inhabiting a great metropolis, uniquely American, bristling with unbounded energy. The great ocean liner entering the harbor, the impressive buildings, some of which still exist today but back then glistening structures, the epitome of modern design, all suggesting a society in which the sky's the limit. This is a great documentary.

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## **"Married with Children: Can't Dance, Don't Ask Me (#3.12)" (1989)**

In this episode Christina Applegate is the star., 29 August 2007

10 stars

Usually, television sitcoms don't lend themselves to criticism because they are what they are, namely commercial products that cater to ratings at the expense of artistic quality. And Married with Children is no different (even though this sitcom was in my opinion far more clever and funny than most other series in the genre). However, this episode was actually excellent. It features dancing by David Garrison and Christina Applegate, an excellent script with great one-liners, humorous and likable characters and proof that when given the chance, performers can excel. Case in point is Ms. Applegate. She is terrific in this episode. Not only is she funny, she dances is and clearly the star. That later on she has gone on to perform on Broadway does not surprise me. Ms. Applegate is wonderful. She would be a great Shirley Feeley in a remake of Laverne and Shirley.

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## **"Married with Children: Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: Part 2 (#2.6)" (1987)**

The American Family, 3 December 2009

10 stars

The script in this episode was great. This is one of the best episodes. Al, Peggy, Marcy and Steve are in top form as the lines are flying all over the place causing nonstop laughter as the institution of marriage gets the once

over. When one compares this show with let's say, Leave It With Beaver or Father Knows Best, one can appreciate how television had evolved, and in a positive way, starting with All In The Family. The character Al Bundy has to rank with Ralph Kramden, Archie Bunker and Chester A. Riley as one of the truly iconic characters in the pantheon of TV buffoons. Great script, wonderful acting, original story, contemporary themes, all presented in good fun. Welcome to the American Family.

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**"Married with Children: No Pot to Pease In (#9.9)" (1994)**

One of the funniest episodes, 14 October 2010

10 stars

This episode of Married With Children ranks among the funniest and most clever episodes of the series. The story is hilarious as the Bundys become the subject of a sitcom. Hence, a sitcom within a sitcom, with extremely humorous results. George Wyner is extremely funny as the sitcom director and the entire cast is in top comedy form, especially Ed O'Neill as the indefatigable Al Bundy. When it wants to, Hollywood can put together a really upbeat, humorous story. This episode offers nonstop laughs as the Al cannot get enough of a TV show that confirms everything he's always said about marriage, children, work and life itself. This is great comedy and deserves praise.

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**"Married with Children: The Stepford Peg (#11.10)" (1997)**

Katey Sagal shines., 6 August 2009

10 stars

What a wonderful episode. Katey Sagal shows that she is a great actress. She really stars and her transformation from a mean, vicious, nasty shrew to a generous, supportive and modest wife was impressive, even astounding. It's just too bad that the writers chose not to further develop the new Peg which was a much more attractive, enjoyable and amusing character than the grumpy, scowling, old Peg. The gag is that Al somehow brainwashed Peg into believing that she is a generous, giving person who puts family first. The question is: who is the real Peg? The disgusting, self-centered, dumbo or the giving, caring, and far more attractive paragon of virtue?

What would have been so terrible if the writers had kept the new Peg? Better yet, what about if there was a scene where Peg is in one of her more irritable and nasty moods, giving Al a really hard time, mocking him mercilessly, belittling his manhood, deriding him for being a shoe salesman, and then, while in the middle of her latest tirade, she suddenly stops, lapses into a stupor, snaps out of it and undergoes a complete change of personality that no one else notices at first but which soon becomes apparent. Might have made for an interesting episode, or perhaps a spin off.

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### **Mars Attacks! (1996)**

Interplanetary war reduced to a virtual joke., 23 March 2008  
8 stars

This is a goofy movie, a spoof on the science fiction genre, and it works. The story has huge holes in it and could easily be trashed, but would not deserve it because this movie is fundamentally a science fiction black comedy. To take this movie seriously is a useless exercise in futility. Why trash a movie that's not supposed to be taken seriously? With that understanding, these comments are offered. Jack Nicholson plays two characters and provides an interesting and at times quite amusing performance. Jack Black and Sarah Jessica Parker also provide entertaining performances. But the best performance of all was that of Rod Steiger. Indeed, Mr. Steiger could have played Mr. Nicholson's roles too. The story is a take-off on other sci-fi movies but also includes some originality so that the movie is more than just a mere rehash of previous works. The movie may have some similarities to, let's say, *The War of the Worlds*, but is definitely NOT a remake of that movie. This movie also relies heavily on special effects which is a key component of the story. If you are searching for a movie that reduces interplanetary war to a virtual joke, then this movie is for you. But remember, it's only a movie.

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### **MASH (1970)**

If you like a movie that mocks soldiers stuck in the middle of a war zone, then this movie is for you., 12 June 2006  
5 stars

This movie is innovative. This movie is well-written. This movie is well-acted. But I don't like this movie. I feel this way because the Korean War is

not an appropriate backdrop for a comedy, even for a comedy with an anti-war message. The United States lost over 40,000 soldiers during the Korean War. Making fun of the Army may be okay in certain circumstances, but to portray Army personnel who served in Korea as a bunch of giggling goof-offs just is not funny to me. The soldiers who served in Korea were heroes and should be accorded the respect their service deserves, even in works of fiction. Characters like Frank Burns and Margaret Hoolihan are comical in a farcical sort of way, but their antics were taking place not in the peaceful confines of some stateside army base, but in the middle of war zone where they were on-call 24-hours per day, everyday, rain or shine and everything in between. If you find that funny, then go ahead and laugh. But I don't find it amusing, not at all.

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**"M\*A\*S\*H: A Holy Mess (#10.13)" (1982)**

Special episode., 19 May 2007  
10 stars

What a great episode. Well written script, compelling story, excellent acting, all rolled up in one half-hour episode. That the writers of a television were able to come up with such a story is remarkable. The chaplain's heroism and the soldier's anguish were aptly portrayed and generated really powerful drama and some strong acting. It's as if the producers of this show had decided that they would try to inject some real drama into the show and explore some topics that some in the audience could find uncomfortable. For this episode deals with questions of ethics and morality that transcend the usual two-dimensional fluff of a Hollywood sitcom and for that reason make this particular episode of MASH special.

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**"M\*A\*S\*H: Fallen Idol (#6.2)" (1977)**

Excellent., 20 July 2008  
10 stars

This is one of the best episodes of this series, which for a series that ran for eleven years is saying a lot. Powerful acting coupled with an excellent script makes this episode worthy of special mention. Although a comedy, MASH covers many themes that portray various aspects of the human condition, here the theme being hero worship and what happens when your hero fails and you are forced to confront the reality of the situation, that your hero has imperfections and could even let you down. Oh how smug one can get when they believe that they can rely on someone else to help

them out until the time comes when help is needed and the "hero" fails. Okay, it's not comedy, but in this case it's better than comedy because it's dramatic, compelling and real.

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**"M\*A\*S\*H: Lil (#7.3)" (1978)**

Sets up the audience and then does not deliver., 28 June 2009  
5 stars

This was shaping up as one of the better episodes of MASH. Excellent acting, great script, real chemistry between Colonel Potter and his female visitor, who also was a Colonel, a plausible story, two people attracted to one another and then ... nothing. What was shaping up to be an outstanding episode of television theater ended with a thud. Why the writers would want to ruin a such a great story is perplexing. The episode is building up to a climax and ends with ... a handshake between a man and woman stuck in a war zone, thousands of miles away from home, and obviously attracted to each other. There is no worse screenplay then one that sets up the audience and then does not deliver. The two Colonels were primed for action and then the writers pull the fuse and create a dud. Ugh!

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**"McHale's Navy" (1962)**

Joe Flynn was the star of this show., 11 May 2009  
10 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Not only is this one of the funniest sitcoms in broadcast history, it is also one of the most astutely written. This is because the conflict between Captain Binghamton, wonderfully played by Joe Flynn, and Commander McHale, played by the incomparable actor Ernest Borgnine, which drives the plot, is anything but a contrivance. Anyone who has any experience working in huge bureaucracies will understand and appreciate this show. First, there is the hapless Captain Binghamton, who is trying to "play by the rules" and thereby gain favor with his superiors, and then there is Commander McHale who in every episode thumbs his nose at the Captain who can only become infuriated since McHale is protected by the same superiors from whom Captain Binghamton is currying favor. That is, higher command has given McHale and his crew carte Blanche to do whatever they want provided that they are successful in carrying out their military missions while the Captain will be held accountable if McHale fails. It is a

no win situation for the Captain and a win-win situation for McHale who gains all the glory but can always use the Captain as a scapegoat of he fails. The fact is that McHale and his crew are no more then civilians dressed up as Navy personnel, and given that, why would anyone expect McHale to conform to Navy rules? Yet Captain Binghamton must conform to Navy rules, rules that he cannot enforce because higher command won't let him. This creates conflict which is the stuff of both comedy and drama. There are few characters in the history of American television that are more pathetic than Captain Binghamton, who was brilliantly played by the Joe Flynn, who manages to combine buffoonery with a fatalism ("Why me? Why is it always ME?" the Captain asks plaintively every episode) that produces laughter as the outclassed and outmaneuvered Captain struggles against all odds to control the uncontrollable, Commander Quinton McHale.

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### **Medium Cool (1969)**

Great movie., 22 October 2010  
10 stars

A news cameraman from Chicago and a single mother from West Virginia. What are the chances of these two meeting and having a relationship? It happens in this movie and what's more, it happens in the midst of intense social and political turmoil. This movie captures the intensity of the political turbulence that surrounded the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. It conveys the anger of the protesters and their suppression by the police and the military. Indeed, this movie dramatizes the power of the government and what can happen when the government decides to assert its power. Robert Forster and Verna Bloom give incredibly strong performances as the two people who unwittingly get caught up in the maelstrom of the protests.

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### **Michael Clayton (2007)**

1 out of 3 people found the following review useful:  
Slow start but strong finish., 23 October 2007  
8 stars

This movie starts slowly but then the tempo picks up and what at first seems to be just another long, pretentious Hollywood clunker turns into an interesting and well-acted story. George Clooney is excellent in the title role. The movie is long but avoids becoming tedious and the story is complex but not so convoluted that it loses its direction. Where the movie

tends to be weak is the ludicrous character of the attorney who for reasons that can only be surmised decides to betray his own client, a large corporate conglomerate which happens to be paying millions of dollars to this attorney's firm in legal fees. This was stretching literary license to the limit. But other than that the movie presents a credible story that should keep the audience's attention, which nowadays is saying a lot. After all, when's the last time that Hollywood made a two-hour movie that told a story AND actually made sense?

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### **Milk (2008)**

A story about determination and courage., 10 December 2008  
10 stars

This movie is one of the best, if not the best, movie biopics in Hollywood history. Besides being superbly directed and well-acted, the movie tells a story about determination and the affirmation of those values that made the United States great. Although Harvey Milk is the central character of this movie, the story is about much more than Mr. Milk's political career or his tragic death. Rather, it is a statement about courage in the face of extreme adversity and for standing up to what you believe is right. Harvey Milk could have played it safe, played ball with the powers that be, cut his deals with the other politicians and in the process become just another politician. But he believed in action and meant every word he said and for that he paid the ultimate price. For a public official to take an unpopular stand takes a lot of courage and guts and Harvey Milk had both those qualities. Yet the movie also contains the negative message, that by taking an unpopular stand one puts everything on the line, including one's life. It's a fact that the movie boldly examines. The deaths of Harvey Milk and George Moscone is a dark chapter in American political history. Hopefully neither man died in vain.

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### **Mirrors (2008)**

Respect the mirror., 7 September 2008  
8 stars

Mirrors can be dangerous. They can hold all kind of surprises. A reflection may be more than just a reflection, so respect the mirror. This movie is great. What a surprise! Easily Keifer Sutherland's best movie. Don't be fooled by the B movie aspect of the story. The script is solid, and although

meant to be one of those scary movies, the movie is actually solidly part of the sci-fi genre, presenting a complex story that challenges our conventional conception of one of our most common household items, mirrors. After watching this movie, you will come away with a far greater respect for mirrors, what they are for and more importantly, what they contain because your reflection may be something more than what you expect. So please, don't take your mirrors for granted and if you find something strange with your reflection, it may be due to causes that defy reasonable explanation.

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### **Mission: Impossible III (2006)**

Surprisingly good movie, 13 May 2006  
7 stars

I had misgivings about going to watch this movie. I believed that this movie would be just more of the same special-effects digital garbage that Hollywood is dishing out faster than a short-order cook dishes out hash at a busy diner. The good news is that although this movie is packed with special effects, IT'S NOT GARBAGE. This movie is actually watchable, and contains some pretty good acting in a movie that is not overly insulting to one's intelligence. In other words, the movie entertains without being a mere live-action cartoon. Now this movie isn't Shakespeare and Tom Cruise is not Sir Laurence Olivier, so if you're expecting something esoteric or sublime, this is the wrong movie. But if you want an action movie and are willing to accept the movie on its own terms, then this movie is worth watching.

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### **Mona Lisa Smile (2003)**

Definitely worth watching., 13 April 2009  
8 stars

Once again Julia Roberts proves that she is one of the great actresses. Ms. Roberts gives a stellar performance as a college instructor who refuses to sell out and in the process becomes a positive roll model for those around her. The movie also features great performances by the always dependable Dominic West and the other members of the cast, including Kirsten Dunst who is definitely one of Hollywood's better actresses. Wonderful performances coupled with a strong story makes this movie something that is worth watching. The only drawback in this movie is that at times the story begins to become contrived as some of the student-parent conflicts

become a bit overblown and the ensuing crises somewhat difficult to believe, but all in all this is good movie which showcases the talents of one of Hollywood's great actresses, Julia Roberts.

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### **Monster (2003)**

Excellent acting., 10 October 2005  
8 stars

First, let me make it perfectly clear - I found this movie to be well acted and fascinating. I certainly recommend it as a interesting dramatization of the the life of a very disturbed person. Yet, let us not forget for a moment that the woman in question was a serial killer who was not only a victim but a victimizer as well, who committed vicious acts of violence that went way beyond any rational explanation for what she did or why. Ms. Charlize Theron's performance was incredibly powerful and poignant, as she portrays a woman whose unrequited quest for love and never-ending rejection of her by society is transformed into an all-consuming and uncontrollable rage. Normally, such a character would not evoke feelings of sympathy, but Ms. Theron manages to do so. It's a remarkable piece of acting. But, please, just remember that it's only a movie, and the movie is a drama that offers a story that may not be consistent with the facts.

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### **Monte Walsh (1970)**

One of Lee Marvin's best performances., 21 September 2009  
10 stars

When considering the acting career of Lee Marvin, the movie Monte Walsh must be included as an example of Lee Marvin at his best, Mr. Marvin gives a powerful, compelling and moving performance as an aging cowboy who has to deal with change. So strong is his performance that he carries the entire movie, which, given the outstanding supporting cast, including Jack Palance, Jeanne Moreau, Jim Davis and Mitchell Ryan, is saying a lot. The story contains drama and pathos without becoming melodramatic or stagy and includes some spectacular cinematography which captures the essence of the open range. What makes this movie particularly wonderful is its unpretentious dramatization of relationships between people with whom the audience can relate and what happens to them as they try to adjust to a disappearing way of life. As the open range gave way to the

fenced in ranches, an entire way of life disappeared. This movie is about what that change means to people and how it effects their lives.

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### **Moon Over Parador (1988)**

A Gem, 26 July 2005

10 stars

This movie contains one of Richard Dreyfuss's greatest performances, as an actor who plays a dictator and does it so convincingly that his own mother does not detect the impostor. Also, this movie is funny, yet has a serious side as well. What is especially intriguing about this movie is the character Madonna, who is the dictator's mistress, but eventually becomes the leader of the country. Madonna's evolution from mistress to political leader added greatly to the quality of the story and to the movie's entertainment value. And the main character, who at the start of the movie is a struggling actor and somewhat of a buffoon, evolves too and by the end of the movie commands respect. I liked this movie.

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### **Mr. Conservative: Goldwater on Goldwater (2006)**

Excellent documentary., 25 January 2010

10 stars

Excellent documentary about an interesting and iconic figure in American history. Barry Goldwater may have lost the 1964 election but was vindicated 16 years later with the election of Ronald Reagan as President. What this documentary shows is how image counts for everything in the political process. It's not who you are but how you are perceived. It's not what you are but what the public thinks you are. That Mr. Goldwater's political career survived the 1964 drubbing he received at the polls is a remarkable event, possibly unprecedented in American political history. It's also a testament to Mr. Goldwater's durability and ability to overcome adversity and earn a place of honor in American political history. Mr. Goldwater was probably the last of the real conservatives whose political career was not propped up by the so-called Religious Right and because of that he lost in 1964. But the Republicans learned from their defeat in 1964 and four years later won with Richard Nixon whose strategy for winning marked the start of a new era in American politics, marking the emergence of religion as a major influence in the shaping of the American political agenda.

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### **Mr. & Mrs. Smith (2005)**

**Angelina Jolie for Comic Actress of the Year!, 31 July 2005**

**8 stars**

**Mr. and Mrs. Smith are just an ordinary couple, living in an ordinary town and in an ordinary house and leading ordinary lives. Or so the audience is lead to believe. But the audience knows better, or at least they should know better. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are not paid big bucks to play just anybody, and the movie soon proves this to be the case. Once Pitts's and Jolie's covers are blown, sparks fly, things blow up, and the one-liners spew forth at a rate almost equal to that of the speed of sound. What this movie proves is that Angelina Jolie is now the funniest comic actress since Sandra Bullock. In fact, if someone decided to make an updated version of "I Love Lucy," I would definitely cast Ms. Jolie in the role of Lucy Ricardo. There is no question that she would do credit to such a role. Andy Garcia could play Ricky Ricardo, and Dom De Louise and Cathy Bates could play Fred and Ethel Mertz. But enough of this digressing. "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" is good entertainment, and Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt work well together, and for these reasons alone the movie is worth watching. As usual, Ms. Jolie is absolutely charming. She is the star.**

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### **Mumford (1999)**

**Trust is what it's about, 3 August 2007**

**9 stars**

**What a wonderful, charming, interesting and original movie. Indeed this movie is a surprise. How can this charming movie go unnoticed? What is it about Hollywood that invests it with the talent to create such an entertaining movie and then practically cast it aside with all the other wonderful movies that fail to catch on with the public? The movie's plot revolves around issues of trust that transcend usual professional bounds and suggests that sometimes the most effective therapists are those without the degrees. Also, this movie contains some excellent acting, especially by Loren Dean who plays the title role. Mr. Dean's performance is a tour de force, yet is unrecognized for reasons unknown. However there is at least one person who appreciates his performance, meaning me, and if others watch this movie maybe others will appreciate Mr. Dean's performance, and the movie, too.**

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## **Munich (2005)**

**Beware! You are entering a cinematic mine field., 10 January 2006**

**1 star**

**Did Steven Spielberg personally direct this movie? I hope not because if he did then maybe it's time for him to move on to something else. Munich has to be one of the worst, if not THE worst movie ever made. Now, Hollywood makes a lot of clunkers, which are pretty bad, but nobody is trying to peddle them off as being anything but what they are - crummy, stupid, poorly made movies. Well, Munich is all that, but what makes it particularly atrocious is its overbearing pretentiousness. This is a three-hour exercise in gratuitous violence, poor acting, unbelievably inane scenes and a muddled political message. For instance, the scene where Israeli commandos attack a terrorist stronghold - dressed in pantyhose! Or the laughable portrayal of Golda Meir as a Jewish grandmother-type surrounded by all her "boys" (it may be of interest to know that Golda Meir led Israel through two wars and was one of two women to have signed the Israeli Declaration of Independence); or the premeditated and cold-blooded assassination of a beautiful young sexy woman, dressed only in a negligee, by three heavily armed Israeli men on the PRESUMPTION that she was responsible for someone's death; or the idea that an Israeli agent could pass himself off as a German; or ... well by now you should get the point. This movie is one of those Hollywood clunkers that belong with all those other pretentious pieces of claptrap that strive to convey an "important" message, but instead inspire the warning: "Beware - you are entering a cinematic mine field. Watch this movie at your own risk. And if you fall asleep in the middle of the movie or leave the theater before the movie is over and feel like you wasted your hard-earned money, don't say we didn't warn you."**

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## **Music and Lyrics (2007)**

**Surprisingly good movie., 27 February 2007**

**9 stars**

**From time to time a movie will surprise me and this is one of those movies. I expected another Hollywood flop - insipid, poorly acted, and utterly forgettable. Instead, to my great surprise, this movie was well-acted, had a good story with attractive upbeat characters and was entertaining. In**

addition, this movie is proof that Hugh Grant is a really wonderful actor. Not only does he have a flare for comedy, he can sing even though he's not known be a singer. And Drew Barrymore gives a wonderful performance as a lyricist. This movie may not win any awards or accolades and probably will soon disappear from the movie theaters, but if that happens that will be too bad because this movie deserves positive recognition.

### **My Fair Lady (1964)**

3 out of 6 people found the following review useful:

Great movie, a classic., 18 December 2008

10 stars

Here we are, 44 years after the release of My Fair Lady, and it's still being commented upon. This movie makes a successful and effective transition from the stage to screen because it stays true to the original story and avoids adding those embellishments that usually detract from and dilute the quality of the original story and music. The movie is great for these reasons: snappy dialog, strong acting, great songs, and an engaging story that avoids becoming maudlin and mushy. The main characters grow, they develop, they change, they fight, they reconcile, they bond. That is stuff of which great stories are made and this movie has all of that. Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison are perfect for their roles; Jeremy Brett and Stanley Holloway are wonderful as are the rest of the cast. But most important, the movie entertains.

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### **My Life in Ruins (2009)**

Tour guides are people too., 5 June 2009

7 stars

Somewhat hokey and contrived, but otherwise delightful fare that is mildly amusing. True, the plot is corny and predictable, but it shows the pros and cons of being a tourist and the challenges of being a tour guide. The tour guide is more than just a source of information, he or she is the social director, social worker, problem solver and baby sitter for the group. Now, why would otherwise perfectly normal adults require a babysitter? As the movie so aptly shows, this is because in the role of tourist an adult regresses to the level of a child and wants to be treated accordingly, which means wanting to be entertained. If one really wants to experience a foreign country, go and live there. For instance, can one really say that they have experienced, let's say, New York City, by having visited the Empire State Building and eating in some restaurants? Or Moscow by taking a tour of the Kremlin? Of course not and that is what this movie shows.

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**"My Name Is Earl: The Magic Hour (#4.1)" (2008)**

Excellent entertainment, 14 May 2010

10 stars

This was a great episode. It's about hope and perseverance. It's about realizing one's dreams and having faith in yourself. In this episode Earl is a supporting character. The star is a man who wants to do something creative, something that nobody thought he could do and he does it and does it well. The screenplay was excellent, the acting strong and all in all this episode was television at its best. The story was wonderful, the acting was great and the characters more than just two-dimensional comic book fare. What makes this episode even more surprising is that it was entirely unexpected. After all, it was on television. It was like finding a spring of fresh water in the middle of a huge desert. Excellent entertainment.

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**New Moon (2009)**

Worth watching., 27 November 2009

8 stars

Despite some cheesy acting, this movie offers a novel portrayal of good and evil. If you like werewolves, then this movie is definitely for you. This may be the first movie which portrays the werewolf in a positive manner. The vampires are also treated in a sympathetic manner, another unique feature of this movie. The special effects are excellent and add to the story. Taylor Lautner is a new star. The dialog is at times amusing and the story keeps the audience engaged as the the struggle between the werewolves and vampires unfolds. Especially interesting is the movie's unique take on the concept of the vampire. Here the vampire is almost human and not the sinister apparition familiar to movie audiences. It's not Shakespeare but it is entertaining and worth watching.

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### **Nights in Rodanthe (2008)**

**Good movie., 26 September 2008**

**7 stars**

**This movie is like a baseball player trying to hit a home run and gets really close to hitting one out of the park but never quite makes it. The producer of this movie is trying to convey some kind of important message to the audience and does a good job trying but succeeds only in sending bits and pieces. This movie also raises other questions: Is Hollywood still able to produce a love story that succeeds in keeping the audience's interest? Is Hollywood still able to produce a love story that is not corny? Is Hollywood still able to produce a love story that is well-acted and well-written? Amazingly, shockingly, unbelievably, after watching this movie, the answer to these questions is a qualified yes. Parts of this movie are tedious and can bring a viewer to the brink of slumber, but the movie sufficiently recovers to keep the audience at least awake if not thrilled. The story avoids corniness and the usual Hollywood contrivances that render such Hollywood movies unintentionally laughable and has an upbeat ending in what is, for Hollywood, an attempt to tell a dramatic story involving deeply emotional themes. Diane Lane's performance is outstanding. She is definitely the star of this movie. If you decide to take the time and spend the money to watch this movie, please remember that it's made in Hollywood, so don't expect profound philosophical insights, but do expect a movie that you may actually like.**

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### **Nihon no ichiban nagai hi (1967)**

**One of the great anti-war movies., 19 September 2010**

**10 stars**

**What is a soldier, who has been told from first day of his enlistment that surrender is not only unacceptable but is treason, to do when he learns that his government, including his own military superiors, are going to surrender? This movie pulls no punches in showing what happened when that exact scenario occurred in Japan in the closing days of World War Two. The two words that can best describe how the Japanese soldiers must have felt are betrayal and despair. The movie further underscores the essential hypocrisy of the Japanese imperial leadership and the sudden realization that everything they had been spouting about the Bushido spirit was just hot air, mere hyperbole. As the movie so graphically shows, the junior Japanese officers who revered their generals simply could not accept what seemed to them a shameless repudiation of principles that they were told were sacrosanct. The movie is excellent for several reasons:**

first, it tells a compelling story; second, it has an all-star cast; third, it is structured as a documentary; fourth, the story is candidly and forthrightly portrayed; fifth, the movie has excellent continuity; sixth, it avoids becoming moralistic; and seventh, it educates the audience about a critical event in history.

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### **Ninja Assassin (2009)**

**You want to learn about ninjas? Watch this movie., 9 December 2009  
9 stars**

**One things about ninjas, they mean business. The movie shows that when you are a target for the ninjas, you are in deep trouble. What is one supposed to do when their home or office is suddenly infested with ninja? Fighting back is no use because, as the movie shows, Ninja are just too quick and you can't reason with them either because they are programmed to destroy their target. But what's even worse is to be a renegade ninja because once you become a ninja,you're a ninja for life, no exceptions. Almost as bad is to be a someone who tries to track down ninjas. They become immediate targets because ninja operate in complete secrecy. Sleath is their trademark and if their cover is blown, they lose the element of surprise which is the main component of ninja strategy. Now, how do I know all this? Answer: From watching this movie. This movie shows in the most graphic terms the mayhem that results when one is targeted by ninja. The director holds nothing back in depicting the violence of ninja training methods and how ninja utilize this training "in the field." Of course the central feature of the ninja organization is their leader and this movie shows that he is all powerful, prone to committing acts of extreme violence and demands and commands complete loyalty. In return, he trains the ninja how to fight, gives them a place to stay and most important collects the fees from the clients who retain their services. As the movie shows, ninja do not work cheap. Ninja don't go around willy-nilly assassinating people. You have to retain their services. But once they're on the job, the client has nothing to worry about unless, of course, the Ninja are confronted by a renegade ninja, that is, a ninja who decides to leave the organization. It takes a ninja to know a ninja. The only way to defeat ninja is to destroy their nest but to do that means first having to find it and that can be difficult. That's why you need a renegade ninja otherwise you can't find them. Then again, after reading this, would you really be interested in paying ninja a visit?**

**Some other comments: For some reason, all ninja are oriental. Why that is is not explained in the movie. Also, ninja are capable of superhuman acrobatics, like jumping from rafters, hopping around like frogs and**

performing other acts that normal humans cannot perform. Ninja also work as a team, except for renegade ninja who work alone. And ninja work FAST. They don't waste time. They go in, do the job, and get out. Then back to their base until their next assignment.

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### **No Country for Old Men (2007)**

**After watching this movie, I can't blame the sheriff for wanting to retire., 14  
December 2007  
6 stars**

**There is a saying: a movie is only as good as its ending, which makes this movie not bad, but certainly not that good. It's as if the creators of this movie had decided that they would try to out-do The Mist for the worst ending of an otherwise interesting movie for the year 2007. Also, this movie brings to mind another good movie, The Last King of Scotland, in that how "Scotland" shows how a murdering tyrannical dictator isn't such a bad guy, "No Country" tries to make the same case for a serial murderer who systematically murders only bad guys. I guess tyrannical dictators and serial killers have their stories too. When trying to dramatize the behavior of seriously mentally deranged persons, such as serial killers, Hollywood sometimes does a good job. Case in point: Taxi Driver, which offers a compelling story about a troubled young man who kills. In Cold Blood is another excellent movie of that genre. This movie does not even come close to those movies in terms of quality or storytelling. Tommy Lee Jones is lost in this movie. He is entirely miscast. However, the actor who plays the main protagonist, the psychopath who goes around killing, gives a great performance and the movie does have its fascinating features and is watchable but with one caveat: be prepared for is just one weak ending.**

**One other point: This movie portrays law enforcement has being easily duped and completely ineffective despite the presence of massive evidence that provides an almost inexhaustible supply of solid leads. What's even more ridiculous is the portrayal of the sheriff as being practically the only law enforcement agent involved in this case when in reality such a high-profile case, involving multiple murders of foreign nationals along or near a border, would have a virtual army of federal, state, county and local officials assigned to it. They'd being practically fighting each other over who would have final jurisdictional authority. But these kinds of facts do not necessarily make for good fiction, so there's one sheriff - that's it - trying to deal with a serial killer, and this sheriff is planning to retire! Can you blame him?**

Here's another take on this movie. Maybe this movie is Hollywood's way of portraying the plight of the seriously mentally ill with violent dispositions. Remember, friends, this is Hollywood that we're talking about, not some mental health organization, and if Hollywood thinks something will sell, it will play it up to the hilt. No subject, no matter how sensitive, is off limits, and it seems that with this movie, Hollywood has decided that "mental illness" is in. Of course, once Hollywood gets a hold of the subject the powers-that-be, using literary license, will transform that subject into something that is almost totally unrecognizable from the original subject. In the case of "mental illness", Hollywood portrays it as something sinister, uncontrollable and a threat to society. Now if this sells, then who's to complain? Then again, it may be appropriate if the movie includes this proviso: "Any depictions of mental illness in this movie may not conform with actual facts."

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### Nothing Sacred (1937)

This movie is a tribute to Carole Lombard., 13 March 2009  
9 stars

This movie was made over 70 years ago and shows its age. Everything is dated. The story, which is childish. The acting, which is stagy. The cinematography, which is staid. What is good, however, the fight between Carole Lombard and Frederic March and when March and Lombard are in the water. And what makes this movie special is Ms. Lomabrd's presence. Carole Lombard was born thirty years too early. She was meant for television. She would have been the queen of the sitcoms. She would have easily out-Lucyed Lucille Ball. That is, she was hot. And she was talented and wonderful ... and married to Clark Gable. She had it all and then she was gone. This vivacious babe, a precursor to your modern TV sitcom star, was the epitome of a movie comedienne. If only ...

### Notorious (2009)

Fans of the N word will love this movie., 21 January 2009  
1 star

Yo, homies, ya wanna c a reel grayt moo-vee, go watch Idlewild. Dis moo-vee is (blank).

The only things in common between this movie and its 1946 namesake is the title. Any other similarities, of which there are none, is purely coincidental. The mmovie tries to depict street life in the urban ghetto and establish a nexus between the artist and his environment. The problem is

that the movie is seriously flawed. This film is so bad that it is difficult to decide where to start. But start we must. First, the acting. The actor (or "akta") playing the main character had to be reading his lines off a prompter (or is it "prompta'?). His performance has to rank as one of the worst acting jobs in any major feature motion picture. Second, the main character has no redeeming personality characteristics (or in street "lingo" he "aint cool") in to the movie, which is supposedly based on a true life story (or "stor - e"), the main character is a drug dealing, coke snorting, woman abusing gangster (or should it read "gangsta'") who disrespects ( i.e. "disses") his mother - and throughout the movie he never changes. This guy (or "bro" or "homie") has no qualms about selling crack to a pregnant woman. Third, the use of the N word. If anyone has objects to the N word, then avoid this movie. This movie will leave you enthralled as the characters loudly call each other by the N word, sometimes as a token of honor and respect, other times when angry. And what makes this even more remarkable and baffling is that it is African-Americans doing the name calling. Fourth, the music. There is rhyming and then there is noise that masquerades as rhyming. This movie contains a huge dose of the latter. But even with all these drawbacks, the movie would have still deserved at least a passing grade if it weren't for item number five: the inherent racism that permeates this movie. In this movie racial stereotyping abounds. Every African-American character is portrayed as being a gangster, drug-dealer, drug-abuser, or whore, or a combination of two or more thereof, and completely incapable of functioning within the norms of mainstream society, this sense of isolation being further magnified by the absence of non-African-Americans in the story. (Why not make a movie glorying the exploits of, let's say, Pretty Boy Floyd or Machine Gun Kelly?) You cannot make a meaningful biography about any performer of color without placing the story within the context of the larger mainstream society, which is mostly non-African-American. After watching this movie, one could reasonably conclude that the whole world consists of Bedford Stuyvesant ( that is, "Bed-Stuy") and Sunset Boulevard. It's bad enough when non-African Americans produce slanted, racist images of African-Americans but when African-Americans themselves produce the same images then that is troubling.

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### **No Way Out (1950)**

**What happens when a community is divided., 9 January 2010**

**8 stars**

**Kudos to Hollywood for making this movie. Here it's no holds barred as blacks ans whites go at each other, no mincing words here. The sparks fly**

and the fists are flying too as mistrust mixed with innuendo provides the catalyst for violence. Although at times stagy, the story swiftly moves along as the a community goes spiraling downward toward anarchy. Richard Widmark gives an outstanding performance as a race-baiting hoodlum whose target is a black doctor, played by Sidney Poitier whose performance is excellent. This movie effectively shows what happens when a community is divided and how things can get quickly out of hand when there is no third-party to smooth things over. This movie represents Hollywood's wake up call to the United States to get its act together and avoid the carnage of sectarian violence.

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### Now, Voyager (1942)

An Irving Rapper masterpiece., 8 August 2009  
10 stars

If made today, the story in this movie would be the basis for a grotesque and laughable parody, but in 1941 the production and acting talent was there to instead create a powerful, first class story about personal growth, emotional independence and psychological strength. Far from being another corny, ludicrous, mushy and melodramatic tearjerker, this movie is from start to finish one of the best dramas ever produced by Hollywood. It offers a powerful story with memorable characters and does so without being contrived or stagy. Even more, this movie explores aspects of the human condition that has universal application, meaning that there is a story that is relevant to everyone, hence its wide appeal. And although Betty Davis is the star, the rest of the cast is equally strong, especially Paul Henreid and Janice Wilson, whose performance as Tina was worthy of at least an Oscar nomination. This is a great movie and a great work of art. Congratulations to Irving Rapper for his skillful direction of such a fine movie.

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### Nuremberg: Tyranny on Trial (1995) (TV)

Good introduction to the subject, 25 September 2010  
8 stars

Producing a two and a half hour documentary on the Nuremberg Trial is like producing a feature length movie based on a twenty-thousand page novel. It merely skims the surface. It does not provide much in-depth analysis of the issues relating to the trial but does succeed in calling attention to the main themes of the trial and explains how it was

conducted. To its credit, the documentary includes segments of the atrocity films that were introduced as evidence of Nazi barbarity and even today these news reels convey the horror of the concentrations camps. One can only be amazed at the appalling condition of Europe immediately after the war and how the whole world was forced to confront a whole range of issues raised by the existence of the concentration camps. If anyone doubts that the Holocaust occurred, this documentary will put such doubts to rest. And if doubts still persist, then there are other issues at play that would require their own documentary.

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### Observe and Report (2009)

This movie is not a comedy., 16 April 2009  
8 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

This movie is not a comedy, not even close to being one. Actually the movie belongs in the action genre since the plot is action, not comedy driven. Seth Rogen displays a surprising talent for playing a heavy character whose actions are anything but funny. He is anything but a buffoon which is why the movie is not a comedy. The other star is Randy Gambill as the pervert who gives one of the great performances as a flasher terrorizing a mall. Mr. Gambill's performance is even more noteworthy in that he has no spoken lines yet his character is central to the theme of the story and without his character there is no movie. Remember, it is not a comedy and this particular deviant is not funny. Ana Faris is amusing at times and Ray Liotta gives a solid performance as a police detective, but they are overshadowed by Seth Rogen who, along with Mr. Gambill, carries this movie. Maybe with another actor the movie might have generated more laughs but Mr. Rogen's portrayal suggests a more somber, angry and ultimately violent man whose affability is a mere facade that is covering up a simmering rage.

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### Oceans (2009)

This movie is a definite must-see for children of all ages., 25 April 2010  
10 stars

First, if you want to watch a movie featuring incredible cinematography, this is the movie to watch. This is the movie that will cause you to ask: "How DID they get that shot?" The ocean is a big place and there's lots to

photograph. The denizens of the deep are portrayed in a respectful and almost reverential manner. One scene in which one of the divers is swimming WITH a great white shark was both spectacular and emotional. This is the first movie this reviewer can recall where a great white shark is portrayed as something other than a wanton killer. The majesty of the sea creatures is awe inspiring. They deserve our protection; they must be preserved and they warrant our undivided admiration and respect. Objects for our amusement in captivity and considered a source of food, this movie shows the audience a different side of these sea creatures, a side that we rarely if ever notice or care about, but nevertheless is there. This movie is a definite must-see for children of all ages.

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### Ocean's Thirteen (2007)

Where's the story?, 19 June 2007

4 stars

I watched the movie. I thought about it afterward. And I asked myself, and indeed still ask: Is it me or is it the movie? What the heck is this movie about? When I can't figure out what a movie is about, then there is a problem. Maybe it's my problem, maybe it's the movie's. But that the question is even asked means that something is wrong because when a movie is good, the question NEVER comes up. This movie has to be one of the more mindless, pointless products from the Hollywood potboiler production factory. The movie tries to be sophisticated, the movie tries to be funny, but all it does is generate that short yet poignant question: SO WHAT? A bunch of guys trying to rob a Las Vegas casino, going through gyrations that are so disjointed and confusing that it defies all logic. What WAS good about this movie, however, were the performances of David Paymer and Ellen Barkin. Both demonstrated a level of comic acting that is responsible for whatever humor this movie was capable of generating. Ms. Barkin definitely has what it takes to be a wonderful comic actress and Mr. Paymer definitely should have a sitcom of his own. As for the other characters, let it be, as the song says. Go on to other projects, do other roles, may your careers prosper but please, OH PLEASE, DO NOT return to Las Vegas, except as a paying guest, because you'll just confuse the audience some more and probably put the audience to sleep, or cause them to ask questions.

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## Oliver! (1968)

Great movie., 4 December 2007

10 stars

Yes, as unbelievable as it may be, in 1968 a musical won the Academy Award for best picture - and it was the third musical to win that award in a five-year period, the first being *My Fair Lady* in 1964 and then *The Sound of Music* in 1965. The difference between *My Fair Lady*, *The Sound of Music* and *Oliver!* however is that *Oliver!* is immeasurably better! No comparison. The first two movies are insipid wet noodles compared to the remarkably robust *Oliver!*. The acting is great; the songs are great; the story is great and the dancing is great. This movie is dynamic, topical, relevant to the human experience and unlike the overblown *Gangs of New York*, *Oliver!* offers a portrayal of poverty in 19th century London, England that evokes sympathy without being condescending. Oliver Reed was a great actor and he proves it in *Oliver!* The other actors and actresses, especially Ron Moody and Shani Wallis, are equally wonderful and offer powerful portrayals of characters who evoke sympathy and warmth without being caricatures.

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## Once Upon a Honeymoon (1942)

Ginger Rogers shines in this movie., 29 December 2009

8 stars

This movie is interesting more as a historical piece than as a source of entertainment. This movie makes repeated references to the Nazis and Adolf Hitler. The story itself is trite and banal and Cary Grant's attempts at comedy fall flat. However, these drawbacks are negated by the presence of Ginger Rogers who is absolutely stunning, even in black and white. She is HOT. No way that that Cary Grant was going to upstage her; he definitely plays second-banana to Ms. Rogers. Trying to imagine how an audience may have received this movie when it was released in 1942, for twenty-five cents, which was how much it cost to go to a movie in those now practically ancient days, the audience certainly got their money's worth. After all, the world was at war, Adolf Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo were running amok, victory was uncertain, but when seated inside a nice, comfortable movie theater watching Cary Grant coming on to Ginger Rogers, it must have offered at least a welcomed respite from the anxiety associated with the war, which is what entertainment is all about. Today there are many beautiful actresses, and some of them can even act, but Ginger Rogers set the standard and she's still number one.

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### **One, Two, Three (1961)**

**Funny movie, but with a serious side too, 20 December 2006  
9 stars**

**This one of Billy Wilder's better movies, which is saying a lot since most of Mr. Wilder's movies are great. James Cagney gives one of his greatest performances and Horst Buchholz was great too. The dialogue is witty and snappy and the action is nonstop. But alas, time relentlessly marches on and has left this movie behind in its wake. The movie is dated and for one reason: the political landscape has so radically changed since this movie's release in 1961 that all the material that would have been relevant to a 1961 audience mean little if anything today. But then again, this movie provides an excellent glimpse into the the situation in Europe at that the time, with Berlin and Germany divided, which was definitely not funny. For the story is set in a location that was a point of contention between East and West for over four decades and which almost caused a war. Of course, this movie had nothing to do with creating that situation. It just that when you watch Mr. Cagney's shenanigan's and Mr. Buchholz's character whining and complaining, don't forget that for many, a divided Berlin and Germany was anything but a joke.**

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### **Open Season (1974)**

**Hooray for Richard Lynch., 18 August 2010  
10 stars**

**This movie is great. Richard Lynch's performance is superb. He carries this movie. He makes this movie happen. The other members of the cast are fine, but without Richard Lynch, this movie would be okay but not great. The movie offers a compelling story, strong acting, high tension and fast-paced action. There is nothing subtle about this movie. It dramatizes the sadistic cruelty of some people and how depravity can go undetected. This movie also features William Holden in one of his better roles. It's surprising that this movie has not received more attention because it offers what today's audience seem to want: gratuitous violence and sadistic depravity, presented in a neat cinematic package. After watching this movie, you will think twice before sharing a cabin with a bunch of guys who seem like the nicest guys in the world.**

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### **Orchestra Wives (1942)**

**Bravo to Archie Mayo., 14 December 2008**

**9 stars**

**Delightful movie but dated. The music of Glen Miller is the main star of this interesting and entertaining period piece. The cast of this movie include three performers who were to become superstars, Dale Evans, Jackie Gleason and Harry Morgan. Interesting to watch them when they were relative unknowns. I wonder what Harry Morgan would have said if he was told that 35 years later he would be a nationally known star in a television sitcom. The cast was wonderful. Ann Rutherford and George Montgomery had that special chemistry and the ladies, Mary Beth Hughes, Virginia Gilmore, Carole Landis and the beautiful Lynn Bari were beautiful, charming ... and naughty. Hey, what's a girl supposed to do when her husband musician is on the road and playing before ... women? And let's not forget the incomparable and always classy Cesar Romero and the incredible dance number performed by the Nicholas Brothers. Their act alone makes this movie worth watching. So if you are looking for some light entertainment featuring 1940s jazz numbers and snappy dialog, then this is the movie for you. Bravo to Archie Mayo.**

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### **Padeniye Berlina (1-r seria) (1949)**

**Bad movie. Simplistic portrayal of Hitler and Nazis., 1 March 2008**

**1 star**

**There are certain subjects that do not lend themselves to mockery. One of those subjects is Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Any movie that tries to treat Hitler and the Nazis as a bunch of buffoons is a movie that is destined to fail dramatically, and thus this movie is a supreme failure. What is ludicrous about this movie is not so much its stilted portrayal of Adolf Hitler but the fact that anyone would even want to go out of their way to try to reduce Adolf Hitler to a caricature and an item for derision. Hitler's career is a matter of historical fact which requires no further literary embellishment. Hitler's policies of deceit, aggression, war and genocide speak for themselves. What more can be said or added about what he said and did or the havoc and suffering he caused?**

**Treating Adolf Hitler and the Nazis as a joke is historically unsupportable. It would be like mocking a serial killer. Mock all you want, the killer is still a killer. To reduce the personality of Adolf Hitler to the level of audio and visual clichés simply does not convey his cunning, his destructiveness, his demagoguery and depravity. Adolf Hitler was anything but a joke. Any**

person who could smile and laugh around children, extend the most gracious courtesies to his personal guests, laugh and joke with his closest staff, indeed, even root for his favorite team in the Olympics, while AT THE SAME TIME plotting to start a war and exterminate millions of people is the kind of chilling personality that defies superficial treatment on the screen, or anywhere else for that matter. Hitler ranting and raving? If this was all that Hitler was about, then maybe it would be funny, but Hitler was no mere screaming buffoon and to try to pass him off as being that does not do justice to the millions of victims who succumbed to his policies. A screaming buffoon could have never done what Hitler did. To lead an entire nation to war and to pursue policies that directly affected the course of history required a degree of determination and self-control that this movie fails to attribute to the Fuhrer. By reducing Hitler to a mere caricature of a dictatorship undermines the basic premise of the movie, that the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin was a strong, viable and credible nation, for how strong does a country and the political leadership need to be to defend itself against somebody that according to the movie is nothing more than a pathetic joke?

This has to be one of the worst propaganda movies ever made. Hitler was already dead, World War Two was already history, Nazi Germany had already been defeated and obliterated from the political map, yet the Soviet Union decided to produce what has to be one of the worst movies ever made, which is saying a lot in an era of bad movies stretching back to the dawn of the age of Hollywood. The acting is poor, the story is pure Soviet propaganda bombast, the cinematography is almost laughable. But what is particularly annoying is its portrayal of Adolf Hitler as a caricature. The portrayal of Adolf Hitler is so ridiculously superficial that it reduces Hitler to an item of mockery and derision which is neither necessary or true. There is one thing that can be said about Adolf Hitler: what he did and what he stood for inspires contempt, scorn and outright rejection, but not derision. There is nothing funny about Hitler's decision to go to war and invade the Soviet Union. Nor is the portrayal of Adolf Hitler as some kind of screaming, argumentative hysterical malcontent historically accurate or dramatically strong. Historical evidence seems to suggest that Hitler was no more prone to fits of anger than anyone else and that he followed a plan of action that was well thought out and meticulously implemented with the full support of the entire Nazi Party and an entire nation, including its army, naval and air force, whose resources were mobilized to achieve what Hitler wanted. In Mein Kampf Hitler put the whole world on notice as to what he intended to do if he had the power and that nobody took him seriously is anything but funny; it is tragic. This movie makes fun of Hitler but what Adolf Hitler did inspires anything but laughter. He wasn't funny when he was alive and to make fun of him after he's dead is more of a reflection of the mentality of whoever made this movie than on the Adolf Hitler himself.

One question this movie raises is why would anyone even want to make such a movie? To mock and deride at Hitler four years after the end of World War Two and Hitler's death seems rather pointless and a mere exercise in displaced rage. By 1949 the career of Adolf Hitler was already well documented and spoke for itself. The whole world knew what he had done and was still in the process of recovering from the consequences of his actions. But for a movie company to actually spend time and money to produce a movie that portrays Adolf Hitler and his Nazi cronies as corrupt, effete, irresponsible sycophants isn't saying anything that was not already public knowledge and merely confirmed the obvious. Now if this movie was intended to be a satirical comedy or a farce, then there might be a valid place for a goofy, campy portrayal of Hitler. However this movie apparently was not a comedy or a satire, which makes the movie completely irrelevant and an exercise in cinematic mediocrity.

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### **Padeniye Berlina (2-r seria) (1949)**

Ugh., 14 March 2008

1 star

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Does the public really need the Soviet Union, with its GULAGS, denial of due process, the building of the Berlin Wall, the purges, conspiring with Nazi Germany to commit an unprovoked attack upon Poland and then illegally invading Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and also committing aggression Poland, poking fun at Adolf Hitler and the Nazis? For the Soviet Union, which gave Germany the green light to invade Poland, to make such a movie attains a height of hypocrisy that is almost breathtaking. Who the heck was the Soviet Union, with its NKVD and brutal one-party rule, to mock Adolf Hitler? And how dumb were the Soviets to act like Operation Barbarossa was a complete surprise? How could they fail to notice the amassing of four million soldiers and thousands of airplanes, tanks and cannons on the their western border? If you want to watch movies mocking Adolf Hitler, check out the The Three Stooges and Charlie Chaplin. Unlike this Soviet propaganda fiasco, they lampooned Hitler while Hitler was still alive.

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## **Paris Blues (1961)**

**Joanne Woodward at her very best., 14 August 2009**

**10 stars**

**What a great movie. Joanne Woodward is at her very best. She is the star, the player that makes this movie happen, the actress whose performance raises this movie from merely good to great. Far from being corny, this movie offers a powerful, coherent and plausible story about people who meet, form intense attachments and then must make decisions that will effect their relationships and their lives. The movie has a tremendous all-star cast, with Paul Newman, Sidney Poitier, Diahann Carroll and Louis Armstrong, in addition to Ms. Woodward, and a great setting, Paris circa early 1960s, minus the tourists. This movie grabs and keeps one's interest as the characters meet, interact, and reveal their innermost thoughts, and does do in a straightforward manner that is neither corny nor trite. This movie is wonderful.**

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## **Paths of Glory (1957)**

**Scapegoating is such a dirty business., 22 October 2005**

**10 stars**

**This is a great movie. The story is compelling, the acting powerful, the theme sublime. This movie is about how the individual person can be reduced to the level of a mere statistic, a mere dot on somebody's organizational plan, a mere object to be sacrificed and never be missed by those in charge, who have their own personal agendas and will do ANYTHING to avoid taking responsibility when things go wrong. A military operation fails, and the general in charge is angry and he will not be the one stuck with the blame. As far as this general is concerned, the soldiers are a bunch of lazy, cowardly slackers who don't want to fight - even though the soldiers are dying by the thousands. But that is of no concern to the general who wants to blame someone for the failed operation because if the general takes responsibility he will be revealed for what he is: an egocentric, incompetent martinet who is interested in only one thing - furthering his career at the expense of the soldiers under his command. To pursue that selfish goal, this general will throw away the lives of the soldiers entrusted to him. This movie stars Kirk Douglas. But the real star of this movie is Adolph Menjou who plays the French general. On July 1, 1916, the British lost over 57,000 men killed or wounded while the Germans lost 8,000, with no appreciable gains, tactically or strategically. What an extravagant squandering of human life. But the generals in charge, who did the squandering, lived to fight another day.**

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## **Patton (1970)**

**Great Anti-War Movie., 28 September 2005**

**10 stars**

**A movie should tell a story that is both credible and entertaining. This movie achieves both goals. The story is about a U. S. Army general during World War Two who believes that he is destined to achieve greatness, and does it, and in the process exhibits behavior that some consider erratic, others consider dangerous, and others consider inspired. The movie suggests that this general's behavior is a combination of all three. Of course, what makes this movie great is George C. Scott's classic portrayal of the general - George Patton. Other actors could have played the role, but Mr. Scott went beyond just playing the role - he became the personification of General Patton. In this movie Patton is portrayed as a complicated man. He is moody, he is foul-mouthed, he is petulant, he is impulsive, he is nasty. Yet he is also brave, loyal, heroic, dynamic, intelligent, pragmatic and inspired. It was General Patton's Third U. S. Army that broke the siege of Bastogne and led the invasion into the heart of Nazi Germany. It was General Patton who correctly assessed the political situation in Europe as it related to the Soviet Union and it was General Patton who recognized and appreciated the heroism of the American soldiers. But although this movie is about a U. S. General during World War Two, in no way does this movie condone or glorify war. Actually, this movie is one of the great antiwar movies, along with "All Quiet on the Western Front" and "Paths of Glory." This movie a condemnation of war because it shows that when peace fails, then it takes men like General Patton to restore order, and one must ask: Do we want men like George Patton in positions of power? Watch the movie and then answer the question.**

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## **Pearl Harbor (2001)**

**"December 7, 1941 - A date which will live in infamy" (FDR, 1941), 27 July 2005**

**8 stars**

**First let me say that I liked this movie. I repeat: I ... LIKED ... THIS ... MOVIE. I know that the story has more holes in it than Swiss cheese and the special effects were somewhat overblown (get the pun?), but this movie is not about the characters nor is it about the special effects. Rather it's about an event that galvanized a nation and transformed the world. That is, it's about the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. After Pearl Harbor,**

the world was never the same, and although the movie has its weaknesses, one thing is for certain: after watching this movie, you know that **SOMETHING BIG** happened on that fateful day and that it effected a lot of people in different ways. Maybe the movie should have provided more historical background - but it's not a documentary. Or maybe the movie should have had a better script - but did that really matter? What **DOES** matter is the event itself, and in this respect, despite the over-reliance on special effects, the movie does its job well. For this reason I cannot be too critical and that alone is enough to make this movie worth watching.

Kate Beckinsdale gives an excellent performance. She is a great actress.

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### **Pineapple Express (2008)**

Where's the humor?, 2 September 2008

4 stars

With the exception of an automobile chase scene this movie offers nothing that is particularly funny. The movie's preoccupation of with drug abuse and its treatment of various subjects, including drug dealing, gang violence, police corruption, corrupting the morals of a minor, are not funny. They are subjects that do not inspire humor. Two guys behaving stupidly can be funny. Anyone ever heard of Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello? And what about the two guys in Clerks II? And what the two guys in Sideways? Or in Weekend at Bernie's? Great movies and fun too. But this movie just doesn't do it. Drug dealing and drug using dudes just does not provoke laughter. There is nothing funny about that, not even as a goof. The acting is good with James Franco giving an impressive performance in a challenging role. Substance abuse is a serious problem which destroys people. If you find humor in drug trafficking and police corruption then this movie is for you. Otherwise, if you want some laughs, go rent Get Smart.

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### **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest (2006)**

Score one for Hollywood, and for the audience, 31 July 2006

9 stars

Amazingly, shockingly, I must admit that this is a very good movie. I was expecting a hodge-podge of special effects that would distract from some poor acting and a dumb story, but to my surprise, this is an entertaining movie. True, the movie does have certain weaknesses, such as some

ridiculously garish costumes for Davy Jones and his crew and a convoluted and confusing story, but the movie is saved by strong acting on the part of the lead characters, especially Orlando Bloom and Johnny Depp, and some pretty good dialogue. This movie showed that Orlando Bloom is actually a strong actor. If you like entertaining action movies, then this is the movie for you.

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### Popeye (1980)

Not that bad of a movie., 25 October 2007  
6 stars

I liked this movie. I'll say it again: I liked this movie. I'll say it a third time: I LIKED THIS MOVIE!!!! Hey, it's Popeye the Sailor played by Robin Williams, not Macbeth played by Orson Welles or Hamlet played by Laurence Olivier. So lighten up! Okay!!! Don't be so critical!! What did you expect? Robin Williams gives an excellent portrayal of a cartoon character who has to act like he's in a cartoon. Kudos for Mr. Williams and for Paul Smith as Bluto. What makes this movie particularly unique is that the characters actually resemble their cartoon persona WITHOUT the special effects. Now that is impressive. If you like the Popeye the Sailor cartoons you have to like this movie because this movie stays true to the cartoon characters. like Olive Oyl, Wimpy, Sweet Pea and all the other characters. So stop ragging the movie because it doesn't deserve it. The movie is neither pompous nor pretentious and provides what a movie should provide - entertainment.

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### Predator (1987)

One Great Movie, 26 July 2005  
10 stars

"Predator" may be one of the greatest, if not THE greatest, science fiction movie ever made, and there have been some really great science fiction movies. The idea of an alien being hunting not just defenseless civilians, but heavily armed mercenaries, and hunting them for pure sport, is, to say the least, original. To the alien, these mercenaries are nothing more than playthings to be toyed with and then transformed into trophies. First the mercenaries are baffled, then nervous, and then outright terrified as they come to the realization that their weapons are useless and their bravado a waste of energy against an entity far more merciless and powerful than they could ever imagine. And when the alien finally reveals itself, it's

appearance is as gruesome as it's behavior is lethal. Why the alien is there is never answered, nor does it have to be answered because it's entirely irrelevant to story. The fact is the alien has arrived and is wreaking havoc on a group of heavily armed men whose efforts to respond are repeatedly thwarted. It's not as if they are defenseless; to the contrary, they WANT to fight, but this time they are up against something that they can't figure out and that is not afraid of them. How they deal with this situation and it's ultimate resolution is what this movie is about. It's nonstop action from beginning to end, and you can't expect any more than that from a movie.

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### **Predators (2010)**

At last, the sequel we've all been waiting for, 21 July 2010  
9 stars

At last, a credible sequel to Predator, the 1987 movie. Unlike most sequels, this movie does justice to the original. In some respects it even surpasses the original, which is saying a lot as the original was a great movie. Adrien Brody is outstanding as a self-styled leader of a group of people literally thrown together to battle forces unknown to them but known to the audience. What makes the story particularly intense is wondering if they will figure out a way to escape. The movie features strong acting, an action-packed story, snappy dialog, good character development and a surprisingly intense performance by Topher Grace. Unlike the previous sequels in this series, this movie maintains its artistic integrity, meaning that it avoids becoming campy or a shameless spin off of the original. This movie is proof that when it wants to, Hollywood can produce a credible sequel without making it seem like a phony, last-minute second-rate job, which means there's still hope.

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### **Pretty Woman (1990)**

Can a prostitute fall in love?, 8 August 2005  
10 stars

This movie is not about prostitution. Rather it's about a prostitute who actually grows as a person. That's plausible. It can happen. In this movie it does happen. And that is the rub. The movie is on thin ice here because the audience has to accept the premise that a prostitute can actually learn to care about her john, which is asking a lot from the audience. If the audience does not buy into the character Vivian, then the whole movie becomes unwatchable. However, Julia Roberts does such a great job as

Vivian that the movie works. She was the right choice for the role; she makes the character believable. Another actress may have played the role differently with different, less satisfying results.

Can a prostitute fall in love? In this movie it happens. What's the problem with that? Street hookers are people too and in this movie the street hooker changes. She wants and demands money; acts out; angles for that extra buck, but eases up when she realizes that the john who is willing to pay top dollar is also a good guy who is willing to treat her like a person, not an object. This scenario is entirely plausible. Total strangers meet under the most improbable circumstances and fall in love. This formula is classic Hollywood and in this movie the actors make it work. The man treats the woman decently and she responds. That makes for a good story. The audience wants the relationship to work.

This is a wonderful, upbeat movie, about two people who actually learn to care about each other. The man is a rich, cynical business man; the woman is a prostitute. What starts out as a business proposition evolves into something special, as the two characters evolve and reveal aspects of themselves that are endearing and engaging. At the start of the movie, both characters have contempt for the opposite sex. The man is in the middle of getting a divorce; for the woman, men are mere customers, nothing more. But when they meet, the chemistry is instantaneous. These two people transcend their personal biases to let down their defenses and learn to sincerely care for each other, which changes their behavior and enhances their self-esteem, thereby making them better people. For this reason this movie is worth watching.

Recently I had the opportunity to watch this movie again on a cable network. What a great movie! Talk about opportunity knocking! Ms. Julia Roberts was something like the fourth or fifth actress to be considered for the title role, and she is great in that role. The role was meant for her. She is the center of the movie. Ms. Roberts' performance is magnificent. She is THE star. Richard Gere is good, but Julia Roberts is the one who makes this movie great. Three cheers for Julia Roberts and three cheers for this classic movie.

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### **Pride and Glory (2008)**

**Brother-in-laws are people too., 24 October 2008**  
**3 stars**

**This movie deals with a very serious issue. What is one to do with a wacky brother-in-law? How do you relate to that guy who is married to your sister**

but remains an enigma and is a virtual stranger, no matter how often you get together? Whoever made this cacophony of a movie apparently has some issues with brother-in-laws. Look, brother-in-laws are people too. They have feelings, have dreams, have desires, and wishes, and aspirations and may even be friendly to you, if you treat them right. Now welcome to this remarkably jumbled Colin Farrell extravaganza. It seems that whenever an overrated movie needs an over-the-top performance Hollywood can call upon Colin Farrell, who is great actor, to give such a performance and in this movie he does not disappoint. Mr. Farrell is energetic, intense and involved. The problem is that his efforts are wasted in a story that is so unbelievably absurd that literary license cannot save it. Plausibility is essential for any story but in this movie plausibility is thrown out the window. Not that there aren't intense moments. There are. But to have the audience believe that a bunch of city workers who happen to be police officers, who also happen to be related to each other, and who also happen to be working together and who also happen to be doing bad things and doing them brazenly with no finesse, stretches credulity to the breaking point. Now regarding another point. This movie is permeated with violence and profanity to the point that it becomes a distraction. Beware of the movie that tries to cover up the holes in a story by inserting lots of noise and profanity. It's a sure sign that the director knows that the story is a turkey because if the story is strong, the profanity is at most incidental or entirely absent, which here is not the case. So if you like noisy movies with almost nonstop violence and profanity, and disparages that great American institution, the brother-in-law, then c'mon in and watch this movie. Otherwise stay away. And whatever else you may do, please ... PLEASE ... DO NOT watch this movie with your brother-in-law. You've been warned.

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### Private Benjamin (1980)

She was supposed to fail, but doesn't., 16 September 2005  
8 stars

This is supposed to be a comedy, but actually it's a drama about a spoiled young woman who blossoms into a truly beautiful person. It's a movie about a person dealing with adversity and, finding out that her neurotic and maladaptive coping skills no longer work, sinks to rock bottom and then finds the strength to work her way back up and prove to the world that she is in fact someone who should be taken seriously and be treated with respect - because she has earned that respect. At first Goldie Hawn's character is little more than a whining, spoiled female buffoon who is an embarrassment to everyone who knows her, but after she joins the army, surprises everyone by actually growing up and becoming an entirely different person. The movie would have been better without the attempts at

comedy, because Private Benjamin is not a funny character. Nevertheless, this is a good movie about a person who succeeds when everybody else expected her to fail, and for this reason should be watched.

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### **Public Enemies (2009)**

**Good try, but no cigar., 10 July 2009  
6 stars**

If John Dillinger was even half as brutal as depicted in this movie, then Johnny Depp was the wrong actor for this role. As a 1930s period piece, the movie is excellent, but that cannot be said for the story itself because the movie attempts to portray the lead character, John Dillinger, and his friends as deserving of some empathy which is entirely disingenuous. They were in fact, violent, brutal criminals who were practically asking for what they finally got. So how can one be expected to care about them? Further, Dillinger and his friends are incorrigible but there is no explanation for their aberrant behavior, leaving one to wonder why they were so violent. Not offering any explanation, the movie becomes just another cops and robbers story, but with one big difference: there are no good guys, thus depriving the audience of even that satisfaction of having somebody to root for. Johnny Depp must be given lots of credit for taking on a role that is way out of character for him, but his portrayal simply fails to project the mean-spirited, menacing nature of a man whose very name is synonymous with crime.

Although Johnny Depp is a wonderful, gifted actor, when it comes to his portrayal of John Dillinger, he is no Warren Oates.

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### **Punisher: War Zone (2008)**

**This movie delivers. Dominic West's performance is incredible., 6  
December 2008  
9 stars**

Ya wanna see a real bad guy? Ya like watchin' the tough guyz doin' their thing? You enjoy watchin' the bad guy showin' da whole world dat he's da Boss, da Big Man, da King? Tellin' all the straightlaced phonies an' fancy pant's ta watch out 'cause here I come? Then watch this movie.

First and foremost this is an excellent movie because it is first-class escapist fare. The movie makes no intellectual demands on the audience

and is completely unpretentious, and is not one of those "touchy/feely" movies that wants to convey a "message" and manipulate the emotions, inspiring discomfort. No, not this movie, thank goodness. Also, this movie is a refreshing departure from the usual action/adventure fare that recently have been cluttering the movie screen. Move over James Bond. Go fly a kite Batman. Take a rest Superman. Enter rehab Hancock. Here comes the Punisher, and this guy means business. With the Punisher there is no finesse, no pretentiousness, no complicated plot. The Punisher does exactly what his name describes- he punishes, and he will punish anyone who gets in his way. The Punisher is one of the good guys, probably the most dynamic action hero ever portrayed in a movie and although a comic-book character he has his sensitive side too. And his main nemesis is as sinister as The Punisher is violent. Ray Stevenson offers a wonderfully controlled performance as the main character but Dominic West gives what is perhaps one of the most remarkable performances in a movie in recent years. There are some who might dismiss this movie as mere comic book fluff but this movie definitely ranks among the more superior movies in the action genre. The story is simple, the acting intense, the special effects impressive and the movie delivers.

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#### **Putney Swope (1969)**

Interesting, off beat movie., 23 December 2005  
8 stars

This movie shows that the free enterprise system and the quest for the almighty buck transcends all racial and ethnic barriers. Ultimately the market place determines the message that is sent to the public. This movie dramatizes that point. A conservative white-collar advertising company is taken over by a group of street-wise African Americans chaired by a no-nonsense black man who wants to make a buck and believes he can sell products by telling the the truth. But the movie shows that no matter how hard he tries to do something different, the market place and the political system demands that he conform, rendering him no different than his predecessors. Interesting, off-beat movie.

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## **Quantum of Solace (2008)**

**It's time for James Bond to retire., 20 November 2008**

**5 stars**

**This movie gives reasonable cause to ask: Is James Bond passé? Is the genre of James Bond movies now a thing for the history books? Daniel Craig's performance is uninspiring and the story itself is so devoid of anything that even remotely challenges ones intellect that the entire movie becomes a bore, and James Bond movies are not supposed to be boring. Every aspect of this story is predictable, every character a reiteration of previous characters, every special effect utterly superfluous in a transparent attempt to fill in those spaces where the dialog fails or is entirely absent. The problem however is not so much the quality of the movie making, it's rather the genre itself. James Bond has been eclipsed by other action characters who are more dynamic, more powerful and more interesting than Bond, who's been on the scene since 1962. How many more times can Mr. Bond be introduced to the audience? Enough already. Let's remember James Bond as he was - debonair, suave, bold, dashing and above all original and unconventional - and all the beautiful women, wonderful villains and startling scenery that characterized those early productions. Mr. Bond is tired, he should retire and maybe become a consultant. But please, no more movies! His day has passed.**

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## **Rain Man (1988)**

**What's Rain Man's problem? - His brother. Revisted movie - Great Movie, 8 January 2006**

**10 stars**

**This movie is about a man who has some kind of mysterious mental disorder which enables him to perform the most complicated mathematical calculations but cannot tell you the answer to one-plus-one. The movie suggests that he is autistic, but is he? He communicates quite satisfactorily when he wants to, and when he's upset he starts rocking back and forth and throws tamper tantrums. Well, so what? When he's left alone, he's all right. It's only when other people, such as his conniving and pushy brother, insist that he talks that he gets nervous. But the movie also shows that when someone speaks to him nicely, he responds accordingly. One strong scene is the scene where a young pretty woman, Iris, who is a prostitute but clearly not a sinister or threatening person, starts talking to Raymond, and Raymond, who is supposed to be autistic, responds. He likes Iris and more importantly has a conversation with her in which he**

reveals a droll sense of humor. The scene gets ruined when the brother shows up and drives away Iris, which destroys the ambiance developing between Raymond and Iris, who found Raymond intriguing, and wipes out what potentially could have been an upbeat and amusing part of the story. What if Iris had picked up Raymond? What if Iris, like the prostitutes in "Leaving Las Vegas" or "Pretty Woman," had bonded with Raymond and started taking care of him? Maybe Raymond would have gained some confidence in himself, felt a lot better about life, really learned how to dance, shaken off the effects of autism, and got it together to tell his pushy brother to get lost. Then the movie would have really become interesting.

I rate this movie a "seven" exclusively because of Dustin Hoffman's dominating performance as the indomitable Raymond. Otherwise, this movie is a "four."

On 5/12/07 I watched Rain Man again and wish to make a few more comments. This movie is about two brothers who attempt to bond with each other after suddenly discovering each other's existence. Both brothers struggle with emotions that overwhelm them but ultimately they succeed in establishing a bond. This time I was much more impressed with Tom Cruise's performance. At first angry and selfish, his character goes through a complicated change and emerges a much better and more responsible person. As for Dustin Hoffman, his performance is a classic and is the hub around which the movie revolves. Mr. Hoffman's character is trapped in a psychological prison that distorts his behavior and makes him emotionally unreachable. But with enough attention, encouragement and support provided by his brother, he begins to improve and by the end of movie there is hope for him. I now rate this movie a 10.

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### **Rambo (2008)**

**Powerful and harrowing movie with stunning cinematography., 8 February 2008  
10 stars**

After watching this movie, I asked myself: "How can I rag this movie?" "What is wrong with this movie?" And after due consideration, I said to myself: "Self, I have no basis for ragging this movie?" This is a powerful, compelling, riveting movie with tremendous cinematography presenting a harrowing story. This movie out-Private Ryans "Saving Private Ryan." This movie contains possibly some of the most stunning action cinematography ever filmed by a Hollywood studio. Also, this could be Sylvester Stallone's best movie. Mr. Stallone succeeds in presenting a powerful action story with lots of special effects and incredible stunts without sacrificing

character development. The audience is told a lot about John Rambo and is given a glimpse of Rambo's philosophy of life. Excellent dialog, great acting and incredible cinematography equals a great movie.

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### Ratboy (1986)

It's Unique, 3 August 2005  
7 stars

First, let's get off our high horses and stop ragging the movie like it's infested with the plague. Okay? It's a movie, a unique movie, about exploitation. Okay, the main character is a rat ... or is it human? ... or whatever. The fact is that this movie teaches us to be more sensitive to those who are different, in this case, REALLY different, even if this movie stretches the message a bit far. I know that it's hard to empathize with character that's a rodent, but Ratboy is a LOVABLE rodent, so why not leave it at that? At the party in the movie, Ratboy seems perfectly in place, nobody was avoiding him (I presume he didn't have fleas), which proves that when we want to we can accept those who are different. One criticism of this movie is that Ratboy is so trusting and naive that perhaps it would have been better if the movie had been about, let's say, a gerbil or a rabbit, and not a rat. Also, the movie fails to address certain obvious questions, like where Ratboy came from and how he is able to talk, but such considerations would probably take this movie in a direction that would undermine the movie's essential charm. For "Ratboy" is a charming movie and Ms. Locke is perfect as the lady who is orchestrating everything. Even though Ratboy is exploited, nobody wants to hurt him and everyone actually likes him. It's a unique and unpretentious movie which, if accepted on its own terms, is watchable and will not disappoint. But if you watch this movie expecting to experience some kind of Shakespearean classic, then either you have been grossly misinformed or someone is trying to play a joke on you.

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### Red (2010/I)

A noisy sleeper. John Malkovich as comic actor., 20 October 2010  
8 stars

John Malkovich is a great actor. His name is associated with many great movies. Now Mr. Malkovich reveals his skill as a comic actor. He carries the movie. He makes this movie watchable. Every scene with Mr. Malkovich is

amusing and often funny. He may be the best comic actor in Hollywood today. His performance represents a major departure from his usual roles and it works.

This movie has some funny moments. It has a lot of action. Things explode. The characters are quirky. There is lots of noise. There are chase scenes. There are witty one-liners. There are good guys. There are bad guys. Yet, that will not stop you from taking a nap in the middle of the movie. The movie is a Hollywood potboiler. It comes out of the same mold that has spewed out countless action flicks over the years. The movie will make you laugh. The movie will make you wonder, "How did they do that explosion?" The movie will also make you sleep because the story is devoid of anything that even remotely challenges the intellect. If you want slapstick-like action, then this movie is for you. If you want a movie with lots of noise, then this movie is for you. If you want a movie that will stimulate your thought process, then bring a pillow and enjoy your nap.

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### **Rendition (2007)**

Good idea goes awry., 19 October 2007  
5 stars

Okay, given that rendition completely circumvents the Bill of Rights and is legally and morally repugnant, does that mean it's still a subject fit for a full length feature film? I don't think so. But that aside, I was shocked and dismayed by what has to be the worst performance by one of my favorite actresses, Ms. Reese Witherspoon. Ms. Witherspoon proved that she is no Cate Blanchette. Heavy drama is not her forte. Her performance bordered on the shrill. And as for the actor who played her husband, he is no Jim Caviezel. Moreover, the story itself lacked dramatic impact because we're not sure whether the government in fact actually does not have the right guy, and what's more, who cares? The "renditioned" man wasn't even a U. S. citizen, so maybe the government, despite its extralegal shenanigans, did capture a terrorist. If the said renditioned man had been an actual American citizen born and raised in the United States who was unfairly profiled, then maybe the story would have been a lot more credible. But alas, Hollywood as usual again opted to discard credibility in favor of the usual sensationalist distractions - explosions, violence and sadism. Hey, if this is what the audience wants, well then why should anyone criticize Hollywood for dishing out what the audience wants? But that doesn't mean we have to like it.

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## **Repo Men (2010)**

**Great movie, 19 March 2010**

**10 stars**

**What a great movie! Jude Law, Forest Whitaker and Liev Schreiber combine to make a fantastic sci-fi feature that is not only plausible but may already be happening. This movie scores a direct hit regarding its underlying message, that is, what can happen when monopoly capitalism is allowed to go out of control. The most glaring abuses are business as usual with tragic consequences for those who are victimized. This movie makes that Michael Douglas movie look like a G-rated romp in the park. At first the movie seems to be little more than your typical Hollywood fare but soon evolves into a complex story about characters who have to make ethical decisions and this involving, of all people, repo men, people not usually known for their sensitivity. Perhaps the strongest performance is that given by Mr. Schreiber who plays a company executive with a mixture of wry humor combined with cold-blooded ruthlessness. The story is fast-paced and robust, and combined with strong acting, makes this movie a must-see.**

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## **Return to Me (2000)**

**Great movie, 13 May 2007**

**10 stars**

**One great movie. The story is excellent, the acting is excellent and is romantic without being overly corny. The movie is poignant without being sentimental. David Duchovny is a big surprise. Mr. Duchovny demonstrates a style of acting that is highly engaging and Minnie Driver and Carroll O'Connor are also excellent. Mr. Duchovny carries the movie and is clearly the star. It is too bad that Hollywood does not produce more movies like this, but that might be asking too much from the potboiler factory. After all, to make a movie that deals with subjects such as personal loss and loneliness is a daunting task which takes a certain amount of discipline and respect for the audience's intelligence. This movie is really wonderful and is for people of all ages.**

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## **Reversal of Fortune (1990)**

**Before O.J. there was Claus., 23 December 2005**

**9 stars**

**Claus von Bulow. Victim of a miscarriage of justice or a criminal who used his money to "beat the rap." The movie suggests the former, but who really knows? After all, he was duly convicted the first time. But this movie is not a mere crime story. Rather, it offers a character study of man who is as unlikeable as he is fascinating. He does not attract sympathy nor does he solicit it. He insists that he is innocent, and is determined to make his case. The story warrants attention. The downside of this movie is the legal team that represents Mr. Von Bulow. With the exception of Chuck, admirably played by that excellent character actor Alan Pottinger, Mr. Von Bulow's legal team are portrayed as a bunch of self-righteous dilettantes who treat this case like it's a game. Am I supposed to believe that this same legal team could convince a state court of appeals that a guilty verdict, duly arrived at, was wrong? What did the trial judge have to say about that? What I'm suggesting is that there is probably more to this story than what the movie portrayed. One is presumed innocent until proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. However, in the case of Claus von Bulow, the defendant is found both guilty and not guilty. Watch the movie and make up your own mind.**

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## **Revolutionary Road (2008)**

**Tour-de-force, 16 January 2009**

**10 stars**

**Move over George and Martha. Step aside Archie and Edith. Take a walk Oliver and Barbara. Here comes Frank and April. They are in the house. They have arrived and they mean business. Kate Winslet and Leonardo DeCaprio give tour-de-force performances as a couple in conflict. Separately each character is likable, indeed wonderful, someone you would want to have as a friend. But together? Oh boy! Hold on to your hat because you'll be going on a ride, with a lot a bumps along the way. The director has taken what would otherwise have been little more than another hokey Hollywood potboiler and has raised it to the level of a classic. This movie is devoid of the mucky sentimentality that reduce such stories to sappy melodramas and instead deals forthrightly with the trials and tribulations associated with unmet needs. For one wants freedom and other wants security and they struggle to bridge that gulf. Ms. Winslet and Mr. DeCaprio were wonderful in Titanic. In this movie their performances**

are better. They're older but still retain that youthfulness which make them so appealing as actors. Also kudos to Kathryn Hahn who is one of the great comic character actresses. There is no bad guy or good guy, just people struggling to get through life and not be emotional frauds.

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### **Righteous Kill (2008)**

**Is this movie a requiem for the careers of two Hollywood legends?, 18  
September 2008  
1 star**

**Does this movie mark the beginning of the end of the careers of two Hollywood legends? Are they finished as major Hollywood stars? Is this the best that Hollywood can offer them? If it is then let us conduct a requiem for their careers. Why do this? One reason: this movie. As soon as the movie starts it becomes immediately apparent that it is a clunker. The acting is uninspiring, tepid at best. Robert De Niro and Al Pacino are almost laughably unconvincing in their roles as two police officers with something to hide. Or maybe nothing to hide. At no point does this movie even come close to generating the level of intensity that makes for a good who-done-it. This movie is as dull as a butter knife, as bland as spice-free food, and as empty as a dried-up well. Nothing can save this movie from its inevitable demise to DVD-land and even there it might not do too well. This movie is about as exciting as a lump of cheese. It challenges the audience to stay awake. It tries to peddle a story based solely on the presence of two Hollywood stars who do little to save the story. This movie also seems to have an ax to grind regarding retirement. For some reason, the creators of this movie take repeated shots at the idea of retirement, as if it is something to be avoided. So for anyone who is contemplating retirement or is already retired, look out and hold on to your 401K or your defines pension plan. Is there life after retirement? To find the answer to this question, do not, repeat, DO NOT, watch this movie. One other point, this is the first movie this commentator can recall in which not one but TWO major Hollywood stars take a cinematic dive. Both look tired and both act tired and so, to paraphrase those words of wisdom, if they look tired and act tired then then they must be tired ... and who wants to pay money to watch tired actors?**

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## **Road to Perdition (2002)**

**Nonstop violence., 5 February 2006**

**4 stars**

**If a movie is to be judged purely on the basis of violence content, then Road to Perdition should win accolades. In this movie the violence is nonstop, nasty, and graphic. Every character in this movie is violent or is a victim of violence. The main form of violence is shooting, primarily with a submachine gun, but the use of hand guns is also graphically portrayed. The violence is so pervasive that the story itself is rendered superfluous. That the main protagonist is a paid assassin, albeit a gentlemanly one, with a lovely wife and two nice children, makes the movie somewhat more watchable, but honestly, can anyone feel any empathy for a person whose job is "remove" other people? Or is the scene in which a police officer is cruelly gunned down outside of a diner supposed to make this movie more likable? In a world that is ablaze with violence, what is the point of this movie? How does this movie make the world a better place in which to live?**

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## **Robin Hood (2010)**

**It's a movie, not a documentary, 18 May 2010**

**7 stars**

**Okay, the story has some holes in it. Okay, the French never invaded England. Okay, Russell Crowe's performance is rather flat and Lady Marion is about as sexy as a sack of flour. Okay, the story isn't really about Robin Hood and that the title was used to hook an audience. Okay, the two kings are depicted as being stupid oafs. Okay, the movie takes huge liberties with the actual history of the period. Okay, the movie meanders at time and contains numerous subplots. Okay, Robin's merry men seem to be a reincarnation of the The Three Stooges. Okay, the idea of Robin's identity theft actually fooling the entire English nobility is almost laughable. Okay, the idea that a woman in 13th century England could be a large landowner in a heavily patriarchal society is taking literary license to the limit. Okay, the idea that Robin Hood had something to do with the Magna Carta is ludicrous. Okay, the French invasion is so poorly planned that it is obviously doomed to failure. Okay, the English nobles are simplistically depicted as a bunch of whining tax evaders. Okay, King John's mother has to be one of the most abrasive characters in the history of Hollywood epics. Okay, the movie's plot seems more like a western set in medieval England. Okay, in this movie Robin is grumpy man, never smiling, weighed down with problems and concerns. Nevertheless, I LIKED THIS MOVIE!**

Why, you ask? Because IT'S A MOVIE. It's not a documentary; it's not a docudrama. It is a movie and should be judged as such. Those critics who take this movie apart are ragging on a work of fiction. On that basis, any movie can be trashed. Hollywood takes liberties for dramatic purposes and in this movie, the relationship of Robin and Marian is subordinate to the larger story about the struggle for power. True, the title of the movie belies the actual story but then again, Robin Hood does figure in the story and perhaps will figure even more in the sequel if one is made.

This is a great movie. Lots of action, good story, and invites a sequel. Despite the movie's title, the story goes beyond the Robin Hood legend and depicts the English political landscape of the early thirteenth century. This movie was driven not so much by the leading actors but by the supporting players, especially William Hurt and Mark Strong. Indeed, in a way they are the stars of the movie with Robin and Marian almost reduced to that of supporting roles. The reason for this is because the story is set within a political context and is not a love story. It's more about betrayal and the struggle for power, which is what drives the story. Robin is just one part of a larger picture that is the England of that time. Also impressive was the invasion scene which seemed to rely more on actual actors than on cgi. All in all, this is another Ridley Scott masterpiece, maybe not as flashy as *Gladiator* but still a strong story, well acted and a movie worth watching.

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### **Rocky Balboa (2006)**

There's a little bit of Paulie in all of us., 17 January 2007  
9 stars

Amazingly, this is a very good movie. Rocky comes out of retirement to fight one more time. But more importantly, the movie is about dealing with change, with loss, with the irretrievable passing of time and how life goes on, no matter what happens. Rocky is more than a fighter, he is now a philosopher who observes life and the people in it. The young girl from the past is now a grown woman. The young boy who was his son is now a grown man. But despite the passage of time, Rocky is still Rocky. He is the Tevya the Milkman of Philadelphia. This movie is about not giving up, always moving forward and never looking back. And let's not forget Paulie played by Burt Young. Mr. Young offers a fabulous performance as Rocky's suffering yet indefatigable brother-in-law Paulie. Paulie is the every-man, the average Joe, the guy in the crowd who in this movie is heard. In a way, this movie is about you and me because there's a little bit of Paulie in all of us.

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### **Rocky III (1982)**

**Mr. T is Wonderful, 27 July 2005**

**7 stars**

**Rocky III would be a long-forgotten movie if it wasn't for one special character, Clubber Lang, played by Mr. T. Mr. T was the dynamo that charged up this movie and kept it from becoming just another grade B sleeper. Because by Rocky III, Rocky Balboa is already washed up and ready to retire. And who wants to watch a movie about a washed up boxer who is ready to retire? But Mr. T energizes this movie, giving it resuscitation needed so that it can live and say something besides that Rocky's time is over and done with, that Mickey should go home and that Pauly should go back to the meat packing plant. Once Mr.T gets involved, the fireworks go off because it's just a matter of time before he and Stallone have it out, which saves the movie from total oblivion. In this movie Clubber Lang is The Man and he's the character that makes this movie work.**

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### **Romeo & Juliet (1994) (TV)**

**Good rendition of a classic story., 8 May 2009**

**8 stars**

**Solid, commendable production of the Shakespeare tragedy. The lead performers are especially impressive as is the supporting cast. The movie should also be commended for staying true to the the setting and not making any major changes in the original script. By presenting Shakespeare in a straightforward manner, the movie avoids the traps and pitfalls associated with trying to update the story. Jenny Agutter is wonderful as Lady Capulet and Ben Daniels gives a strong performance as Mercutio. But what essentially makes this movie watchable is the story itself which is a classic. Of course, as a television production, the movie lacks the gloss that might be found in the feature film, but more than makes up for that with skillful directing and excellent acting.**

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## **S1m0ne (2002)**

**Are actors expendable?, 9 July 2007**

**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**I guess if you're a movie director who can't deal with an actor, then create one. Indeed, this movie inspires some interesting questions: Why deal with actors when they can be computer generated? Why should special effects be confined to just special effects? Why not expand that capability to include every facet of a movie? Simone is ostensibly a comedy, but is based on a serious premise, that creativity and technology are not necessarily incompatible. In this movie the main protagonist, a movie director, finds it difficult dealing with a temperamental actress and out of desperation uses computer technology to create a new actress over whom the director has complete control. This may seem far-fetched or implausible but it is not. Historically automation has displaced whole classes of workers. Are actors next?**

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## **Safe (1995)**

**Good movie, 25 January 2010**

**9 stars**

**This movie dramatizes the plight of the hypochondriac, a person who sincerely believes that he or she is physically ill although all empirical evidence indicates the exact opposite. A person has a cough, or a headache or some other somatic problem yet a physical examination reveals no problem. What is a person to think or do? Okay, then is it the environment that is making the person sick? That leads to more frustration as those in charge of the environment claim that everything is fine, that nobody else is getting sick, only that one person, so therefore the problem must be psychological. By this time the person is frantic, can no longer function and then really becomes mentally ill. This is the theme of this movie. How is one to cope in an increasingly polluted environment that literally makes you sick but nobody really believes that you are really sick?**

**What is one to do when they sick, really sick, yet there is no empirical evidence to suggest the presence of a health problem? Is it all merely psychosomatic? That is, is just in one's head? That is the theme of this provocative movie. Our environment is filled with thousands of chemicals the exposure to which cannot be avoided. Yet what is one to do when exposure to these chemicals affects one's health? How can one effectively**

cope? As movie so effectively shows, there are few if any viable options. For instance, what are you to do when at the workplace you have an adverse reaction to the chemicals in a detergent used to mop the floors? Stop working? Go home? Quit the job? Complain? Stop breathing? And then there is the question of whether you may be overreacting or is a hypochondriac. This movie dramatizes the plight of those who become sick as a result of exposure to chemicals.

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### **Sahara (1943/I)**

Perhaps the outstanding movie of its genre., 26 July 2010  
10 stars

This movie withstands the test of time and therefore is a classic. All the facets of movie production fall right into place in this outstanding movie about sacrifice and heroism. Instead of being hokey, this movie offers a strong and compelling story about survival and does this with an all-male cast. This movie may be the penultimate war movie; it is at least an excellent example of the genre. Theatrics are set aside as the the story immediately unfolds and follows a straight path leading to a strong dramatic finale. Humphrey Bogart and the rest of the cast are excellent. Especially impressive is the performance of J. Carroll Naish as an Italian POW. Although made during World War Two, the movie succeeds in keeping propaganda to a minimum and concentrates instead on telling a story. The movie maintains a steady level of suspense as the audience is made to wonder whether the tank crew will survive. In the era of flashy special effects and computer graphics, it is refreshing to watch a movie that relies solely on acting and actual sets and locations to tell a story.

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### **Salt (2010)**

Three cheers for Angelina Jolie., 3 August 2010  
10 stars

What a great movie! Fast-paced, high energy entertainment. Angelina Jolie has never been better. She is truly the star of this movie. Kudos to the director and the rest of the production crew for how they managed to take a complex story and create a coherent motion picture that offers dazzling special effects, high drama, intense conflicts and a surprise ending. Far from being obvious, the movie succeeds in grabbing and keeping the audience's interest as the plot unfolds and develops. Liev Schreiber gives a

chilling portrayal of a high ranking government official with a hidden agenda and the rest of the cast is equally excellent in their support roles. But the star as always is the beautiful and talented Ms. Jolie. She carries this movie and through her efforts this movie becomes great entertainment. Although the story may seem far-fetched, it really isn't. The movie poses serious questions relating to the loyalty of government officials and our national security. Three cheers for Angelina Jolie as she stars in yet another wonderful movie.

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### **Saturday Night Fever (1977)**

Classic movie., 18 August 2007  
10 stars

There aren't enough accolades to describe this movie. It is one of the great movie musicals not only because of the great acting, exceptional music, excellent musical numbers and exceptional choreography, but because of the story itself. Instead of fluff, the movie presents a strong, engaging story that is timeless. As a result, the movie avoids becoming a period piece which makes it as watchable today as when it was first released in 1977.

The term "classic" is a word that should be used sparingly, especially for Hollywood movies which for the most part are pot-boiler remakes of remakes of remakes, crass commercial products utterly devoid of any artistic originality. However, this movie is a classic. It has withstood the test of time and presents a complex story with themes that are as relevant today as they were when this movie was released thirty years ago. This surprisingly unique movie dramatizes a wide range of social issues that still plague society today. These issues include alienation, racial strife, family discord, class conflict and other symptoms of social pathology that if anything have intensified. The movie's power is further enhanced by the excellent acting and timeless music that together with a compelling story make this movie something special, not just another commercial product but a work of art, a true classic.

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## **Saving Private Ryan (1998)**

**War is Unpleasant, 5 August 2005**

**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

The movie has a lot of gratuitous scenes of violence (Don't need Hollywood to show me that war is a violent activity). The movie has a lot of stereotypical characters (Don't need Hollywood to portray soldiers as being foul-mouthed and grimy). The movie has a pretentious story (Don't believe that even the U. S. Army would risk 10 soldiers to locate one, and an enlisted soldier at that, in the middle of one of the biggest operations in the history of warfare). But what saves this movie from being a complete dud is Tom Hanks's portrayal of Captain Miller. Hanks's performance is not just wonderful, it is superlative. Captain Miller is a civilian who now finds himself in combat and the conflict between his civilian background and military responsibilities is what this movie is about. Because of this conflict, Captain Miller suffers, emotionally as well as physically. We observe how Captain Miller goes through a process of breaking down as his situation becomes more and more untenable. And when the private in question is found, yet refuses to leave, Captain Miller begins to completely unravel as he realizes that his mission has failed and that the men in his unit who died - under Captain Miller's command - had died in vain. Captain Miller literally becomes a nervous wreck, but nevertheless he fights on, courageous and strong till the ultimate moment arrives marking the end of Captain Miller's life. For Captain Miller is a hero and his character is symbolic of every citizen-soldier who answered the call to duty, and made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

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## **Scarface (1983)**

**Chilling movie, 3 November 2006**

**10 stars**

**9 stars**

In 1983 I found this movie to be flawed but entertaining in a campy sort of way. Here was Al Pacino playing a Cuban gangster, along with a whole bunch of other non-Hispanic actors playing various Latin American characters. To me it added to the essential surrealist quality of the movie. Well, 23 years later, I watched the same movie and my impressions have changed. This movie is anything but surrealistic. This movie is a powerful dramatization of what happens when a psychopath grabs power. This is Al

Pacino's greatest movie. Here he plays a character who is angry, alienated, dispossessed, morally depraved and marginalized. His own mother wants nothing to do with him. His own sister is utterly corrupted by his presence. Unlike Michael in *The Godfather*, whose own depravity is at least blunted by the veneer of middle class civility, Tony's behavior is upfront, unambiguous, without restraint and utterly lacking in finesse. Everything he does is based on cunning and brute force. Unlike the Godfather, Tony doesn't need an organization to run his operation, he IS the organization. Nor does he pretend to be anything other than what he is, a gangster. For Tony is a product of the culture of violence that pervades society, produces characters like Tony Montana and supplies Hollywood with the material with which to make these kind of chilling movies.

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### **Schindler's List (1993)**

**A Nice Nazi? You Must Be Joking!, 31 July 2005**

**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

This is a great movie. It is a story that had to be told. As unbelievable as it is, even a Nazi was capable of showing compassion, of pausing to stop and explore his own conscience and make decisions that saved people from death. This Nazi had every incentive to dispose of his charges yet decides not to do it and instead takes the high road with dramatic results. Counterposed to him was another Nazi who wantonly murdered people and in the end paid for that with his life. Yes, two Nazis, one guided by the highest principles, the other who was devoid of even the slightest spark of kindness, both Germans, yet both different. Why? Who knows?

I know that everyone raved about this movie and how it was Spielberg's greatest and most important movie. Well, guess what: I don't need Hollywood giving me a history lesson on the Holocaust or trying to capitalize on the suffering the victims of that event had to endure. I don't need a Hollywood producer or director trying to manipulate me into thinking that some Nazi really had second-thoughts about the plight of the Jews ... many of whom happened to be German too. If you want to watch a really good movie about where the German people were at when it came to Nazism, watch the "Mortal Storm" made in 1940, or watch any of Leni Riefenstahl's documentaries glorifying the Nazi system. These movies were made when the Nazis were actually in power. But don't tell me decades after the war that there were Nazis with a conscience because if that had been the case, Adolf Hitler would not have lasted one day in office. Hitler

could not have done what he did if he did not have the unanimous approval of EVERY Nazi who followed his lead. A Nazi who cared? Yeah ... right. The next thing Hollywood will be telling us is the Genghis Khan wasn't such a bad guy or that Isaac the Terrible wasn't all that terrible, just misunderstood and blah, blah blah. If Hollywood thinks the story ... any story ... will make money, they'll try to exploit it for all its worth. Now, what I really want to know, however, is why was the movie filmed in black-and-white? Were concentration camps painted in black-and-white paint? Were the inmates black-and-white? Or the guards? I don't think so. And that concentration-camp commandant who's taking pot-shots at the inmates? Was that supposed to tell us that the Nazis were depraved wanton murderers? Once again, I don't need this movie to tell me that. I know that. Plus that subject was fully covered in "Judgment at Nuremberg" which did a much better job of it, minus all the gratuitous violence. So if you want to watch a black-and-white movie about a Nazi, who, for reasons never explained, decides to protect Jews and also shows Jews being subjected to all forms of mistreatment and violence and terror, then this is the movie for you. But for goodness sake, don't construe this movie as being a history lesson because if you do, you'll come away believing that some Nazis were actually nice, and there's no way I'll ever believe that.

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### **Secretariat (2010)**

**A wonderful movie. Diane Lane deserves Best Actress nomination., 22  
October 2010  
8 stars**

Although this movie contains some cheesy scenes and stretches literary license, it nevertheless is a good movie. Diane Lane is stunning as the owner who refuses to sell out. Actually the movie is more about her than about the horse. Secretariat was one of the greatest, if not the greatest, race horses in history. His career is legendary. Not only does this horse win races, he wins big! The movie includes some incredible shots taken from atop the horse which give the audience a sense of actually being in the race. These horses are strong and they are fast. They are incredible creatures but alas they are still animals and without the human element the movie would go nowhere. The human element here is Penny Chenery Tweedy. She believes in her horse and the horse seems to reciprocate. There might be some who object to this film as being exploitative of an animal, yet the horse was more than just a money maker, he was a symbol of perseverance, determination and success. One other point: Diane Lane should be nominated for Best Actress. She is beautiful. She was the exactly the right actress to play the role of Penny Chenery. What a wonderful movie.

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**Semi-Pro (2008)**

**Not that bad, but not that good either., 17 March 2008**

**6 stars**

**Not a great movie but not that bad either, which isn't saying much because there is not much to say about this movie. It's not offensive, it has its funny moments, but it's not going to become part of the pantheon of great Hollywood classics. The best word to describe this movie is "cute." That's it. Nothing more. There are no memorable performances. The movie waivers between being a comedy and drama. Strong performances are nonexistent in this movie but the none of the performances were all that bad. Entertaining, yes! Inspirational? No. A masterpiece? Definitely not. One other point: this movie is supposed to be a period (1970s) but everything about the movie seems to be 2008, a discrepancy that further weakens an already teetering story.**

**One other point. Even in a tepid movie such as this, Woody Harrelson once again gives a commendable performance, again showing that he is a great actor. If the movie was as good as his performance then this movie would have been great.**

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**Semi-Tough (1977)**

**What a guy will do to get a woman., 15 October 2005**

**7 stars**

**Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristofferson play two pro football players who are interested in the the daughter of the owner of the team, wonderfully played by Jill Clayburgh. This movie is actually humorous. It shows what these two guys will do to try to win over the lady who is playing these guys off against each other and enjoying every second if it. The two men are willing to make total fools of themselves in the process, until the Burt Reynolds character wises up, steps back, examines the situation objectively and then plots his strategy to gain the lady's attention. It's not the greatest movie, and it's not exactly a sports movie, but it's worth watching, has funny moments, and shows what a guy is willing to do to get a woman.**

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## Shallow Hal (2001)

Ugh! How dare they make this movie?, 18 August 2008

1 star

How dare they make this movie? There is just so much that a movie buff can take and this movie crosses the line. How did someone ever concoct such an asinine story? If this movie was meant to be comedy, it did not work. If it was meant to be a drama, it did not work. If it was meant to give work for actors and production crew, it works! The paucity of creativity is so pronounced that it alone should be the subject for the movie. Jack Black is a solid actor but he could not rescue this movie. The lovely Gwyneth Paltrow is made to look and act ridiculous (what a waste of a wonderful actress). And the story has nothing that can even remotely save it from the quagmire of mediocrity that banishes it to the world of the DVDs and television reruns where it can be foisted upon an unsuspecting public that can never be fully prepared for what they will be watching.

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## Sherlock Holmes (2009)

Sherlock the buffoon., 7 January 2010

3 stars

The name Sherlock Holmes evokes an image of a suave, debonair man of impeccable taste and stalwart character, and then there is this movie which offers a new take on the Sherlock Holmes persona, this time as a frumpish, mumbling, annoying buffoon. True, Sherlock does display fleeting moments of lucidity and genius but for the most part he is a mess. Yet the audience is asked to believe that this broken down Scotland Yard reject can solve complex crimes, beat up the toughest toughs and be involved with a beautiful woman, all of this without any evidence that he actually bathes. The only credible part of the movie is the scene where the audience finds out that Holmes hasn't been out of his apartment in weeks, but that is where Sherlock Holmes belongs because on the street he is merely a nuisance, and an annoying nuisance at that. There is no way that this Sherlock Holmes could possibly defeat Professor Moriarity. Holmes is so befuddled that at times he sounds incoherent yet the audience is asked to believe that this man, who at one point manages to get himself shackled to a bed, can actually solve crimes when he has hard time just leaving his apartment. The only thing bleaker than Holmes is London itself. The city is dreary, filthy, dismal and probably reeking with odors, a perfect setting for this downtrodden Holmes and his prissy companion Dr. Watson. Now regarding Dr. Watson .... I'll leave that alone for now.

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### **Shooter (2007/I)**

**Far-fetched (or is it?), 24 March 2007**

**8 stars**

The movie is far-fetched and clearly another example of the special effects department taking charge (no pun intended). But the movie is has a certain energy that transcends its weaknesses as a work of art, and Mark Wahlberg gives a strong and energetic performance and may be the new Sylvester Stallone. And Danny Glover is very good too as the retired Army Colonel (or is he really a retired Army Colonel?) with a secret agenda. The female actresses are very pretty and supportive of their men (the Wahlberg character has an accomplice), but the main character is the Shooter. The movie poses an interesting question: Are Americans their own worst enemies? This movie calls to mind the story of Senator Joseph McCarthy who warned about subversives infiltrating the government. After watching this movie you may want to consider whether Senator McCarthy may have been right.

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### **Show Boat (1936)**

**Excellent Movie. The best musical ever made by Hollywood., 25 July 2005**

**10 stars**

The Paul Robeson and chorus rendition of Old Man River has to be without a doubt the greatest single rendition of one song in the history of Hollywood musicals. And what makes it even more impressive is that the number was directed by a director who had made his reputation directing monster movies. Of course, the name of the director was the iconic James Whale. So remarkable was his career that in 1998 a movie was made about him. Great song, great director, great performers, great everything, it all came together in the production of that song.

After watching a myriad of current Hollywood special effects potboilers I needed to recover so I watched the 1936 movie Show Boat. Oh my, how movies have changed. This movie has to be the best musical Hollywood ever produced, and for a potboiler factory like Hollywood, that's saying a lot. That Hollywood was able to put together such a great movie is proof that there was a time when Hollywood could produce a commercially viable product that did not sacrifice, or rather completely trash, artistic quality. If Hollywood tried to make this musical today, it would be a laughable joke, a fiasco, a travesty, an embarrassment, and why? Not because of the lack of

talented performers because they are out there, and not because of the lack of talented musical arrangers and choreographers, because they're out there, but because the production crew itself would want to "modernize" the story and render it almost unrecognizable from the original when in fact the story itself is timeless. Could Hollywood recreate the "Ol' Man River" number? The answer is YES, but it won't happen and that's too bad because the talent is out there but will never be showcased. But there's always the 1936 version ... the best musical ever made by Hollywood.

The 1936 movie *Show Boat* is arguably the finest musical ever produced by Hollywood. Not only does the movie contain an impressive array of wonderful and entertaining musical numbers, the acting is excellent and the story compelling. All the performers are impressive. Irene Dunne, Helen Morgan, Alan Jones, Charles Winninger, Hattie McDaniel, Sammy White and all the others are excellent. But especially impressive is Paul Robeson, particularly Robeson's classic rendition of "Ol' Man River." Although cast in a supporting role, Robeson's presence nonetheless dominates the movie. "*Show Boat*" is definitely worth watching, and although the movie candidly deals with serious social issues, it's still a movie for the entire family.

A few further comments about the scene with Paul Robeson singing "Ol' Man River." This version of "Ol' Man River" has to be one of the greatest, if not THE greatest, single musical piece ever filmed by a Hollywood studio. What's also remarkable is that the movie was produced and directed by James Whale, a former British POW with no previous experience in making movie musicals. It just proves that when given the chance and the encouragement people can excel and do great things.

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### **Showgirls (1995)**

Entertaining ... if you don't take the movie seriously, 18 August 2007  
7 stars

What a movie!!! It's poignant, it has humor, it has conflict, it has backstabbing, and it's campy. This makes it a good movie. And Elizabeth Berkley is beautiful and wonderful as the heroine Nomi Malone, a drifter who seeks stardom and gets more than she bargains for. Why take this movie seriously? Why not accept it for what it is, not what someone may want it to be? Who can truthfully criticize the acting when the movie obviously is not meant to be taken seriously? Who cannot but smile at some of the lines that are truly laughable? That does not make a movie bad. It makes the movie entertaining, and if entertainment is what you want,

then this movie is for you. But please ... please ... don't take this movie seriously.

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### **Shutter Island (2010)**

**Better than mediocre but not great., 27 February 2010**

**7 stars**

It's hard to knock a movie with a good ending even if the bulk of the movie stinks, which is case for this over-hyped thriller. Much of the movie is exceedingly underwhelming and at times outright boring. The gloomy sets, the hackneyed acting, the dumb dialog all combine to make the first two-thirds of this movie quite bland, the stuff that makes the eyelids feel heavy as you are sinking into slumber-land. Yet something amazing happens. The movie actually turns itself around and becomes an engaging and exciting cinematic event, marked by strong acting by Leonardo Di Caprio as his confused character struggles to unravel the riddle of his very identity. How this movie manages to avoid creative oblivion is fascinating. Somewhere, some how, the director must have realized that he had to turn this movie around to avoid flop-ville. Two problems with the movie is that the sinister characters aren't really all that sinister and that the setting, a psychiatric hospital is, well, a psychiatric hospital. One must remember that when a story is based in a hospital, drama can be taken just so far because along with the doctors and nurses who interact with patients, there is also a virtual army of clerks, housekeepers, accountants and other support staff who actually keep the hospital running. So when watching Shutter Island, one should ask: who is paying the bills, mopping the floor, dealing with account payable and receivables and maintaining the phones? They have a story too but once again it goes untold.

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### **Sideways (2004)**

**Excellent Movie, 2 August 2005**

**10 stars**

Two middle-age guys decide to take a week traveling around central California, intending to visit wineries, taste wines, have a pleasant and relaxing time, and enjoy each other's company. Well, it doesn't work out that way. Instead, the trip becomes an adventure of self-exploration and self-discovery revealing complex characters in search of personal fulfillment. One guy wants to drink, the other guy wants to party. But the premise of the story is not what makes this movie so enjoyable. It's the

actors and actresses that make this movie happen. They transform rather commonplace characters into people we want to know and care about. Also, the cinematography adds to the surrealistic quality of the movie, which renders the movie more esthetically pleasing. Excellent movie.

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### **Sink the Bismarck! (1960)**

This is "The Titanic" of War Movies., 30 May 2006  
9 stars

In World War Two Nazi Germany launches a battleship that was for its time the most advanced and lethal warship ever built. And as proof of its invincibility, the Bismarck within a matter of minutes sunk and seriously damaged two of Britain's biggest warships. Yet like the Titanic, this ship, this incredible example of technical ingenuity, was doomed to fail, and to fail spectacularly and ingloriously. As the title indicates, this movie is about the sinking of the Bismarck. To reveal how and why this ship failed would be inappropriate here, but this movie does a credible job in explaining why the British became totally obsessed with that one ship and why the British had to destroy that ship at all cost. Watch the movie.

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### **Six Days Seven Nights (1998)**

Surprisingly good movie., 5 October 2008  
8 stars

The movie has all the trappings of mediocrity but is surprisingly a good movie. In terms of quality, this movie is on the same level as Joe vs. The Vulcano. The main reason why this movie is watchable is the performance of Harrison Ford. He proves once again what a great actor he is. Even in relative lightweight fare he is a dominating presence on the screen. David Schwimmer and Ann Heche also provide excellent performances. There is a part of the movie where it could have become another Swept Away but thankfully the story takes a more original turn. One remake of Swept Away was enough. The movie contains nice scenery but underscores that looks can be deceiving and that what looks like a paradise can also be a prison from which there is no escape.

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### **Slaughterhouse-Five (1972)**

**War is not a subject to be joked about., 1 September 2010**

**6 stars**

Okay, the bombing of Dresden was a traumatic event. However, this movie treats that event as some kind of surrealistic happening which significantly understates the horror of what occurred there. Politics aside, a lot of people died there, died horrible deaths, yet, as much as it tries, this movie does little to evoke any feeling of compassion, the reason being that the story is told from the vantage point of an American, not a German. Perhaps if the story was told through another character, let's say, an eight year old German child who lost his or her entire family, then perhaps the movie would have been much stronger. War is subject not to be joked about or played with. It does not lend itself to a whimsical approach. The main character in this movie, an American soldier, is traumatized but his flashbacks are silly, completely out of place with the movie's somber theme, that war damages people, psychologically as well as physically.

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### **Sleepless in Seattle (1993)**

**Someone special is out there waiting for you., 24 October 2005**

**10 stars**

The story is corny. The plot is contrived. The movie is awash with abject sentimentality to the point of being outright maudlin. Yet this is a wonderful movie. Yes, a **WONDERFUL MOVIE!** Now you ask: Why is such a maudlin movie so wonderful? The answer is because of two of the finest actors in Hollywood today, Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Their portrayal of two lonely people searching for love and unwilling to settle for second-best transforms a meandering script into a story that will touch anyone who has ever felt lonely or isolated or has suffered a loss of someone close and special to them. Indeed this movie deals candidly with the challenges associated with trying to meet someone in a society that fosters isolation, fear and outright paranoia. That the two main characters in this movie are able to transcend those barriers is what makes this movie so special, for it offers the possibility of hope for even the most desperately lonely people who just need a little bit of encouragement to get out into the world and meet that special someone.

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## **Slumdog Millionaire (2008)**

**Has its flaws but nevertheless a very good movie., 3 March 2009**

**8 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**It must be admitted that this is a very good movie. Expecting to find an overrated, over-hyped piece of Hollywood bluster, instead this movie was riveting, evocative, well acted and upbeat. What a relief because whereas usually there is an inverse relationship between hype and artistic quality, here the relation is direct ... for once. The movie deals with a number of themes, poverty, love, crime, child abuse, and has a number of plots which are all woven together to produce a coherent and watchable work of art that restores confidence in the artistic credibility of commercial cinema. Most compelling was the effective use of flashbacks and the portrayal of the main characters as the audience observes their development. Although a high quality movie, it does have its faults. First, there is the scene where Hindus attack Moslems. This scene is entirely outside of the context of the story, more so since religion does not define the characters. Second, the child actors playing the older brother simply were not menacing looking enough to make their performances entirely believable. Third, the Taj Mahal scenes where the audience is supposed to believe in young kids passing themselves off as tourist guides was ludicrous. Fourth, how the main character manages to get onto the game show is not clearly explained. Fifth, by the end of the movie a huge slum had been cleared away with no explanation other than ... "we used to live there." Sixth, the questions on the game show were challenging but, considering the sum of money at stake, not overly difficult. Seventh, the use of torture to extract a confession was completely inconsistent with the nature of the alleged crime - cheating on a game show. The show could have told the young man to leave. Yet, despite all these shortcomings, the movie was entertaining, compelling, well acted and deserves praise.**

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## **Smokey and the Bandit (1977)**

**Maybe Jackie Gleason's greatest movie., 15 January 2009**

**10 stars**

**This movie is hilarious and the actors are great. This has to be Bert Reynold's signature film. He is never better than in this movie. He plays a wonderfully endearing and witty character; Sally Fields is is funny too. But the real star of this movie is Jackie Gleason as Sheriff Buford T. Justice. Mr. Gleason's performance is a classic and has to rank up there with some**

of the greatest comic characters in Hollywood motion picture history. In this movie Jackie Gleason proves once again that he was one of the greatest American comic actors and if you don't believe it, then watch the movie and judge for yourself. The movie offers nonstop laughter as Smokey and the Bandit play a cat-and-mouse game that keeps the audience engaged and laughing. Wonderful movie.

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### **Soldier (1998/I)**

Great performance by Kurt Russell, 22 September 2007  
10 stars

One of the great science fiction movies, a metaphor on war. Kurt Russell is perfect for the title role. His character is a symbol of how society treats those it deems no longer useful, how cruel society can be, how people are treated like mere commodities, to be thrown away when deemed obsolete. This movie provides a chilling portrayal of how people can be reduced to the level of robots, how they can be conditioned to commit the vilest acts under the pretense of obeying orders and what happens when people are taught to obey every order, no matter how outrageous, without question. Mr. Russell's character says little but when he does speak, his words carry great meaning. This is one movie where the script does not get in the way of the story, which is unique. This is an excellent movie that does not rely solely on special effects but actually explores questions relating to war, violence and the relationship of the individual to society.

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### **Something's Gotta Give (2003)**

8 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

This movie is a drama about a man and a woman who erect an elaborate array of emotional barriers to fend away intimacy and thereby avoid pain. They want intimacy, they want romance, they want love, and do not want to be alone, but are afraid of letting down their defenses and getting hurt and having to get in touch with a lot of repressed feelings. As their relationship evolves, both the man and woman go through a lot of changes and approach the brink of actual mental and physical collapse, before coming to terms with who they are as people and what they really want out of life. The woman is a playwright who writes about life but doesn't live it. The man is a womanizer who really wants love but feels incapable of making a

commitment. When the two meet the sparks fly as their defenses go into full swing as they cope with a whole array of feelings about themselves and about each other. Good movie.

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### Song of Freedom (1936)

Another great Paul Robeson movie., 26 April 2008  
10 stars

This movie is about how sheer chance and pure luck and can lead to fame and fortune. Paul Robeson is wonderful. His singing is comparable to that in the 1936 Show Boat, arguably the greatest musical ever made by Hollywood. Paul Robeson is such a commanding presence in this movie that without him this movie could not be made. Also the story is compelling as a man has a chance to fulfill his dream and in the process learn more about himself and his roots. Anyone who gives any thought to their own roots can relate to this movie. It's about a man's quest for cultural and spiritual fulfillment which this movie motts effectively portrays. Also impressive is Elizabeth Welch who plays Mr. Robeson's wife. A good story, well acted, excellent, inspirational songs, all combined to create a great movie.

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### Spartacus (1960)

Tragic story., 11 December 2005  
8 stars

An illiterate non-Roman slave almost defeats the best armies Rome has at her disposal. The same slave, before his "break out," shares his cell with a naked female slave, in full view of his Roman guards. And a Roman general has some kind of relationship with his male slave - in a swimming pool. Now, what does all this have in common? Answer: I don't know! It's all in the movie, however. I don't care about Spartacus's love life nor do I care about whether the Roman general had a special relationship with his male slave. The story is about the revolt itself, which is one of the most famous slave revolts in history. It's about an army of slaves who are fighting for their freedom. But that's not enough material for Hollywood, so here comes the sex, as if that had any bearing on the revolt itself. Kirk Douglas offers a powerful, albeit somewhat hammy performance as the heroic Spartacus and Tony Curtis offers an interesting portrayal as the Greek slave who is Spartacus's adviser, friend and scribe - and his master's lover. Okay,

**Spartacus rebelled against Rome, but was it really necessary for Rome to crucify thousands of men just to find Spartacus? That is truly tragic.**

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### **Speed (1994/I)**

**Can a city bus actually go 50 mph without falling apart?, 10 October 2005  
8 stars**

**Okay, the story is exciting, the acting is excellent, and it's definitely one of the better action movies, but ... BUT ... asking the audience to believe that a city bus can sustain a speed of 50 mph nonstop for one and half hours in the middle of a city without breaking down stretches the bounds of credulity. Maybe a Mazda, maybe a Porsche, maybe even a Greyhound or Short Line bus, or maybe even your standard commuter bus could have functioned intact, but an inner city bus? NO WAY!! It's enough that these buses work at all, much less that they could go 50 mph without breaking down within five minutes (okay let's make it ten minutes). It would have been more realistic if the bus was required to maintain a constant speed of, let's say, 20 mph. Now that would be far more believable and realistic. But when that bus does its flying act, like the General Lee flying through the air in the "Dukes of Hazard" or Burt Reynolds and Sally Fields doing the same in "Smokey and the Bandit," that's when I knew that this movie had moved into the realm of science fiction. It would have been more believable to have had the bus launched into orbit around the earth, or to the moon.**

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### **Speed Racer (2008)**

**Entertaining cartoon-like movie., 17 May 2008  
8 stars**

**It would be easy to trash this movie, to mock its simplistic plot, to deride its flashy use of special effects, to laugh at its childish format, to question whether this movie is actually a cartoon, but this movie is actually good. It's imaginative, action-packed and has a unique style. It's not pretentious; its comic book-like design adds to the movie's watchability and makes it a much purer form of entertainment. This movie is like a live-action cartoon that uses the theme of capitalistic greed and corruption to create the basis for a story with a well-defined set of villains and heroes. At first one might wonder if this movie is a cartoon interspersed with some live-action footage but as the movie proceeds and the story develops the movie's**

creators succeed in putting aside the pretentious in favor of some unabashed fun. Also, welcome to Susan Sarandon as the new Donna Reed.

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### Spider-Man (2002)

Mediocre, 17 December 2005

4 stars

If you like comic book characters who perform acts of superhuman strength, then this movie is for you. Unfortunately, the movie offers little else which warrants commendation. The story is simplistic and superficial, the characters two-dimensional; the acting, with the exception of Willem Dafoe's, is mediocre; and the special effects contrived. Any story involving a human being becoming transformed into a spider-like creature should evoke a sense of terror and horror over such a change, especially when the human knows what is happening. Yet this movie offers none of that. (Compare Spiderman to the Jeff Goldblum character in "The Fly" and you know what I'm referring to.) Instead, the movie remains essentially a comic-book story about a comic-book character. That being the case, why not just read the comic book?

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### Spider-Man 3 (2007)

Shallow comic book story, 11 May 2007

6 stars

What can one say about a movie that is entirely devoid of intellectual content? Such a movie defies review because there is nothing substantive to review. All the talent, all the time, all the money and all the other creative resources that were expended to make this movie are ultimately wasted, all for nothing. Spiderman and his enemies are comic-book characters and no amount of special effects can change that fact. The characters are insipidly shallow, but what else is to be expected from a comic book story brought to the screen? That does not mean that movie can't be a moneymaker because it is a commercial product, but even compared to Superman or Batman, the movie does not contain enough intellectual content to sustain any drama. But if this is the kind of escapist fare that sells, then more power to the market place.

There is one exception to the above comments. In this movie Thomas Haden Church once again proves that he is a great actor.

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### **Splice (2009)**

**This movie is worth watching., 10 June 2010**

**8 stars**

Usually when Hollywood dabbles in topics as complex as cloning, the results are often laughable. Grotesque monsters, campy acting, and suspension of credibility usually abound as directors have a field day introducing the most fantastic special effects in their attempt to entertain the audience. This movie avoids those pitfalls. This movie is one of the better ones of the science fiction genre. Scientists dabble in unauthorized research producing unintended results. Though at times bordering on the far-fetched, the movie avoids becoming a goof and treats the subject matter with a certain measure of respect, thus telling a story that does not completely insult one's intelligence. The test of this occurs during the scene where the one of the scientists gets a bit too intimately involved with their experiment, which could have provoked laughter if less skillfully directed. The acting is strong, the special effects toned down and the story is comprehensible without becoming simplistic. This movie explores ethical issues relating to the nature of scientific research, especially that driven by the quest for profit. This is a movie worth watching.

The movie raises an interesting question: is it permissible to have sexual relations with a clone?

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### **Stagecoach (1939)**

**Wonderful movie. Claire Trevor was hot., 13 March 2010**

**10 stars**

Some may say that this is not the best western movie. Others may say that the story contains too many clichés. And others may say that the movie is outdated, a relic of the past, an antique, to be relegated to the closet, attic or shelf. Well, they'd all be wrong. This movie was great when it was made in 1939 and is still great today. That this movie is still watchable is proof of the story's strength. The director, John Ford, manages to bring together the script, the scenery and above all the acting to create a classic, a movie that withstands the test of time. Especially powerful are the two characters, Dallas and Ringo, played by Claire Trevor and John Wayne. Both give outstanding emotionally charged performances, one as a prostitute, the other as a cowboy, both with pasts, whose paths cross. Far from being

stagy or corny, Mr. Ford manages to inject into their relationship a bond that transforms the movie from a typical cowboy movie into a cinematic and artistic masterpiece. Thomas Mitchell also gives a notable performance in this wonderful movie.

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### **Stalag 17 (1953)**

If you're a fan of Peter Graves, then watch this movie., 29 September 2005  
8 stars

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

Six hundred sergeants cooped-up in the Nazi German POW camp during World War Two. Six hundred guys who think they're all bosses but with no command responsibilities. Six hundred guys who are angry. And one of them is an informant. The question is: which one? This is a good movie. The acting is first-rate and although the movie is somewhat theatrical, the story helps keep the movie watchable. Peter Graves is great in this movie. His character is both engagingly clever and peculiarly sinister, more so because of Mr. Graves's powerful performance. Who would think that such a wholesome looking soldier would be so loathsome? Who would think that such nice looking man would be so duplicitous? Indeed, Peter Graves's performance overshadows and in fact dominates the movie. In a way this movie is like "The Westerner," which ostensibly starred Gary Cooper but in fact was dominated by Walter Brennan, with Mr. Cooper playing a supporting role. It's the same situation in this movie, this time with Mr. Holden playing the supporting role to Mr. Graves.

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### **Standard Operating Procedure (2008)**

Important expose on the total breakdown of discipline and abuse of authority., 11 April 2010  
10 stars

This disturbing documentary causes one to ask: is the U. S. military populated by a bunch of degenerates masquerading as soldiers? Is the U. S. military depicted in this movie the same U. S. military that was welcomed as liberators during World War Two or has the U. S. military iterated to the point that it is now completely unrecognizable from its past? Abuse of authority is an old story but when it is officially sanctioned and then covered up, then that is altogether another story. Hasn't the U. S. military

ever heard of the Nuremberg War Crime trial? Yet this same military directed its lowest ranking personnel to commit the grossest criminal acts and when the whole thing was uncovered refused to take responsibility, instead opting to scapegoat those who were stuck with having to carry out the orders. What kind of leadership is that? There's a saying: S%\$# flows downhill and what happened at Abu Graib prison is proof of that. Where did the soldiers get the idea that you could torture prisoners? Where did that come from? What kind of culture would produce people who think that making people sexually abuse themselves is acceptable ... and then gloat about it? The photos shown in this movie speak for themselves. The United States did not fight Nazi Germany just to adopt the procedures associated with the SS, but at Abu Graib that is exactly what happened.

One other thing. What this documentary reports is another example of what happens when amateurs, in this case reservists, are asked to perform military duties for this they have no training or professional experience. But even that does not explain the total breakdown in discipline and the willingness to engage in repugnant behavior that they knew was illegal and improper.

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### **Starship Troopers (1997)**

You want interplanetary war? Well, here it is!, 13 January 2009  
10 stars

Unlike other science fiction movies with complicated and pretentious plots and subplots, this movie presents a simple, straightforward story about interplanetary war, with the emphasis on war. Two planets fighting it out. Two species vying for galactic supremacy. Humans vs. the non-humans. It doesn't get more direct than that. It's war and the earth is mobilized for action and action there is as those who answer the call of duty earn the highest honors and the admiration of all they protect. What makes this movie even more interesting is that the enemy is completely unlike the humans yet have the capacity to inflict great harm. There's no room for compromise. No room for negotiations. The two species cannot communicate with each other. There is no commonality between them. No third-party is going to negotiate a truce because there is no basis for discussion. Star Wars depicts war; this movie depicts a far more primeval scenario that sweeps away all the sentimental muck, leaving a much more compelling depiction of warfare, with no-holds-barred as the humans are out to pacify and even exterminate a life-form so foreign as to completely repulse the humans. For those with an aversion to insects, this movie may cause discomfort; for those who harbor a hatred for those six-legged

denizens, this movie will provide the catharsis that will bring relief and joy as the humans systematically and mercilessly eradicate a menace.

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### Star Trek (2009)

5 stars

What a circus! A sappy distortion of the original Star Trek story.

**\*\*\*Spoilers \*\*\***

**Mr. Spock, where are you when we need you because you definitely are not in this movie. And as for Captain Kirk, a heroic if somewhat temperamental character has now been reduced to a mere caricature of a caricature, except this new caricature is so dumb that it baffles the mind as to how anyone could actually believe that such a dolt could be passed off as a hero. In this blotted version of Star Trek, the ship has been transformed into a glossy and poorly run whinery. Yes ... WHINERY ... that is a place where everyone whines. The complaining never stops. What do they want? They have good jobs, rank, authority, and are millions of light years away from headquarters and sanity. Their problem is that they pick a fight with a much stronger, tougher, smarter and better organized opponent who has a legitimate gripe against the Federation, particularly Mr. Spock who undergoes some kind of time warp schism that defies every known and probably every unknown law of physics, not to mention common sense. But what is even worse, the movie isn't even campy, it's just plain dumb. The USS Enterprise would not have last five seconds against the Alien or Predator. Darth Vader would have had a field day against Kirk and company. Ming the Merciless would have made short shrift out of the hapless crew from the Federation. Starship Troopers would have put the Enterprise in mothballs.**

**If a spacecraft is capable of demolishing a planet, then why would anyone believe that a starship could defeat that spacecraft? This movie defies all logic as it asks the audience to believe what is patently absurd, such as the Enterprise being able to destroy a planet killer or the scene in which Mr. Spock is having a conversation with himself. No, not talking to himself, rather talking WITH himself, the same person, two bodies. Move over Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. The producers of Star Trek have discovered new laws of physics. This is not to suggest, however, that the movie is all bad. Far from from it. Although muddled, the story does move at a rapid pace, with lots of special effects, lots of noise, lots of fighting, with things blowing up, planets being sucked dry, some good dialogue, a solid**

performance by Zachary Quinto as Mister Spock (the younger), a stabilizing presence by Leonard Nimoy as Mister Spock (the older), and strong performance by Eric Bana as the bad guy, who, if this movie had a credible story, would have whipped Kirk and Spock's butts in about ten seconds (but then there would have been no movie). But the most yucky feature of this sappy distortion of the original Star Trek story is the love relationship between the half-human Mister Spock, who has a whole bunch of personal problems so acute that it would have even made the most insensitive dolt think twice before having anything to do with him, and Ms. Uhuru who looks and acts like a teenage girl. Ms. Uhuru: News Flash! Mister Spock is a wreck! Also, whatever happened to those vaunted shields that in the television show always protected the ship from harm? In this movie the shields are about as effective as paper-mache as the Enterprise is strafed, bombed, rocketed, smashed, tossed, toppled, and shaken like a baby's toy. Rarely, if ever, in the annals of Hollywood movies has a hero spaceship been more beat up. By any standard of movie story telling, the Enterprise should have ceased to exist. Indeed, the Enterprise should have disappeared after its very first encounter with the bad guy ship, so outclassed was it in terms of size, firepower and intelligence. And who could figure out exactly who was the Captain? There was constant bickering over who was in command. First Pike, then Spock, then Kirk, then back to Pike. What a circus! This movie was more reminiscent of McHale's Navy or F Troop. The Enterprise would have done better with Captain Parmenter, Sergeant O'Rourke and Corporal Agarn in command, or better yet, Captain Wally Binghamton and Ensign Charles Parker. Now THEY were the type of hapless Hollywood buffoons who would have fit in perfectly in this sfx-laden, pompous piece of celluloid which is called Star Trek.

An afterword: Two of the more annoying characters in this movie are Doctor McCoy and Engineer Scotty. It is highly doubtful that there are any two characters in any Hollywood movie that are more whiny and shrill-sounding than these two nincompoops. Now, in the TV series, these characters are temperamental but not stupid. However, this movie makes them temperamental AND stupid. They make the late Lou Costello sound like Clark Gable. In fact, this movie would have worked much better if the actual Bud and Lou had played Kirk and Spock.

In this movie, The Enterprise fighting the bad guy space ship would be like a badly sailed row boat going up against the largest aircraft carrier in the world, commanded by a crew of highly motivated, well-organized, merciless fanatics and bristling with planes, rockets and other highly lethal weapons, and the row boat not only winning but completely obliterating the aircraft carrier. Duh! ... Duh! ... DUH!!!!!!

Actually, this movie might have worked better if Spock and Kirk became

the bad guys, playing disgruntled renegade Star Fleet officers who steal the Enterprise, convert it into a pirate ship and then try to shake down the entire Federation, threatening to destroy the universe with a secret, but unnamed, super weapon, that can make a real mess of everything. One other point: for a Vulcan, Spock is a disappointment. In this movie he is more skittish than a young teenage girl on the eve of her first prom with her first date. Spock, Kirk, Uhuru, the whole bunch of them, are so laughable that it gives one cause to believe that maybe this movie was supposed to be a comedy.

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### **State of Play (2009)**

**Ugh! Is this Russell Crowe's worst movie?, 17 May 2009**

**3 stars**

Is Hollywood joking or what? Even by Hollywood's abysmally low standards, this movie is dumb. If one accepts the premise of this movie at face value, one will reasonably conclude that the only person who can solve a complex crime is a ... newspaper journalist! Ugh! Also, this movie is proof that you cannot have a character actor, which is what Russell Crowe has become, playing the lead. After his mind-numbing performance as the boxer James J. Braddock, in a movie that had to be one of the worst sports movies ever made, (Mr. Braddock was married, had children, had financial difficulties, actually had a REGULAR job, lived somewhere in New Jersey ... wow, what a story!), Mr. Crowe has never been the same. It's a shame because he is a great actor.

Oh what a crummy movie. Why was this movie made? This movie challenges even the most intrepid movie buff to stay awake. If this movie is trying to be another All The President Men, it fails. This has to be Russell Crowe's worst movie. Nothing in this movie is good. Dumb story, poor acting, clichéd, contrived, unoriginal and above all, BORING. Russell Crowe proves that he is no Robert Redford and that the political who-done-it genre is passé. A murder? Call the police, not a reporter. This movie is no Chinatown. How could the actor who was so great in The Gladiator be so mediocre in this movie? Mr. Crowe's character was scruffy, annoying, non heroic, uninspiring and superfluous. This dismal movie merits no further comments.

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## **Stealth (2005)**

**It's not Shakespeare, but it does entertain in a comic bookish kind of way.,  
2 August 2005  
5 stars**

**If Hollywood was giving out awards for the worst movie of the year, then this is the movie that would win it. In fact, it would be no contest. Yet, its essential mediocrity is strangely mesmerizing and entrancing, completely sacrificing even the pretense of artistic merit in an attempt to dazzle the viewer. For this reason, this movie is at least watchable. Unlike other terrible movies that bore you with pretentiousness, this movie does not make even the slightest effort to suggest itself as a being anything than what it is: superficial claptrap, with large doses of poor acting, an inane script and an concocted story that is so muddled that it defies explanation. The movie starts well, but then takes a serious nose dive from which there is no return. But what is most pathetic is the movie's blatant rip-off that great sleeper, "2001 - A Space Odyssey" that featured the HAL-9000 computer. It also borrows liberally from "Top Gun" without preserving any of that movie's quality or originality. But what the movie lacks in quality, it more than makes up in sheer entertainment, giving you lots of action, likable though two-dimensional comic book characters, and a geography lesson. The geography graphics are very helpful in enabling the viewer to figure out the locations of the characters in the story who are doing so much flying around that you wonder if they they're earning frequent-flyer miles. The movie is not Shakespeare; it's not even "Spongebob Squarepants" (which, unlike this movie, is intentionally funny). If you like contorted stories, poor acting, and meaningless plots in movies that are still entertaining and do not challenge the intellect, then this movie is a must-see. For this reason I rate this movie a 5 - the producers are giving the audience exactly what they want. By the way, anyone who is fascinated with the number 3 will be absolutely ecstatic over this movie.**

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## **Step Brothers (2008)**

**Entertaining. Kathryn Hahn is great., 2 August 2008**

**What a funny movie! This movie compares favorably with Get Smart for laughs. Kathryn Hahn was hilarious. Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly are great, perfectly cast. They are a combination of Three Stooges (minus one of the stooges) and Abbott and Costello, with both being Lou Costello. This movie contains many truly funny scenes. The script is raunchy at times but it's all good fun as the step-brothers get to know each other. Some scenes provoke outright laughter, especially those with the aforementioned Ms.**

Hahn whose performance was positively wonderful. Her scenes with John C. Reilly are great!! The movie is not for children, but is great entertainment.

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### **Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li (2009)**

**It's about The Angry White Man, 1 March 2009  
6 stars**

**This movie should have been entitled "The Angry White Man" because the main character is a nasty white man who is angry and is determined to act out his nastiness in Bangkok, Thailand, which far from appearing exotic, looked a lot like a combination of downtown Los Angeles and midtown New York City. The other characters serve peripheral roles and, with the exception of Michael Clarke Duncan who plays Mr. Bison's henchman, all of them are quite unspectacular, some being outright ludicrous. The young lady playing the street fighter is utterly miscast and her mentor-friend is equally out of place in this otherwise interesting if not overly impressive movie. The movie does have its good moments but only when Mr. Bison or Mr. Duncan are in the scene. Mr. Bison is the only character which is developed in the movie, the others being mere caricatures of good guys or bad guys. A good performance is given by Mr. Duncan who could have played the lead villain too. Mr. Duncan deserves kudos for his performance.**

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### **Street Kings (2008)**

**If you watch this movie, don't say you weren't warned., 18 April 2008  
1 star**

**What a crummy clunker. Poorly acted, unoriginal story, gratuitous violence, nasty characters, unentertaining. This movie was garbage right from the start. Who killed the corrupt cop? Who cares? Why would any production company want to make this movie? This has to be Keanu Reeve's worst movie. This movie was a challenge to any actor and the movie won. The actors could not save it. The material was just too poor. A corrupt cop winds up in internal affairs? Yeah, right. The audience is supposed to buy that? If the intent of this movie was to do a remake of Dirty Harry, they failed ... badly. Keanu Reeves is no Clint Eastwood and Forrest Whitaker is no Harry Guardino. So here is my plea to Hollywood: Please, PLEASE, no more corrupt cops movies. Please!!!**

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### **Submarine Command (1951)**

**William Bendix's finest role, 26 July 2005**

**9 stars**

**This movie has to be William Bendix's finest role. Noted for his portrayal of comic characters, such as Chester A. Riley in "The Life of Riley," in this movie Bendix is a moody, brooding sailor harboring a deep-seeded resentment toward the commander of a submarine, played by William Holden. The other characters in the movie are quite forgettable and the storyline itself, although interesting, is nothing particularly special and as a post-World War Two movie, it lacks the intensity of movies made during the war. But William Bendix's portrayal makes this movie worth watching and makes this movie, if not a classic, at least a work of art that merits consideration and an honorable mention.**

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### **Sullivan's Travels (1941)**

**Marvelous movie., 19 April 2008**

**10 stars**

**When it's hard to write a critique about a movie it has to be good and this movie is not only good, it is excellent. There are not enough superlatives to adequately describe this movie. This movie provides a panoramic portrayal of American society, a portrayal that is as relevant today as it was in 1941. It's one thing to play at being poor, it is another thing to actually be poor. Joel McCrea was outstanding as a rich movie director with a social conscience. Veronica Lake was incredible. If anyone has any doubts about Ms. Lake's acting ability, this movie dispels all doubt. What makes this movie especially effective is how it portrays the cruelties of life without moralizing and how it shows how the simplest pleasures and gestures of politeness can make life, no matter how oppressive, still worth living.**

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### **Superman Returns (2006)**

**Pompous ... Pretentious ... Boring, 11 July 2006**

**4 stars**

**Superman Returns may be the most pompous and pretentious movie ever made in the history of cinema. Treating a comic-book character like he's Lawrence of Arabia or a virtual deity is ludicrous. Regarding the deity angle, let's not forget that no spirit or deity invested Superman with super**

powers. Rather Superman's super powers are the result of him being on a planet with a physical make up entirely different from the planet where he originated. Also, the acting in this movie is, like the movie itself, uninspiring and dull. Superman Returns contains what has to be the worst performance in Frank Langella's career. This is the first movie where the character Perry White is portrayed as being subdued and pensive, and a subdued and pensive Perry White is exactly what this movie could do without. Nobody in this movie is particularly exciting. Is this because of the director? Or the actors? Or the script? Who knows. Probably a combination of all three. But one thing is certain, if you decide to go watch this movie, don't forget to bring a pillow in case you doze off. Or better yet, bring a Superman comic book.

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### **Surrogates (2009)**

Interesting but not exciting movie., 3 October 2009  
7 stars

This was a good movie. Some parts were dull but by in large it presents an interesting story and features a strong and steady performance by Bruce Willis who plays a human and the human's robot double. The movie explores an interesting theme: the quest for vicarious satisfaction without risk. It's thought provoking theme. But don't expect anything exciting. After all, how shocked can one become when watching "someone's" face being peeled off just to discover that the "person" is a machine? Unless you are robot yourself, or a mechanic, it's not the kind of stuff that will make a strong dramatic impression, no matter how well the machine is crafted. Yet when the machine is directly linked to an actual human being, there is the basis for an interesting story.

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### **Syriana (2005)**

Muddled meandering movie, 18 January 2006  
6 stars

Okay, oil is becoming a scarce commodity and countries are competing for control of that commodity and in the struggle for control it's a free-for-all with no rules. The "bad guy" in this movie is China, which is attempting to corner the oil supply by making a deal that will displace the United States in the mid-east. The premise is interesting, but it gets lost somewhere in this movie. One moment we're in Geneva, the next moment in Washington, DC, the next moment in Lebanon, etc. After watching this movie, I'm

convinced more than ever that we have to start weaning ourselves off from oil, not only for economic and political reasons, but so that Hollywood will stop making muddled movies like this one that tries to dramatize complex economic and political issues in the mideast but wind up being simplistic and just plain boring (except for the graphic torture scene which was gratuitous and tasteless).

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### **Takers (2010)**

Excellent action-packed crime drama, 1 September 2010  
9 stars

What a great movie! This movie has it all! Nonstop action, snappy dialog, strong story and interesting characters. Unlike most movies, this movie does not sag in the middle. Instead, it starts off fast and then builds up speed. The special effects are incredible and the cinematography is awesome as the movie succeeds in giving the audience a sense of where the action is occurring. Instead of pretentious finesse and phony touchy-feely, this movie offers the nitty-gritty of underworld activity coupled with the frustration and bravery associated with being a police officer. Matt Dillon gives a solid performance as an intrepid police detective who is determined to solve a crime and Paul Walker brings a further measure of sophistication and class to an already stellar cast. If you looking for Mary Poppins, you won't find her here; if you're looking for an action packed story, you're at the right place.

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### **Taxi Driver (1976)**

Iconic., 19 November 2006  
10 stars

When this movie first came out in 1976, I found this movie to be absolutely astounding. But alas, time marches on and thirty years later this movie is a dated relic of a bygone era. The New York City of 1976 is not the New York City of 2006; indeed the same can be said for all of society. But that's not the movie's fault. Rather, in the ensuing thirty years since this movie was first released, so much has happened, and so many technological and demographic changes have occurred, that the movie is now passé. What was considered shocking then is now almost commonplace in movies today. For instance, the idea of a 13 year old girl being a prostitute certainly raised lots of eyebrows in 1976, but today would gain scant notice. Even the main character, Travis Bickle, being a Vietnam War veteran today would

mean little if anything. Indeed, would a guy like Travis Bickle even be driving a taxi in New York City today? Could he even afford to live in New York? And would a guy like Sport be a pimp? Not likely. Nevertheless, this movie still provides a credible story about the effects of social isolation in an impersonal, hostile, violent, alienating and degenerate urban environment, which is the one thing that has NOT changed except for the worse, and for this reason is still worth watching.

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### **Terminator Salvation (2009)**

**Good, solid sci-fi movie., 30 May 2009  
8 stars**

This movie is definitely one of the better of the sci-fi genre. A taut story, solid acting and good continuity makes this movie watchable. Christian Bale gives a credible performance as John Connors but the real star is Sam Worthington as the android with an identity crisis. The movie is based on a not original but still intriguing premise involving the relationship of man and machine and which of the two is superior. This theme may seem far-fetched but it's a science fiction movie and therefore should be judged as such. Although not a classic in the tradition of Frankenstein or other landmark movies, it is nonetheless an interesting and engaging movie that presents a new take on the man vs. machine theme and does this with skill.

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### **Terror in the Mall (1998) (TV)**

**After Hurricane Katrina, this movie is not entertaining., 28 August 2005  
2 stars**

If "Terror in the Mall" was one of the truly great masterpieces of cinema art produced by Hollywood in the last twenty-five years then the story would have been exciting, the acting wonderful, and the characters unique, all of which would have combined to make this movie a prime example of film art at its best. Everything about this movie would have suggested that it is a masterpiece, from the first scene in the prison to the last exciting scene when the antagonist is making his escape in the helicopter. Moreover, heroics would have abounded as the police and corrections officers join forces to apprehend a very dangerous escaped convict. And the special effects would have been like the icing on a very wonderful cake. This film would have been nominated for awards in every category, and the only reason why it would not have won is because the critics wouldn't have appreciated the true greatness of this movie. This movie would have been

marvelously directed and offered dramatic performances that would have been Shakespearean in their quality and scope. We all would have applauded and said: "Bravo!" to the producers of this movie and "Hip-Hip-Hooray!" for taking the time to make such a wonderfully engaging piece of entertainment. But, alas, this is a mere fantasy, for this movie is truly bad. It's not worth the time enumerating all the things wrong with this movie, but suffice it to say that after watching this movie, one should turn on the news and watch what's going on in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and then decide for yourself whether a movie about shenanigans in flooded shopping mall is the kind of entertainment you want to watch.

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### "That '70s Show: Grandma's Dead (#1.23)" (1999)

Sitcom deals with a serious topic., 29 August 2007  
9 stars

This show deals with the topic of death, which is unexpected for a sitcom. Surprisingly, the show deals with the subject in an effective manner, without becoming sentimental. Repression, denial, and projection are dramatized as each character deals in their own way with the loss of a relative, in this case Red's mother. Kurtwood Smith gives the best performance. His character, the droll and cynical head of the household, Red, struggles the most to maintain control, repress his emotions and frowns on others who express theirs. That doesn't mean he is unfeeling, it just means that he is afraid to let loose because he believes that showing feelings is a sign of weakness and will undermine his position as an authority figure. Yet he too eventually succumbs as he reminisces with his son, who blames himself for his grandmother's death. All in all, this sitcom manages to deal with a complex and sensitive topic at a level that transcends the the usual low level of potboiler pulp to which we have become accustomed.

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### The 40 Year Old Virgin (2005)

It's Okay but it's not "Sideways", 8 September 2005  
6 stars

Okay, the premise of this movie is somewhat shaky, but the movie is amusing, and at times provokes outright laughter. Yet this movie also has its serious side, which actually detracts from the movie's entertainment value because the main character is neither a social misfit or a buffoon. Instead, he is person who chooses to remain celibate and demands that his

decision be respected, which is anything but amusing. For it's not that he can't "get laid," or doesn't want to, it's just that he wants "action" on his own terms or not at all, which doesn't make for a funny character. If the main character were goofy, like, for instance, Austin Powers, or were some kind of pompous martinet, like, for instance, Captain Wally Binghamton in "McHale's Navy," then this movie may have been much funnier. But here the 40-year-old virgin is actually quite normal, friendly, and likable. In short, he is boring. It would be like trying to laugh at Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy while taking them seriously. This is an okay movie, but if you want to watch a really funny movie, watch "Sideways."

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### **The Abbott and Costello Show" (1952)**

Great TV show., 16 January 2006

10 stars

The A & C show is one of the funniest comedy shows in the history of television. All of the skits that made this comedy team American comedy icons are in this series. And what adds to the shenanigans is the cast of those inimical characters that we still talk about - Mike the Cop, Mr. Fields the landlord, Hillary Brooks (Lou adored her. And how could anyone not react with a smile when she would condescendingly refer to Costello as "Louis?"), Mr. Bacigalupe and Lou's "friend" Stinky. Every episode is funny; every character is funny, and this show is proof that humor does not have to be dirty to be funny. Bud Abbott's sneer, Lou's whining, Mike's indignation, all that and more is what is to be found in this treasure chest of comedy, brought to you by one of the greatest comedy teams of all times - Abbott and Costello.

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### **The American (2010)**

Clunker., 3 September 2010

5 stars

This movie is boring. It has violence, it has sex, it has a lot of gratuitous nudity but it lacks a meaningful plot. The main character generates neither empathy or sympathy nor is the audience ever made aware of why he does whatever he does. This does not mean that the movie is junk, what it does mean is that it doesn't engage the audience. If you like nude scenes, then the movie is fine but nude scenes themselves cannot sustain or replace a story. The movie might have worked better if the prostitute was the leading

female character. The woman playing the assassin was miscast and George Clooney himself was lethargic. This is not one of his better movies. At one point the audience was actually laughing at some of the dialog and when that happens you know the movie is a clunker.

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### **The American President (1995)**

Politics and sex - what else is new?, 2 November 2005

7 stars

The story is ridiculous, the acting, especially Annette Benning's, is poor, Michael J. Fox playing a character with the name Rothschild is a bad case of miscasting, and the portrayal of a President having an affair with a lobbyist causes me to wince. Yet I like this movie. You ask why, and I'll tell you. Because of Michael Douglas. This was a Michael Douglas movie. He actually gives a great performance as a President whose presidency is in a real crisis because of his indecisiveness and desire to do what is expedient at the expense of what is right. This President is so befuddled that he even has an affair with a lobbyist, which in the real world would be political suicide and be the subject for a slew of investigations and possibly indictments. But allowing for literary license, the movie avoids these political unpleasanties and concentrates instead on the relationship between the President and the lobbyist, with the latter using sex to manipulate the President and thereby achieve her political goals. That such shenanigans go on in this movie reduces this movie to the level of a distorted love story; that such shenanigans also go on in real life gives cause for serious concern.

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### **The Apartment (1960)**

What a man will do for sex., 1 September 2005

9 stars

This is a great movie. This movie shows what a nobody, just another anonymous worker in a huge corporation, has to do to get ahead and shows that belief in hard work as the path to success is just a bunch of baloney. It's who you know and how well you pedal favors that get you promoted. If you behave like a doormat, then someday you may get your own office - as long as you continue sucking up to those who dole out the goodies. This movie also shows how hypocritical people can be and how the people who seem most innocent are the ones who are actually the most

perverted and corrupted. For instance, in this movie, the elevator operator girl seems so nice and wholesome, yet she is in fact the biggest and most conniving whore in the company. And what about all the executives? How did they get their jobs? What kind of favors did they have to do to get in good with the boss? And how did the boss get HIS job? Who did he blackmail or suck up to to get the big office with the sexy secretary and the big salary? For the message of this movie is clear - it's not talent or hard work or even luck that gets you ahead, it's how much of a pushover you're willing to become to get an extra crumb from those in power. And this movie also shows what happens when you tire of playing the game. Simply, you're ruined. When Jack Lemmon's character "C.C." decides that he doesn't want to play along anymore, he loses his job, has to move, and gets the elevator operator, who by now has been banged so often by the boss and by probably every other Tom, Dick and Harry in the company that only a fool like C.C. would actually want to have anything seriously to do with her. This is a weak ending to an otherwise interesting story. Then again, maybe not - maybe this is the way the movie should end, with a putz like C.C. making a fool of himself again. Gee ... what a guy willing to put up with to get some "you-know-what."

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### **The A-Team (2010)**

**This is a wonderful, entertaining movie., 2 July 2010  
9 stars**

After a rocky start, this movie becomes great. This movie contains snappy dialog, a fast-paced story, excellent comic acting and an outstanding performance by Bradley Cooper who is the real star. Although Liam Neeson is given top billing, it's Bradley Cooper who carries this movie. He is in almost every scene and has real strong chemistry with Jennifer Biel. Credit must be given to the creators of this movie for the excellent job they did in recreating legendary TV characters. Usually such attempts fall flat; however in this movie they are as wonderfully entertaining as ever. The scene where the four heroes are "flying a tank" is one of the most hilarious scenes this reviewer has ever watched. This is why this movie is so good - it's campy but well produced; goofy but engaging; entertaining without sacrificing creative quality.

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## **The Aviator (2004)**

**Solid Movie about Howard Hughes., 2 August 2005**

**8 stars**

**Okay, I'm still recovering from "The Titanic" debacle, so I didn't buy into Leonardo Di Caprio playing Howard Hughes, and although Kate Blanchett's portrayal of Kathryn Hepburn was shrill and annoying, and the pseudo-psychology used to explain Mr. Hughes's idiosyncrasies were flat-out crude and ludicrous, and the scene where Mr. Hughes is staggering around in his hotel room naked utterly devoid of any entertainment value, still this is a solid movie. It's a solid movie because of the life of Howard Hughes himself. The story of Howard Hughes is not his mental illness, nor his affair with Kathryn Hepburn, nor his run-in with Congress. Rather the story of Howard Hughes is about what Hughes did, what he built, what he accomplished, what an incredibly great and gifted man he was. He was rich man, but he was also a worker, a test pilot, a builder, an innovator, an inventor, as well as a pioneer Hollywood producer and director. No matter how hard this movie tries to portray Mr. Hughes as some kind of oddball, and no matter how unbelievable and superficial is Mr. Di Caprio's portrayal of Howard Hughes, the man's accomplishments could not be ignored or denigrated, even in this movie, and they speak for themselves. So Howard Hughes had mental problems? So what? What is important is what Howard Hughes did, and for that reason this movie should be watched.**

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## **The Bad and the Beautiful (1952)**

**Outstanding example of cinematic art., 14 August 2009**

**10 stars**

**This movie was released in 1952 so one might reasonably expect that it would have a somewhat dated, stagy story. Not the case here however. This movie has it all - an all-star cast, great acting, compelling story, wonderful cinematography and plausibility. Yes, there are people who do use other people. It is reprehensible but oh so true and this movie fully explores that seedier side of the human psyche. Lana Turner was given top billing for this movie, and her performance is wonderful, but the main star is Kirk Douglas whose performance is nothing short of spectacular. Without Mr. Douglas, this would still be a good movie, but his performance raises this movie to the level of a classic. Honorable mention must be given to Gloria Grahame, Walter Pidgeon, Gilbert Roland, Barry Sullivan, Dick Powell and the rest of the cast whose performances help make this movie a powerful and outstanding work of art.**

### **"The Bell Telephone Hour: The Many Faces of Romeo and Juliet" (1967)**

**Larry Kert and Carol Lawrence at their best., 6 May 2009**

**20 stars**

Purely by accident I had the pleasure of watching on television a rebroadcast of this episode of the Bell Telephone Hour featuring the great Larry Kert and Carol Lawrence as they sang the featured song "Tonight" from the iconic classic all-time musical masterpiece "West Side Story" directed by Jerome Robbins and music by Leonard Bernstein. This particular clip from the show is significant because Mr. Kert and Ms. Lawrence originated the roles of Tony and Maria and here they are, ten years after the show, recreating their roles and doing a marvelous job. After all, it was their roles, their creations and no matter how many times the show may be reprised, Larry Kert and Carol Lawrence's performances will always be the best.

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### **The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)**

**Intense and compelling. Kudos to Dana Andrews for an incredibly great performance., 4 November 2007**

**10 stars**

This is a great movie with outstanding performances by the entire cast, especially Dana Andrew's and Harold Russell's. Although released just after World War Two the movie has survived the test of time, principally because of the the nature of the story which deals with issues that are timeless in their relevancy. This movie is proof that "they don't make 'em like that anymore." It is hard to imagine Hollywood being able to recreate this movie today. The audience would be able to relate to the story - who couldn't?. But who'd play the roles? Could any actor today play Fred Derry without it becoming a laughable caricature of the returning war vet? Could any actor today play an Al Stephenson without coming off as being a bloated middle-aged phony? The trouble with Hollywood today is that when it tries to make a movie about a serious subject, especially one based on actual events, it usually becomes a confused jumble of special effects interspersed with inane dialogue which veers away from the actual historical event which is shunted to the background. There are exceptions. "Forrest Gump" with Tom Hanks and Gary Sinese deals in part with the subject of returning war vets, but that is not the main theme of the movie. "Saving Private Ryan" with Tom Hanks, Vin Diesel and Tom Sizemore must get high marks for its excellent portrayals of soldiers in combat, but this movie deals with soldiers who are still fighting, not the postwar aftermath. "Dear Hunter" with Robert DeNiro and Christopher Walken, "Born on the

**Fourth of July" with Tom Cruise and "Coming Home" with Jon Voight and Jane Fonda, are about postwar adjustment issues and all three are very good, very powerful movies. But even these movies have certain melodramatic features that make them rather stogy, with more focus on interpersonal dysfunctionality than on the actual events that may have contributed to the problematic behavior. The closest that Hollywood comes to approaching Best Years in terms of artistic style and thematic content is "The Men" with Marlon Brando, made in 1950. Filmed in a film-noir style, Best Years is far more subdued, far more intense, far more sophisticated, far less hysterical and therefore far more compelling than the other aforementioned movies. Anyway, go watch the movie.**

**One other item. This movie is proof that Dana Andrews was one of the greatest actors ever in the history Hollywood. The entire movie centers around his performance as Fred Derry, a character which Mr. Andrews brings to life and which has become a symbol for all soldiers who return home.**

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### **"The Beverly Hillbillies" (1962)**

**Jed Clampett - the greatest character ever created in the history of television sitcoms., 8 November 2005**

**Normally I don't critique sitcoms because, frankly, it's not worth the effort and are so crassly superficial that they don't require any serious attention. But in the case of "The Beverly Hillbillies" I will make an exception. This is because of one character: Jed Clampett, played by Buddy Ebsen. Jed Clampett is one of the most endearing yet complex characters ever created by the television industry. Superficially, Jed Clampett doesn't seem to be the type of character that warrants much serious attention. After all he's just a simple, uneducated backwoodsman from the hills who's lived in a shack all of his life, and by pure dumb luck comes into a pile of money which doesn't seem to change him one bit. Which is what makes Jed Clampett such a wonderful character. For Jed Clampett has dignity and integrity and nothing will divert Mr. Clampett from remaining true to himself or altering the way he treats everyone - with openness, honesty and a real desire to be hospitable. Further, Jed Clampett commands respect, and is respected, not only by his immediate family who are utterly devoted to him, but even by that crass and conniving banker who, despite his air of superiority, reveals, episode after episode, what a buffoon he is compared to the calm and self-assured Mr. Clampett. Also, it should be noted the Jed Clampett protects and cares for not only his daughter, but his nephew and mother-in-law, the latter two a constant challenge to Jed's patience, which he never loses. If there were more Jed Clampetts in this world, then maybe**

**we'd all be living in shacks, but at least we'd be getting along with each other and treating each other better.**

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### **The Beverly Hillbillies (1993)**

**Wonderful movie, 22 July 2007**

**10 stars**

**What a wonderful, silly, entertaining movie! Diedrich Bader is especially hilarious as Jethro/Jethrine, but everyone in this movie is funny. The Clampetts are great. They are the kind of people that one should have as friends. Not only are they nice, they will treat you as a friend. Jim Varney was perfect as Jed and we cannot forget mentioning Dabney Coleman whose performance as usual added to the humor. This is an unpretentious, humorous, entertaining movie and the kind of movie that is not only watchable but provokes nonstop laughter. This special movie compares favorably with the sitcom. Both are humorous without being nasty and both show that nice people can actually finish first. If you enjoy nonstop laughs then this movie is for you.**

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### **The Big Lebowski (1998)**

**David Huddleston's greatest movie., 11 October 2010**

**10 stars**

**This movie is a cinematic masterpiece. It is excellent in all facets of the production. Jeff Bridge and John Goodman are absolutely wonderful in this offbeat yet engaging story about a man who is caught up in a case of mistaken identity. However, the actor who deserves special praise is David Huddleston who gives one of the more memorable performances as the guy who causes all the problems. In addition to the excellent cinematography, this movie is a tribute to the bowling alley and perhaps to all the humdrum places that we often take for granted. After all, how often has a bowling alley been used as a setting for comedy or drama? Yet, in this movie, that concept works. After all, where else would you expect to find a dude who likes Creedence Clearwater revival and drives a beat up car? Julianne Moore is great too in this movie as is the rest of the cast. This movie is a definite must watch for everyone who likes high quality entertainment.**

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### **The Bodyguard (1992)**

**Wonderful Movie, 3 August 2006**

**10 stars**

Oh my, what a wonderful movie. Hollywood is known for churning out a lot of sentimental mush that's supposed to pass for romance. But, thankfully, this is not one of those movies. In this movie the main characters, the bodyguard and the lady he is hired to protect, are likable and have a relationship that develops into something really beautiful and special. Moreover, the story is plausible and the movie is well-acted too, with Whitney Houston turning in an outstanding performance reminiscent of Diana Ross's in *Lady Sings the Blues* (which is another great movie). If you want to watch a movie with good acting and an engaging story, then this is the movie to watch.

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### **The Bourne Ultimatum (2007)**

**Why me?, 16 August 2007**

**3 stars**

"Why me? WHY IS IT ALWAYS ME?" This is the plaintive cry that was uttered repeatedly by Capt. Wally Binghamton whenever he was having a run-in with his nemesis Cmdr. Quinton McHale in *McHale's Navy*. Now I ask the same question, except I'm not contending with a Quinton McHale. Instead I wonder whether it is my fate to watch extremely bad movies, of which this movie may top the list. There is nothing more pathetic cinematically than a pretentious movie. This movie lacks a coherent storyline; lacks anything that even remotely approaches good acting; and is just another noisy Hollywood special effects-a-rama. There is nonstop fighting, ongoing violence, constant noise, but it's not a war movie. Actually I'm still trying to figure out whether this movie is a drama, thriller, action, science-fiction, or what? When I have to struggle figuring out what a movie is about (and Hollywood is not known to produce movies with complex plots) then there is a problem. Maybe it's me ... but maybe it's the movie. I opt for the latter. If you decide to watch this movie and don't like it, don't say I didn't warn you.

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### **The Box (2009/I)**

**Yawn., 6 November 2009**

**3 stars**

**This movie is like a race horse that starts off strong but by the middle of the race is lagging behind and finally collapses way before the finish line. This movie is entirely devoid of anything that even remotely resembles suspense. Not only is the plot insipid and transparent, the character who is supposed to make all the bad things happen, Mr. Steward, played by Frank Langella, inspires more sadness than fright. Where is Vincent Price when we need him? Also, the "deal or no deal" premise is entirely misplaced on the wrong couple. Offer the deal to, let's say, a destitute man on the street or someone who is, perhaps, addicted to gambling and is swimming in debt, and the choice would be obvious. Also, the box itself is anything but frightening. As the movie drags on, the story becomes increasingly dull, tepid and predictable. When the movie finally ends, one is left feeling tired and in need of fresh air to reinvigorate the body and mind. Yawn!**

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### **The Cherry Orchard (1999)**

**Tedious cinematic experience., 24 July 2008**

**5 stars**

**In this era of gratuitous special effects and uneven, even shoddy, productions, one cannot depend on Hollywood to successfully transfer a stage play to the screen. This movie is partially the exception, as the movie amazingly pulls itself together in midstream to become a commendable work of art. The first part of this movie is a cinematic disaster. It's boring, slow, and muddled, with a terrible first ten minutes which is supposed to provide some background information about some of the main characters but which is totally disconnected from the main body of the story itself which takes place in a completely different venue. Then as this movie is heading toward a complete cinematic breakdown it amazingly recovers its strength and vitality and becomes crisp, sharp, focused and coherent, conveying a poignant story about torment and suffering in time of change. From that point on all the performances are great, especially that of Michael Gough, Alan Bates and the beautiful Charlotte Rampling who succeeds in capturing the essence of the woman whose whole world is being turned upside down. But despite the strong finish, that one first has to endure a truly bad start before getting to the good part makes this movie a tedious cinematic experience.**

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### **The Cooler (2003)**

Things change., 12 September 2005

10 stars

This movie is a part of the genre of movies, such as "Pretty Woman" and "Leaving Las Vegas" that portray the prostitute with the heart of gold. And in this movie, that formula works, and works well. Here, the down-and-out guy meets the hooker --- and they fall in love! It's corny, it's hokey, it's sentimental, but it works. But what makes this movie especially entertaining is Alec Baldwin. This has to be Alec Baldwin's greatest movie performance. Indeed, whoever produced this movie probably designed this movie for Alec Baldwin. Mr. Baldwin's performance is a tour-de-force. The other actors, William H. Macy and Maria Bello in particular, are also wonderful and endearing, but it's mostly about a casino owner and how his vanity proves to be his undoing. This is a great movie.

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### **The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (2008)**

The most slow moving, pretentious sci-fi movie in history. Benjamin is nice but he is BORING!, 3 January 2009

1 star

Yawn .... Zzzzzzzzz.... (movie's still playing) .... Yawn .... Zzzzzzzzz ....  
Benjamin's how old now? WHO CARES? AND WHY IS HE GETTING YOUNGER?

In the Picture of Dorian Gray with Hurd Hatfield, Donna Reed, Angela Lansbury and George Sanders, Dorian NEVER gets old. Beat that, Benny. At least in Dorian the movie offers an explanation for why Dorian does not become old. With Benny ... NOTHING! NO EXPLANATION! Ya gotta give the audience an explanation.

After giving the matter some thought and avoiding a rush to judgment, let it be known that this celluloid mess is a truly bad movie. This movie contains all the elements found in a clunker: boring characters, pretentious story, implausible situations, laughable dialog, unoriginality and unnecessarily long. Why oh why was this movie made? What was its purpose? It could not have been to entertain because in that regard the movie fails abysmally.

How bad is this movie? There are no words that can fully answer this question. For one thing, this movie is long. For another, this movie is boring. For yet another, this movie is slow ... is ponderous ... is pretentious. An old man who gets young? Okay, what's next? A tall man who gets short? (Oh, that was done in the Incredible Shrinking Man.) A man who becomes an animal? (Oh, that was done in The Werewolf and other similar movies) A intellectually challenged man who becomes a genius? (Oh, that was done in Charly) A man who creates another man (Oh, that was done in Frankenstein). Ugh.

First, in which genre does this movie belong? Science fiction or whimsical drama? For a drama, including a work of fiction, to work the story has to have plausibility, and in this movie the lack of plausibility is glaring. Now if the movie was presented as a science fiction drama then maybe the story could be accepted at face value and judged accordingly. But for this incredibly boring, ponderous, pretentious, and LONG movie, that is not the case. Okay, a man is born old and grows younger. That is a crucial element of the story that demands, indeed cries out for, further explanation. That cannot be accepted as a given because of its fantastic nature. Yet this movie offers no explanation whatsoever, relying instead on the audience accepting it despite it's obvious implausibility. This would be like watching the movie King Kong (any of one of the movies) with no explanation of King Kong's origin (Kong came from an island). Or this would be like watching the movie Predator with no reference as to where the creature originated (the creature came from outer space). Then the movie is so lacking in any kind of dynamism or conflict as to render it stale to the point of being annoying. The main character Benjamin is liked by everybody, even his father who not unreasonably panics when he sees his strange progeny. Also, the use of repeated flashbacks chopped up the story, interfering with its continuity, and starting the movie with an dying elderly woman who could barely talk didn't help the movie either. And by the time the main character has devolved into a child it was way past his bed time, for him and for this over hyped, over baked, overly long and very boring movie.

Actually this movie does have some (unintentionally) memorable scenes. Like when the Benjamin's father is told that he has a new baby son, sees the infant, is absolutely horrified, grabs the baby and then is running all over the place with the baby while being chased by the police. Or when Benjamin is working on a tug boat and throws garbage overboard - into a head wind - and gets covered with garbage. Or when Benjamin has his first sexual experience - with a whore. Ugh.

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## **The Dark Knight (2008)**

**Not bad, but not great. This is the Doctor Zhivago of Batman movies., 8 August 2008  
7 stars**

**Is it finally over? Did the movie finally end? This movie proves the following: NEVER make a movie with comic book characters that is longer than two hours. Even most Shakespearean plays aren't that long. NEVER make a movie that is somber, morose and convoluted. NEVER have the good guy act like a bad guy (here Batman is just as nasty as the guys he's going after). NEVER have the leading lady play a support role. NEVER have lead actors play support roles unless they are no longer leading actors (superstars Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman are in support roles). NEVER have Batman without Robin. Christian Bale is no Michael Keaton and Gary Oldman is no Neil Hamilton. This movie needed ... cried out for ... Batwoman (remember Julie Newmar?) ... and Frank Gorshin, Burgess Meredith and Cesar Romero, and, yes, even Burt Ward and Adam West. This pretentious movie is not bad but it certainly is not great. The one bright spot in this otherwise somber production is the performance by the late Heath Ledger. His performance as the Joker almost carries this otherwise lackluster version of the Batman story. Batman is a hero and to portray him as being anything else does not work. Dark Knight is the Doctor Zhivago of Batman movies - long, pretentious, drawn out, somber, and above all, dull.**

**A few words about Heath Ledger. Mr. Ledger was a great actor and proved it in Dark Knight. Despite the movie's flaws, his performance is practically flawless as he brings a unique interpretation of a sinister and complex character to the screen. Whenever Mr. Ledger was in a scene, the movie improved and became interesting. Mr. Ledger gave a great performance for which he deserves a BRAVO!**

**Also, during the filming of Dark Knight, one of the stunt men, Conway Wickcliffe also passed away. Although not a movie star, the loss of Mr. Wickcliffe should be duly noted. From the extra in the crowd to the featured star, every member of the cast and crew play a critical role in bringing a story to the screen ... or the stage. The amount of planning and work involved in producing a movie or staging a play is almost indescribable and without the efforts of EVERY member of the cast and crew, the entertainment brought to public in the movie houses and theaters would not be possible.**

**This movie reportedly is a box office smash hit, but when viewed today the**

theater was practically empty and after watching this movie, now I know why. After all, if you want to take a nap why pay good money to fall asleep while watching the Dark Knight?

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### **The Da Vinci Code (2006)**

**It's a turkey., 6 June 2006  
2 stars**

**Let me get right to the point. This movie is pretentious, poorly acted, and attempts to convey a muddled message on a complicated subject that is meant for serious scholarly consideration and not to be grist for another half-baked Hollywood potboiler. The movie attempts to use a theological controversy as the basis for a convoluted "who-done-it" story and in the process makes assertions that even for a work of fiction demands credible evidence. Now the producers of this movie have the absolute right to make a movie with a theological content, but along with that right comes the responsibility of providing hard evidence to back up the movie's fantastic and completely speculative assertions. Further, the characters in this movie are so utterly superficial, uninspiring, uninteresting and comic-bookish that it seemed that even the actors themselves knew that this movie is one big turkey. Indeed, this could be the worst movie in Tom Hanks's otherwise brilliant career. Indeed, perhaps the main character of the movie should have been Inspector Clouseau.**

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### **The Day After Tomorrow (2004)**

**It's Cold Outside!, 12 August 2005  
4 stars**

**When you talk about catastrophe movies, the catastrophe has to be something that is plausible, otherwise the catastrophe becomes a joke. This is the case in this movie. This movie suggests a scenario that is so preposterous, even for a science fiction movie, that it reduces the movie to the level of a farce. When the entire northern hemisphere freezes in a few hours and a freighter winds up in the middle of Manhattan, the movie takes a turn that makes it fundamentally ridiculous. And to watch characters trudging through a blizzard reminded me of Dr. Zhivago trudging his way back to Lara, except in Zhivago's case there was actually a plausible story with which to associate Zhivago's actions. This is not to say that I did not find the special effects intriguing because I did, but special effects**

themselves are not enough to sustain a movie, which this movie proves. If you like cold weather this is the movie for you.

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### **The Day the Earth Stood Still (2008)**

Strong performance by Keanu Reeves in a mediocre remake., 15 December 2008

6 stars

Although lacking in the moody intensity of the original and without the services of Michael Rennie and Patricia Neal, this movie is still watchable and for one reason, the presence of Keanu Reeves. Mr. Reeves gives a commanding performance as Klatu and saves this movie from becoming another sci-fi joke. The robot Gort is ridiculous and the special effects rather overdone, but Mr. Reeves manages to keep the story interesting if not compelling. In addition, although an integral part of the plot, after making a dramatic entrance, Gort is somewhat marginalized and is literally placed in a package which really removes it from the action. Gort in a box? I don't think so. One of the movie's more glaring drawbacks is that it does not clearly show how Klatu succeeds in conveying his message of doom to the entire world; he manages to wreak havoc everywhere but whether all of humanity connects up the havoc with the message is unclear. Also, Klatu's apparent change of mind is not fully explored leaving the one to wonder why he changed his mind. One thing is for certain, however, and that is to try to be nice to your visitors even if they come from other planets.

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### **The Departed (2006)**

"Beware of the Hype.", 16 November 2006

3 stars

"Beware of the hype, for it shall mislead." "There is a direct relationship between the level of hype and a movie's mediocrity." These are axioms that are as immutable as Isaac Newton's Law of Gravity or the speed of light and the truth of which are again evident in this dismal movie. Judging by the hype that preceded this movie, I am neither surprised nor disappointed by this movie's utter lack of quality. This movie is so bad that the scenes of graphic and gratuitous violence provoked unintended laughter. (By the way, isn't there enough violence already in the world that Hollywood has to dramatize it? Can't Hollywood ease off on the violence? Why show people being gunned down? How does that make the world a better place? How does that add to the artistic quality of a movie?) Also, the story itself and

characters involved are so utterly insipid and so lacking in anything that even remotely resembles originality that they cannot be taken seriously. A police officer on the take? A criminal who is also an informant? The main characters in this movie are gangsters and corrupt police officers. It's understood that they are violent. So why show the violence? Remember the hype and judge accordingly.

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### **The Descent (2005)**

**This movie is a dud., 1 September 2006  
1 star**

**As a moviegoer, I go to movies that I expect may be bad. In this respect, The Descent does not disappoint. The movie met all my expectations. Ridiculous story, gratuitous violence, artistically tasteless, and poorly acted. Whoever made this movie apparently decided that they will jettison all intellectual content and replace it with ... nothing. Since the movie is so utterly lacking in intellectual content, there is little that one can say about it. Indeed, this movie defies serious discussion and offers nothing that is worthy of serious consideration. But the bottom line is that the movie is not entertaining. This movie is a dud.**

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### **The Dirty Dozen (1967)**

**Dumb movie that is an insult to the memory of all of our heroic soldiers., 26 September 2005  
4 stars**

**Whwn I first saw this movie many years ago, I thought this movie was great. A bunch of misfit soldier, all with major personality disorders which render them incapable of obeying orders, are magically transformed into an elite unit of fighters who perform acts of heroism that border on the miraculous. But, alas, things change and with it my opinion about this movie. IS THIS MOVIE FOR REAL? Are we supposed to believe that our military heroes are little more than psychopaths? Are our Medal of Honor winners anything like the perverts portrayed in this movie? Are we supposed to believe that such characters were even allowed to stay in the army? Are we supposed to be believe that such characters were entrusted with defense of the United States? Are we supposed to believe that such characters could last even one minute on the same battlefield with the Germans? No way! Our heroes were men of honor, men who put duty before everything else, men who were brave and who were good, men who**

were nothing like the misanthropes portrayed in this movie. This movie is just another example of Hollywood using an historical incident, such as in this case World War Two, to make a movie that shows scene after scene of gratuitous violence, this time involving mentally ill soldiers. Compare this movie with "All Quiet on the Western Front" or "Paths of Glory," and then you may understand what I'm talking about.

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### **The Duchess (2008)**

Beautiful, charming movie. Bravo to Keira Knightley., 11 October 2008  
10 stars

Move over Scarlet O' Hara. Here comes Georgina Cavendish, bringing with her enough emotional baggage to overload a convoy of ships, in an intriguing and engaging period piece movie. Keira Knightley is superb as the heroine Georgina and Ralph Fiennes gives a commanding performance as Georgina's emotionally frigid husband, Lord Devonshire, who must have a son. This movie grabs and keeps the audience's attention and provides a glimpse of what life must have been like for the English aristocracy in the late 18th century. But the central character of this movie is always Georgina as she negotiates the rough waters of a loveless marriage and the infidelity that follows. Georgina is wonderful, she is heroic, she is persevering, she is of nobility yet is a champion of the people and a character who the audience can like and even love. Keira Knightley's performance does full justice to the life and times of Georgina Cavendish, and the story reminds us that despite their wealth and titles, the English nobility were people too.

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### **The Dukes of Hazzard (2005)**

Unpretentious Movie, 8 August 2005  
7 stars

For all you reviewers who ragged this movie, why don't you get off your high horses. Ragging this movie is simply unfair. The movie is not, nor does it represent itself as being anything other than what it is - a low-brow slapstick comedy with goofy characters and an equally goofy story. As such, the movie is not pretentious. If it was, I'd be the first to give it the biggest and messiest ragging because it would deserve it. But if you accept the movie for what it is, then this movie should be spared the jibes that should be directed to those truly awful movies that try to fool the audience into believing that they are watching a quality product when in

fact what they are watching is junk. So, my fellow reviewers, stop taking the Dukes so seriously and instead sit back, relax, and enjoy the movie.

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### **The Exorcist (1973)**

**Good vs. Evil, 8 August 2005**

**10 stars**

**This movie is the quintessential story of Good vs. Evil. The story is powerful, compelling and credible. Further, it's not a horror movie. Rather, it's a movie about faith, sacrifice, and self-exploration. For this movie portrays a struggle which brings out self-doubt and renders the characters utterly helpless in the face of a force so overwhelming and malevolent that the protagonists are literally thrown against the wall. A little girl is possessed ... or is she? The situation tests the characters' faith and belief in powers beyond the ability of science to detect, accept or control. Even the young priest himself has doubts and undergoes a test of faith that transforms him from a self-doubting and guilt-ridden hypocrite into one of the great heroes in the history of cinema. As such, it is a true work of art and definitely worth watching.**

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### **The Expendables (2010)**

**Nonstop action, 24 August 2010**

**10 stars**

**Within the action movie genre, this movie has to rank at or near the top. This movie has a solid story, great acting, snappy dialog and fantastic special effects making it one of the great action movies. The movie offers nonstop action with characters who either very likable or very bad. Eric Roberts and Steve Austin are chillingly effective as the bad guys and Sylvester Stallone has never been better as the good guy. Things blow up, mayhem abounds and the action is fast and furious. Yet despite all the noise the story stays on track and remains well organized, comprehensible and interesting. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis have cameo roles that fit right into the story. There is violence but it's not gratuitous, it's integral to the story. The fight scenes are incredible. This movie probably won't be nominated for any awards and if that proves to be the case, it will be due purely to politics.**

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### **The Family Man (2000)**

**What if ..., 26 September 2010**

**8 stars**

**What if .... We all make decisions that have far reaching consequences. Sometimes what seems right at a certain moment years later seems to be the epitome of poor judgment. Often our thinking is clouded and we don't even know it. Hence, years later one might ask: "How could I have done such a thing?" You think you're doing the right thing and later discover that what you did was motivated by pure selfishness, but you did not know that at the time. A man and woman have a relationship, one decides to leave; two lives are changed forever. Like it or not, we are interdependent on each other. What party A does can affect the lives the parties B, C, D, E, etc. Life is a crap shoot; there's no saying how the dice will roll. It's like a roulette wheel that never stops spinning. That is the theme of this movie. The main character makes a decision that places his life on a certain path. Yet if he had made a different decision, his life would have been completely changed. It's a heavy theme which receives credible treatment in this movie. Nicholas Cage and Tea Leone are excellent as the main characters. They are wonderfully engaging and together successfully tell a story about "what if...."**

**This movie offers a highly sentimental and romanticized portrayal of the American family. Despite the essential hokeyness of the story, the movie succeeds in avoiding becoming a cliché and instead offers an interesting and thoughtful fantasy that will inspire some to think about their priorities, and for a Hollywood movie, that is an impressive accomplishment.**

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### **The Fan (1996)**

**Good story goes awry, 4 October 2007**

**5 stars**

**This movie is like a steam locomotive that starts out chugging down the tracks full throttle but then loses steam and grinds to an unceremonial halt before reaching its final destination. Also, this movie suffers from some major miscasting. In this movie Robert DeNiro attempts to recreate his Travis Bickle character but alas, twenty years later, it doesn't work. Also, casting Wesley Snipes as Mr. DeNiro's victim is simply unbelievable, especially after Mr. Snipes's performance in Demolition Man. If anything,**

their roles should have been reversed. Yet the movie does make interesting use of professional sports as a venue for portraying the dynamics associated with displaced aggression. But if you want to watch a really good crime dram/thriller that effectively incorporates a baseball park into the story, watch Experiment in Terror with Glenn Ford, Lee Remick, Martin Ross and Stephanie Powers. Now THAT was a great movie.

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### **The Five Pennies (1959)**

**A Powerful and Compelling Work of Art, 27 July 2005**

**9 stars**

Danny Kaye is known for his comic roles; for his laughter, his singing, his dancing, his light-hearted humor. But this movie presents a different Danny Kaye - serious, brooding, consumed with guilt, confronted by really serious problems - and here Danny Kaye shines. This movie is proof that if he had to, Danny Kaye could have been one of the greatest dramatic actors in the history of motion pictures. There is no question about that. In this movie, Kaye puts aside the clowning to play a subdued, moody and introspective character who nevertheless is still likable and worthy of attention. And it works! In the movie he wins over the audience, he wins over his family, he wins over his friends. And who can ever forget the scene with Louis Armstrong? Kaye's character overcomes all obstacles to triumph and to be loved. Only a highly skilled and sensitive actor could have done the job, and in this movie Danny Kaye proved that he had the requisite qualities to transform what could have been little more than a sudsy soap opera into a powerful statement about a man who, along with his family, not only survives but sets an example for others. For this reason, this movie is a powerful and compelling work of art.

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### **The Fly (1958)**

**Good science fiction movie, 22 June 2007**

**8 stars**

This is one of the better science fiction movies, with strong acting, especially by David Hedison, who gives an outstanding performance as a scientist whose experiment goes awry, with tragic consequences. This movie is part of that genre of science-fiction movies that portray scientists working on the fringes, on the brink of breakthroughs, but who ultimately lose control of and are destroyed by their own work. The classic example is the movie Frankenstein. The Island of Dr, Moreau is another example. This

movie belongs in that genre. The lead character is charming, engaging, genuinely likable, yet literally gets caught up in his own work, which provides the basis for the story. If this movie has a message, it is that scientific research must be conducted with utmost care and with the minimum of risk. To do otherwise is just courting disaster, such as that dramatized in this movie.

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### **The Fly (1986)**

**One of the great sci-fiction/horror movies -ever., 28 December 2005  
10 stars**

This is a great movie. It's a story about tragedy. The story may seem far-fetched, and I guess it is, but it just adds to the intensity of the movie. In addition, Jeff Goldblum, as the main character Seth, gives one of the great performances in the history of sci-fiction movies. As the audience watches Seth slowly but inexorably change into something loathsome and awful, we witness how he fights to maintain his dignity and humanity against all odds, knowing that ultimately he will succumb. This is why this movie is so great. It's not just a mere "monster" movie. It's a movie about a man who refuses to give up. It's also about his friend who supports him and stays with him till his final moments as a human being.

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### **The Front Page (1974)**

**Witty and fast-paced, 17 January 2007  
9 stars**

When the subject of great movies is being discussed, this movie must be included in the discussion. This movie is a witty and fast-paced satire that pokes fun at the news media. The characters are memorable and the acting is fantastic. Walter Matthau, Jack Lemmon and Vincent Gardenia are great in this movie, but most impressive is Carol Burnett's wonderful and powerful performance which dominates every scene in which she appears. But what makes this movie even more appealing is that it is a story of how the quest for the extra buck can corrupt everyone involved, with tragic consequences. Billy Wilder is very strong on this point and for this reason this movie is worth watching.

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## **The Godfather (1972)**

**A study in social pathology, 13 November 2005**

**10 stars**

**A man immigrants to the United States from Italy and has three sons - the oldest is intellectually deficient, the second is a temperamental bully and hothead, and the third, seems well adjusted and normal. Yet looks can be deceiving, for it is the third son, Michael, who is actually more cunning and more depraved than his two older brothers and proves it. Michael is a merchant of death cloaked in the regalia of middle-class civility which makes him even more lethal. Michael never loses his temper; he dresses impeccably; he's a highly decorated army veteran and has an admiring wife, all of which is mere window dressing masking a viciousness and brutality that is without limit. And what is it that Michael wants? Only to protect his family from "enemies" who want to destroy his family. Except the enemies are of Michael's making. Al Pacino's portrayal of the sinister Michael Corleone is one of the great and classic performances in the history of movie making. Mr. Pacino fully and effectively projects every nuance of Michael's distorted and depraved character, from his predatory nature as a merciless and cold blooded killer who shoots two men at point-blank range with whom he is having dinner; to his hypocritical flaunting of religion such as using the baptism of his son as a cover while ordering the assassination of some of his supposed "enemies"; to his blatant dishonesty such as when he lies right to his wife's face; and to his decision to wantonly murder his own brother-in-law, and thereby make his sister a grieving widow. Marlon Brando got top billing for this movie, but it was Al Pacino who is the real star.**

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## **The Godfather: Part II (1974)**

**Michael is no Vito Corleone., 27 November 2005**

**7 stars**

**When this movie was first released oh those so many years ago, I liked it. Recently I watched the movie again. This time, the movie wasn't that good. My main objections to the movie are: the repeated use of flashbacks and the character of Michael. Regarding the flashbacks, they ruined the continuity of the movie. Is this movie about Michael or is it about the first Godfather? Second, the character Michael is so overblown and two-dimensional that not even Al Pacino's excellent performance could totally save it. It seemed that what Michael needed was a therapist to help him**

work through his misplaced aggression. Michael feels the need to defend his family but defend them against WHAT? Moreover, Michael is married, is the father of two children, is educated and thoroughly middle-class. This profile does not suggest someone who is likely to be directing an organized crime syndicate. Sorry, it just doesn't wash. And when Michael has his older brother murdered, even though his brother is mentally challenged, that defies all logic, even for Michael for whom the family comes first. If this movie is supposed to be a dramatic study of a deeply confused man who harbors paranoid delusions of persecution mixed with a big dose of grandiosity, then this movie is interesting. However, if this movie is trying to suggest that an intelligent, college-educated, married family man, who has the option to go "legit", would be interested in pursuing a career in organized crime, then this is stretching literary license a bit far. Why not have Michael run for political office instead? Now that could make for an interesting and credible movie.

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### **The Good Fairy (1935)**

**Corny but watchable., 1 June 2008  
7 stars**

Corny movie, dated, but cute, watchable but if you fall asleep don't be surprised. It is amazing how the name Preston Sturges sets up certain expectations for a movie, that it will be fast-paced and crammed with witty, funny dialogue, but alas reputation, like many other aspects of human life, may not be completely consistent with reality. This is a good movie but it is obscure and for good reason. The movie has an excellent cast but the movie's premise is so simplistic that it calls into question whether the audience in 1935 was so naive. This story presents a rather bizarre portrayal of life in an orphanage and the transition from ward to the government to independent woman. Also, the transplantation of Hollywoodish scenery and dialogue onto a story originally set in Hungary is a bit of a stretch but nevertheless it's a good movie. Herbert Marshall, Frank Morgan and Reginald Owen give excellent performances, which is further evidence that the quality of acting was far superior than what it is today, which isn't surprising given Hollywood's obsession for special effects with its firm reliance on the computer to rescue movies from total oblivion.

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### **The Good Shepherd (2006)**

If you like long movies with lots of flashbacks, then this movie is for you., 1  
January 2007  
3 stars

How bad can a movie be? At what point should the critic stop ragging a movie? The Good Shepherd inspires such questions. It is a long movie. It is a tedious movie. It is, literally, a sleeper. The acting, the story, the direction, is almost amateurish. The main characters are uninteresting, the dramatic conflict contrived, the plot predictable, and whoever plays Matt Damon's son, well, he is arguably the most annoying presence on the movie screen in years. The only time this movie perks up is in the scenes with Robert Di Niro and also when a man takes a flying leap through a window. But the movie's most annoying qualities are its pomposity, its pretentiousness and its repeated use of flashbacks. Hence, a new warning: Beware of the flashback, it can ruin a movie.

Also, this movie contains one of the most flagrant examples of miscasting in recent movie memory. The decision to cast Angelina Jolie as a submissive housewife defies logic and is another reason why this movie is truly remarkable but for all the wrong reasons.

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### **The Graduate (1967)**

Powerful movie., 9 November 2005  
10 stars

I know that Ben is a sap and a stalker. I know that Mrs. Robinson is a cheating alcoholic with the morals of an ally cat. I know that Mr. Robinson is a fool. And I know that Elaine Robinson is a hapless victim and player in a bizarre and twisted story of marital infidelity and social disillusionment and alienation. Nevertheless, I like this movie. Yes, I'll say it again ... I LIKED THIS MOVIE! The question is: Why? None of the characters in the story, with the exception of Elaine, are particularly attractive or nice. In fact, they are some of the most reprehensible characters ever portrayed in a movie. I say this sweeping statement because these characters behave in ways that they know are morally wrong, and despite their knowing better, continue to flaunt themselves anyway. They are angry characters, angry at the world, angry at themselves, angry at each other. They are also boldfaced hypocrites, flaunting their middle-class materialistic trappings, like their nice houses and expensive cars, and so smug, like that fool Mr.

Robinson and Ben's father whose only concern is that Ben get a good job and keep up appearances, all of which masking a shallowness and depravity that is the central theme of this story, which is why I liked this movie. The movie offers a candid portrayal of people who you'd think are the salt of the earth and the bedrock of society, but in actuality have the strength and consistency of quicksand. This is a serious movie depicting the moral depravity of modern society and the damage such depravity can cause.

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### **The Grapes of Wrath (1940)**

What happens when people trifle with nature., 16 February 2010  
9 stars

The Grapes of Wrath is director John Ford's homage to nature and a warning to all - that nature, in the form of rough terrain, inclement weather and immense distances, can be lethal to humans. In this movie the land is more than just mere scenery, more than just a back drop for a story, more than just a passing reference, it is an integral player, indeed it is the story itself. Briefly, the movie is about a family, the Joads of Oklahoma, who, after being evicted from their farm during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, become homeless and, in quest of work and a more secure place to live, embark on a long journey through prairie and desert to California. For them, California is the proverbial land of milk and honey and holds for them a promise of a new and better life, much like the ancient Hebrews may have felt when they left Egypt in quest for their promised land. As the Joads travel west in their broken-down jalopy they are dwarfed by the sheer immensity of the landscape. The movie features several panoramic vistas of the rugged western landscape, prairie and desert, geographical barriers that the Joads must surmount to reach their goal and places where they can die. For the land is not friendly and benign; instead it is a source of contention and a cause for grief, such as that visited upon the Joads as they lose their homes and possessions and are forced to migrate in order to survive. The Joads' vulnerability is further reinforced by the distances they must travel and the stress caused by the move itself. Two members of the family die while on the road and another disappears; nothing is close by. Driving many miles means having to deal with the possibility of their truck breaking down en route and becoming stuck in the middle of nowhere. And like the land itself, the people encountered by the Joads on their journey are surly and begrudging at best. The message is unmistakable. Nature can crush us at any time and must be respected for what it is, an all-encompassing, awesome, stark entity that is both life giving and deadly, especially when ignored, as the Joads learned as the "wind" destroyed their lives, perhaps as a pay back for the way the land

was abused. And when the Joads finally arrive in California, reality quickly sets in and with it comes more trouble and disappointment, all of this having to do with the land, which again poses a threat to the Joads' survival. The story ends with Tom Joad, who is in trouble with the law, shown trekking across the land and the rest of family again on the move as they continue to seek work. The foreboding mood that permeates this movie is further enhanced by the black-and-white photography that further brings out the stark emptiness and vastness of the land. This movie is a dramatic statement that warns the audience that human kind must be cognizant of the whims of nature for nature is something that cannot be ignored or trifled with. In the 1930s people did not treat the land with respect and the land responded in kind. That the Joads got caught up with that is the stuff for a dramatic story but nature itself is beyond our ability to control as so aptly shown in this movie. We build dams and they inevitably fail. We build dikes to keep out the ocean yet we still have floods. We build huge ships that sink. We build airplanes and rockets that crash. We build mighty bridges and buildings and they collapse. And in *Grapes of Wrath*, we farm the land and the soil turns into dust. And THAT is the story.

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### **The Great McGinty (1940)**

A cinematic icon., 26 April 2008  
10 stars

This is one of the great movies. It's up there with *Citizen Kane* and *Casablanca*. Indeed, in some respects it's even better. The story portrays the corruption inherent in the American political system and does this in a nonabrasive and a political manner. That is, Sturges presents the story and lets the audience draw their own conclusions. Judging from this movie, Sturges shows how the political process is a sham and causes one to reasonably conclude that the only way to get something done is through extra-legal means. Although made in 1941 the movie's story is as relevant today as it was 67 years ago. Brian Donlevy gives an outstanding performance as a down-and-out nobody who rises from the soup kitchen to the governor's office and when he attempts to actually try to reform the system learns some hard lessons about politics and life.

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## **The Hangover (2009)**

**Amusing, 18 June 2009**

**7 stars**

**This is a good movie, not great, but good. The movie has an offbeat story with an interesting twist, almost like a whodunit except that here it's a "what happened." Although the story has its amusing moments, it is not uproariously funny. Actually, the movie worked better when showing how three fellows are following up on all kinds of strange and weird clues to figure out what happened to them. There is a lot of slap stick, reminiscent of The Three Stooges, and if you like the Three Stooges style of comedy, then this movie will make you laugh. The funniest character is the Chinese guy played by Ken Jeong whose acting is definitely over the top and is a scene stealer. The three lead characters are amusing but do not come close to generating anything approximating a real loud guffaw. The best part of the movie are the end credits, which says something about the celluloid that preceded it.**

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## **The Heartbreak Kid (2007)**

**Dull and dumb retread of a classic movie., 7 October 2007**

**2 stars**

**Any resemblance between this movie and its 1972 predecessor is purely coincidental. This movie appropriated a title that more appropriately should have been named The Heartburn Kid. Ben Stiller is no Charles Grodin and the other actresses are no Cybil Shepherd or Jeannie Berlin. The movie's story borders on the depressing and none of the scenes are funny. At times this movie is on the brink of becoming a tragedy. However, the movie did have potential of becoming a good drama about a man who doesn't want to knuckle under the domination of women and pays the price by being lonely and being the object of ridicule. However, this type of theme is not the stuff that comedies are made of, as this movie aptly proves. And what's even more pathetic is that the main character, the "heartburn" kid, moves FROM San Francisco, arguably one of the world's most picturesque cities in the world, where he OWNS a large sporting good store, to a resort hotel in Mexico where he miraculously seems to finally find personal happiness as a beach entrepreneur associating with "locals" who play jokes on him. None of this is funny. The quest for personal happiness is a serious subject, and Ben Stiller's character is too shallow and too stupid to lend itself to such introspection. What is most ridiculous about this movie however is its nasty and totally unfunny portrayal of Mr. Stiller's character's wife as some kind of eccentric control freak, when it seems that all she**

wanted was to have fun, sing and have a lot a sex. And when she gets sunburned, that would have been a great time for the Stiller character to show his wife some TLC, such as a nice, gentle massage, touching all the right places and then give her the "banging" that she not only wanted but expected. Now THAT would have a welcomed addition to this dull and dumb movie. The only reason I rate this movie a "2" is because of Jerry Stiller. Now HE would have been a great "heartbreak kid."

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### The Holiday (2006)

An entertaining Cameron Diaz vehicle., 9 May 2010  
7 stars

When watching this movie one can only be impressed with Cameron Diaz. This is her movie; her wonderful performance makes this movie work. Although the story is mostly Hollywood fluff and is about as substantive as a cloud in the sky, Ms. Diaz brings life to what would otherwise be a implausible facsimile of an actual story. The always beautiful Kate Winslet is wonderful too but in this movie she definitely plays second fiddle to Ms. Diaz's lead. As for the story itself, it has so many holes in it that there is not enough room to discuss them all. Suffice it to say, this movie is character, not story, driven. The male leads, Jude Law and Jack Black, are to be commended for subordinating themselves to the ladies; after all, this is a movie about two women who do something daring and in the process change their lives. But regardless of what one may think of the story, Cameron Diaz's presence will, for you, make watching this movie an entertaining experience.

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### The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1939)

Great Movie, 22 August 2005  
10 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

There's a saying: "They don't make 'em like that anymore." This saying is especially true for the 1939 classic, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame." What makes this movie so great is 1. the story, 2. the screenplay, and 3. the acting. Surprising is Edmund O'Brien's excellent portrayal of the people's poet, Gringoire. But of course the star of the movie is Charles Laughton, whose portrayal of the poor and hapless Quasimodo, who is hopelessly in love with the beautiful Esmeralda, transforms this movie from an

interesting period piece into a really powerful story. For this movie is truly dramatic - in its portrayal of the power of the Church in medieval society; its portrayal of the people themselves, who are angry, restless, and desperate; and its portrayal of an unfortunate man who transcends his place in society to defend the woman he loves and protect the Church and in the process becomes a hero. If you want to watch a classic movie, then this is the right movie for you.

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### **The Hurt Locker (2008)**

Serious entertainment., 17 July 2009  
8 stars

If you enjoy light entertainment or want something to uplift your spirits, then **AVOID** this movie. Disarming live unexploded bombs in combat situations is a dangerous, dirty and harrowing experience that calls for iron discipline, nerves of steel and a bravery that is practically limitless, a point that this movie successfully drives home. The problem is that the main soldier assigned to do this risky job in the movie is a loose cannon, someone who is reckless, puts his unit at risk, doesn't follow orders and therefore is someone that the military would not want diffusing bombs. This does not mean that this movie is not good or compelling, because it does offer a riveting story, but it must be watched with the understanding that the military does not allow for mavericks who knowingly place their entire unit at risk, like the main character does in this movie. For instance, if a soldier deliberately cuts himself off from communication with his platoon leader, that soldier would soon hear about it, loud and clear. Also, the action is not placed within a larger context, that is, the action takes place in Iraq but that's about all the audience is told, which may cause one to wonder why soldiers are there in the first place. This would be like watching the B-25s dropping their bombs in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* without knowing why the the United States was at war with Japan or watching *Saving Private Ryan* without knowing why American soldiers were storming the beach at Normandy. Nevertheless the movie does effectively convey the harrowing and dangerous nature of war and should be shown to persons who are contemplating joining the military.

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## **The Incredible Hulk (2008)**

A remake of a remake and shows it., 16 June 2008

4 stars

First, Edward Norton is no Bill Bixby and second, how many "Hulks" does this movie need? This movie has several glaring weaknesses: first, the acting is laughable. Tim Roth must be considered as a candidate for the worst actor award for 2008. Second, the story is simplistic. Man is sick, man gets angry, man becomes a monster. Duh. Third, the special effects are almost cartoonish. Is this movie actually a cartoon interspersed with live acting? This confusion of style is now typical of most Hollywood action/sci-fi movies. Fourth, little character development. The characters are two-dimensional facsimiles directly out of the Hollywood potboiler mold. Liv Tyler's performance is utterly flat. It's not her fault; it's the material she has to work with. Betty Davis and Joan Crawford probably would have fared little better, but at least they would have given the role a little more flare. This movie is a remake of a remake and shows it, a really empty vessel. No originality. Intellectually empty. A huge Hollywood fx extravaganza that, like all the celluloid garbage that has preceded it, will eventually find its way to DVD land and oblivion.

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## **The Informant! (2009)**

Offbeat movie featuring an excellent performance by Matt Damon, 24

September 2009

8 stars

Offbeat movie that, with limited success, tries to make light of some serious stuff involving corporate corruption at the highest managerial levels. What makes this even more significant is that the events dramatized in this movie are supposedly based on actual events which, if true, calls into question the reliability of witnesses in criminal investigations who themselves are criminals. Embezzlement and fraud are serious crimes, but when a person committing such serious crimes becomes a star witness for a full-blown government investigation targeting a major international corporation, then this casts a huge, dark shadow over the credibility of criminal investigation itself. This movie is also about to what lengths government officials are willing to believe such unsavory informants even as these informants continue to flagrantly break numerous laws. Matt Damon gives an excellent performance as the main character, Mark Whitacre, a man who on his own initiative feeds the government information while he continues to embezzle huge sums of money. The movie shows how the government almost becomes complicit in

Whitacre's's criminal behavior and how it causes an incredible and irreparable amount of damage. Does being an informant absolve one of guilt for crimes committed? Watch the movie and find out.

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### The Informer (1935)

Beware of your friend, especially if he needs a few bucks., 6 October 2005  
8 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

Today if someone mentions the name Victor McLaglen the response most likely will be "Who?" or perhaps "Why?" Well, believe it or not, Victor McLaglen won the Academy Award for Best Actor in this film, which is about a poor, desperate man who is willing to sell out his best friend for "carfare" to the United States. It's an interesting movie which shows how low even the most well-meaning shnooks will go just for a few bucks. The movie takes place in British-dominated Ireland and while all the other characters are either directly or indirectly fighting for the political independence of Ireland, all Mr. McLaglen's character is concerned about is getting money and getting drunk. The movie makes one wonder whether political activism is worth all the trouble because while the activist is struggling to make a point, many others not only do not care, they don't even know what the fuss is all about. The morale of this movie is: look out for the friend, he may sell you out for a dime.

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### The Invasion (2007)

Nicole Kidman is great, 17 August 2007  
10 stars

First, this is a great movie, an excellent sci-fi flick. Excellent acting, taut script, interesting story, ongoing suspense and great action, all the ingredients that make for a highly entertaining movie. Of course, what makes this movie even better is the presence of Ms. Nicole Kidman, who proves once again that she is Hollywood's premier actress and easily the best looking. Not enough compliments can be made about Ms. Kidman. One must wonder why anyone would divorce such a talented, successful and fine-looking lady. Yes, beauty is skin deep, as the saying goes, and one cannot judge a book by its cover, according to another saying, but seeing is believing and success speaks for itself, and what I saw of Nicole

Kidman in this intense and exciting movie is further proof that Ms. Kidman is not only a talented artist but is beautiful as well which is befitting a great actress who is truly a star.

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### **The Jazz Singer (1927)**

**Cinema Icon, 23 October 2007  
10 stars**

**Yes, the movie was made eighty years ago. Yes, the acting is stagy. Yes, the movie is a relic. Yes, the story is hokey and contrived. Nevertheless this is a great movie which withstands the test of time. It's about a man in conflict within himself and his family. It's about the immigrant experience in the United States. It's about the lure of show business. It's about life. It's about the American urban experience in the early 20th century. For the Jazz Singer is more than a curiosity piece, it is an icon of American culture and will be recalled and remembered as long as people have interest in movies. Although talkies are now taken for granted, the Jazz Singer hearkens back to a time when movies were silent and actors were seen but not heard, and this movie represents a technological breakthrough of monumental importance that cannot be overstated. Al Jolson was one of the greatest performers in American history. His place in the history is firmly established, and Jazz Singer is proof.**

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### **"The Jeffersons: A Short Story (#6.2)" (1979)**

**Wonderful episode., 13 August 2008  
10 stars**

**What a wonderful, amusing, entertaining episode. Under the guise of a spoof, the episode explores some sensitive issues relating to self-esteem, stereotyping, and feelings of inferiority and does so in a manner that engages the audience and gives cause for thought, while at the same time having the opportunity to enjoy some sharp humor. This episode is made even more impressive by the farcical nature of the story which pokes fun in a manner that is not only unoffensive but gives cause for laughter. Sherman Hemsley shines as the featured character around whom the story revolves. Although he takes himself seriously, when forced to confront issues that cause him shame he rises to the occasion and becomes an inspiration and positive role model for others. And of course Marla Gibbs again shows that she is one of the finest comediennes in TV history.**

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**"The Jeffersons: Louise's Old Boyfriend (#6.3)" (1979)**

**Excellent classic TV., 12 August 2008**

**10 stars**

**What a clever, funny, and entertaining episode. Crisp writing, excellent comic acting, a really amusing farce. Nonstop laughter as the confusion abounds with comic results. Also there were several close ups of Marla Gibbs who gives a great comic performance. Ms. Gibbs is one of the great comediennes of the TV sitcom genre who created the iconic role of "Florence", the funniest maid in TV history. This particular episodes showcases Ms. Gibbs. Here she is the star and deservedly so. But the biggest star are the writers whose literary creativity produced the lines that to a great extent made this great episode possible. That this episode is about thirty years old shows that it has passed the test of time with flying colors and perhaps can be considered a classic.**

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**"The Jeffersons: Mother Jefferson's Birthday (#2.19)" (1976)**

**This episode showcases Mama Jefferson., 18 April 2009**

**10 stars**

**This episode is remarkable since it centers around the character played by Zara Cully who is marvelous. Ms. Cully carries the episode which is truly funny while maintaining the dignity of the main character. This episode also deals with the theme of sibling conflict which on the surface may seem silly and trite but underscores the fundamental irrationality that drive such disputes. It is not the nature of the disputes that are remarkable. Rather it is the characters themselves who are made to appear humorous given the trivial nature of their disputes. The other characters are also humorous as they try to deal with a self-centered but fragile woman whose transparent manipulations, which on the surface seem ridiculous, become the basis of a humorous and well acted episode.**

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## **The Kids Are All Right (2010)**

**What happens when a heterosexual comes out of the closet, 29 July 2010  
7 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**Julianne Moore is hot! She is one of Hollywood's great performers and proves it in this movie. The story has some loose ends that never get tied but so what? Julianne Moore deserves an Academy Award nomination for her incredible performance. She plays a woman in a lesbian relationship but is actually a heterosexual which erupts when she meets a man. Wow, that was a powerful dramatic moment, but the movie doesn't follow up on that. Instead she returns to her lesbian partner which, given the intensity of her sexual response to the man, is utterly implausible. This is not a value judgment on which type of relationship is better. She is HOT for this man, who care about her and who is also the biological father of her child, and for her to leave him after what they did together in bed, and did repeatedly, is untenable. This movie is fundamentally about a woman who has repressed her true sexual orientation and which finally emerges in the most unmistakable way. There is no way that this character returns to her cold, frigid lesbian partner.**

**Hollywood has done it again. In an attempt to take on a controversial topic, same sex marriage, it offers an interesting yet implausible expose of a family in crisis. The problem is that the situation portrayed is so contrived as to render it ludicrous. Two middle aged women, openly lesbian, live together, are in fact married, each one has a child, produced by sperm donated from the same man. So far so good. Now, here is where the story fails. One of the women is not a committed lesbian. Further, it is soon apparent that one of the same woman is not happy being in the relationship and for good reason: her companion is a nervous, high strung, pushy, scowling, insecure control freak whose pouting would be more than enough to drive away anyone, man or woman. So, when the woman gets a chance to leave the closet, she immediately hops into bed with the sperm donor, enjoys having sex with him, has feelings for him, yet after all that goes back to her nasty, prissy partner. That is stretching things a bit far. If the man was a violent, vicious, manipulative psychopath, then maybe she would have cause to end the relationship and go back to Ms. Insecurity, but in this movie the man is loving, caring, wants to be involved, and she likes having sex with him. She has no viable incentive to leave him yet leave him she does for reasons that are totally unconvincing. As a result the story enters the realm of the implausible. This movie features strong acting by the entire cast. Annette Bening is great as the prissy one and Mark Ruffalo should be nominated for a Best Actor award. It is just too bad that the**

acting cannot save the movie from the pitfalls in the story that prevent the movie from being not just good, but great.

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### **The Kingdom (2007)**

Special effects potboiler, 28 September 2007

5 stars

The good guy vs. bad guy format is alive and well in this movie. The problem is: who are the bad guys? Is it the group of fanatics who commit a heinous act of terrorism or is it the the unelected government elite that, according to this movie, has been bought off by a certain Western power and which is completely out of touch with the will of its own people, thus radicalizing them. As a special effects showcase, this movie is first rate. There are gunfights, explosions, expletives, fighting, that is, the entire gamut of audio and visual gimmicks typical of Hollywood potboiler action movies. However, what this movie offers in terms of action it equally lacks in terms of intellectual or historical content, typical for this genre. If you like these kinds of movies, then you will be entertained. But if you want a movie that seriously explores the root causes of the violence, then go on to something else because this movie will not provide the answers.

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### **"The King of Queens: Queens'bro Bridge (#5.22)" (2003)**

Excellent episode., 23 March 2008

10 stars

This is an excellent episode that touches on a number of serious topics but without becoming melodramatic. The topics include sibling rivalries, inter-generational conflict, the plight of the frail elderly, bullying, loyalty, selflessness, extended family cohesion, dependency issues and marital conflict. The central character here is Doug who has to make some serious decisions that will effect his relationship with his wife and directly impact on his father-in-law with whom he is in conflict. The question that becomes apparent is how does a young married couple cope with added responsibilities relating to care of an elderly parent with a challenging personality? What do they do? Watch this episode and find out.

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### **The Ladykillers (1955)**

**This film is so bad that I'm still in shock, 12 September 2005**

**1 star**

**There aren't enough negative words to convey how I feel about this awful movie. This movie was bad ... no, it was bizarre ... no, it was strange ... no, it was pretentious ... no, it was infantile ... no, it was unfunny ... no, it was dated ... no, it was irritating ... no, it had a crummy soundtrack (this is the first time I have ever mentioned a movie's soundtrack). And get rid of those birds! This is a story of a gang of men who have conspired to commit a major crime. NOT FUNNY! And they just so happen to find this annoying and intrusive "little old lady" to act as a front. Again, NOT FUNNY! Maybe, the people who made this movie were still suffering from the aftermath of World War Two, which may have somehow affected their sense of what is humorous, but I actually found nothing in this movie to be funny. The scene where the entire gang pile into the phone booth was just-plain dumb. What made this movie even worse is that I was expecting something far better, especially since it starred Alec Guinness. And regarding Alec Guinness's character, Prof. Marcus, the Marcus character would have fit in quite well as one of the aliens in "Star Wars" or some other science fiction movie. A lot of people ragged "The Dukes of Hazzard" but that film was unpretentious and the Duke boys were FUNNY; these British thieves were not good natured buffoons; they were nasty and grotesque. There's a saying: "The don't make 'em like they used to." Well, in the case of this movie, thank goodness for that!**

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### **The Lake House (2006)**

**Enjoyable, 7 July 2006**

**9 stars**

**This is a wonderful movie with outstanding performances by Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock. Something has happened to Ms. Bullock style of acting. She has developed into a truly great actress. Her transformation became evident in Crash and is further evident in this movie. The plot is far-fetched, but so what? It's a fantasy. This movie is proof that when it wants to, Hollywood can still make a movie that offers great acting and an interesting story that really engages the audience, even if the plot is predictable. For this is a movie that succeeds not because of the story, but through the performances of the lead actor and actress who carry this movie and render it not only watchable but enjoyable.**

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## **The Last Castle (2001)**

**Good movie, 24 September 2007**

**8 stars**

Sometimes life brings you pleasant surprises and this movie is one of them. I was channel surfing when I happened to find this movie which immediately caught my interest. Two men are involved in a power struggle over control of a prison. One has authority of office, the other has the loyalty the rank and file. This movie features one of Robert Redford's better performances. His performance as an ex-Army general who is stripped of all the trappings of command but retains his dignity is excellent. James Gandolfini's performance as a cunning and sadistic Army colonel in charge of a military stockade is equally powerful. This is a good movie.

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## **The Last Emperor (1987)**

**Puyi: Opportunistic criminal or man caught up in whirlwind of change?, 3 August 2008**

**10 stars**

What is an emperor, who has been told all his life that he is meant to rule, supposed to do when he no longer has an empire? It is easy to condemn the Emperor Puyi as a weak willed collaborator and monarchist and to reasonably wonder why anyone would want to make a movie about such an apparently vacuous person. But Puyi's life was tragic and as such provides the basis for an excellent historical drama. Puyi never asked to be emperor, which was the only job he was ever trained to do, and after having been evicted from his palace ... which was his home ... sought refuge with the Japanese who took him in and gave him a job, the only job he was ever trained to do. So can it be any wonder why the dispossessed emperor would have had some affinity for the Japanese? John Lone gives a great performance as the dispossessed and unhappy emperor and Joan Chen is equally impressive as his depressed and opium addicted wife who was the classic innocent victim and who did nothing to deserve her vile mistreatment by her own people. Mrs. Puyi was so utterly harmless that the mere thought of anyone wanting to mistreat her is sad and troubling. This movie dramatizes a universal theme - the challenges associated with adapting to relentless change as one tries to maintain their emotional equilibrium and sense of identity while all the landmarks of their lives are rapidly disappearing. Was Puyi a opportunistic criminal? Or was he a man caught up in a whirlwind of change that ultimately proved to be his undoing and then his redemption?

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### **The Last King of Scotland (2006)**

**Idi Amin - - Wanton murderer or misunderstood nationalist?, 25 January 2007  
9 stars**

**Who was the real Idi Amin? Was he a wanton murderer as history suggests? Was he a misunderstood nationalist who believed he was acting on behalf of his country? Was he really a "nice guy" who had to do nasty things? This movie offers an up close and personal portrayal of Idi Amin the man. In this movie Amin laughs, speaks with candor, is charming, and is supported by the people. But Amin is also capable of committing cruel acts of brutality against those who he believes are his enemies and will turn against his closest advisers if he detects even the slightest hint of disloyalty. For what Amin demands and expects most of all is unquestioning loyalty and in return he offers genuine friendship. Forrest Whitaker's performance as Idi Amin is phenomenal. His resemblance to the actual Idi Amin is uncanny. This movie is worth watching.**

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### **The Libertine (2004)**

**The artist in conflict with society., 11 October 2010  
10 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**This may be Johnny Depp's greatest movie role. His performance is uncanny in its depiction of an English playwright who refuses to be the hypocrite and pays the ultimate price. He is the epitome of self-destructive behavior; his addictions are obvious to all yet he is expected to conform in manner expected of a gentleman. He responds with debauchery, with scathing wit, with a rebelliousness that alienates his peers. Yet he is also loved and respected even as his life spirals downward to its ultimate doom. Nobody understands him; he lives in a rough time and there is no one to whom he can turn for support. He is reprimanded by those closest to him and he lashes out by making choices that hurts the very people who love him the most. This movie provides one of the most effective dramatizations of the artist in conflict with society. He recognizes what others refuse to acknowledge and his message is not a pretty one, but it is the truth. John Wilmot was supposed to write pretty pose for his king and be a dutiful husband, but for him such a lifestyle was a mere pretense, a phoniness that he had to reject for the sake of his integrity. As an artist he had a**

higher calling, that is, as a messenger of truth, and he lived it, no matter what the cost. He was driven by forces that were beyond his ability to control and which led directly to his demise, and to posthumous fame and respect.

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### **The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean (1972)**

Paul Newman at his best., 5 December 2007  
10 stars

When I cannot decide whether this film is better than *The Westerner* with Walter Brennan and Gary Cooper, than I know that this is a great movie because *The Westerner* was one of the greatest westerns ever. Paul Newman gives a powerful performance as the legendary Judge Roy Bean. Mr. Newman is truly the star of the movie and he carries the movie well. His presence is enough to take a good movie and make it great. This movie is an example of how the actor makes the difference between a movie being likable but forgettable and wonderful and memorable. Mr. Newman captures the essence of the Bean character, the judge's eccentricities, his homespun philosophy on life and his essential humanity. True, Judge Bean was known as the hanging judge and he was a law unto himself, but he knew who he was dealing with and that there was nobody to back him up. He was THE LAW and had to command respect. Portraying an historical figure is tricky, but Paul Newman does it well and for that reason alone the movie is worth watching.

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### **The Longest Day (1962)**

Unusual Hollywood movie., 16 December 2007  
10 stars

*The Longest Day* is a long movie that tries to dramatize the events of June 6, 1944 - D-Day - and succeeds!!!! Here Hollywood actually succeeds in making a movie that stars ... the actual historical event. This is so uncharacteristic of Hollywood that it deserves special notice. Usually when Hollywood gets a hold of some historical event that it wants to bring to the screen, the event itself winds up becoming a mere backdrop to some insipid love story. This movie does not ... REPEAT ... DOES NOT ... do that. How the producers of this movie managed to stay so focused should itself be the subject of a movie. Nowadays if Hollywood did a remake of this movie, maybe one-quarter of the movie would be about the actual event and the remainder be about some dumb and completely impossible love

story - for instance an American paratrooper who, of course, had never been away from his hometown until joining the army, and a young French woman, who happens to be fluent in English (with a French accent of course), who are both hiding from the Germans while the invasion is going on ... and become guerrilla fighters and then ... lovers!!! (In reality, the French woman would have been a collaborator who would have reported the GI to the German authorities or her SS lover. After all, let's not forget Marshall Petain and Pierre Laval.) That's what Hollywood would do The Longest Day if re-made today. One other thing, it is tempting to compare this movie to Saving Private Ryan. This is like comparing apples with oranges. They're both war movies concerning D-Day, and that's where the comparison ends. What is for certain is that D-Day, June 6, 1944, was one of those momentous days in history that no amount of Hollywood embellishment can trump and that the brave soldiers who stormed onto Omaha Beach were the stars of the story and to portray it any differently would not only be artistically dishonest but disrespectful to the memory of those brave soldiers who participated in the event and in many cases made the supreme sacrifice.

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### The Long Voyage Home (1940)

Unusual John Wayne movie., 6 October 2005

You want to see an unusual John Wayne movie? If you do, then see this one because it's unlike any other John Wayne movie. In this movie, Mr. Wayne is completely out of his usual character - macho, self-assured, in charge, the boss, the big man, the man who's in charge, etc. Here he plays a gentle foreigner who just wants to go home. He even speaks with an accent that is so convincing that if I hadn't known that the actor was John Wayne, I would have taken him for a Norwegian. This movie is proof that a great actor can transcend being type-cast and actually play a variety of roles that give the actor a chance to more fully utilize his or her talent. The story itself is kind of humdrum, but so what! It's about John Wayne. So take the time to watch this interesting John Wayne movie.

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### The Lost Weekend (1945)

Well acted but superficial., 31 October 2005  
10 stars

When I first watched this movie I was really impressed with the story and the acting, especially that of Ray Milland, whose performance as Don

Birnam is truly classic. Then I made the "mistake" of reading the book by Charles Jackson, and then revisited the movie, and sadly my opinion of the movie has changed. I'm still impressed with Mr. Milland's performance, but can't say the same about the story. The problem with the movie is that it does not explain what is compelling Don to drink. All the movie presents is a somewhat theatrical and sensational portrayal of a man whose behavior becomes more and more ridiculous as he is repeatedly thwarted in his quest for money to buy a drink. Okay, Don has a drinking problem, but why belabor the point? Substance abuse is a multifaceted problem; there's nothing theatrical about it either. Don Birnam needs to drink ... so what! Showing an alcoholic lugging an iron typewriter up Third Avenue in search of a pawnshop so he can get a few bucks to buy a drink was more ludicrous than dramatic. The problem is that the movie doesn't explain WHY Don is drinking and what is driving him to torture himself and feel so miserable. But then again, who cares?

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### **The Mack (1973)**

You wanna be a pimp? Then watch this movie., 1 August 2006  
9 stars

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

There's gotta be a better way for a drug pusher to make a living. The question is what can a drug pusher do to make good money when all he knows is how to be a criminal? Well, just look here! This movie, "The Mack," provides the answer: **BECOME A PIMP!!!!** But it's not as easy as it sounds, bro. Being a pimp comes with lots of responsibilities and lots of hassles too. First, you need to take care of the local gangsters and you have to take care of the other pimps too, otherwise you'll be encroaching on their turf, and that can ruin the whole neighborhood. Plus you have to be as cool as ice and as slick as oil, 'cause when ya pimping you have to be on top of what's going on and maintain your control, if you know what I mean. Dig it?! So if you want to learn a thing or two about pimping, and what to do to become a "player," then watch this movie. Dig it?

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## **The Manchurian Candidate (1962)**

**Maybe McCarthy wasn't so off-base., 6 October 2005**

**10 stars**

**This movie makes you think about how our government can be insidiously infiltrated and subverted by outside elements that want to destroy us and do so in a manner that is so cunning and devious that we won't even know that it's happening. It also makes you think about how a highly suggestible and vulnerable individual can become an unwitting shell for those outside elements who are plotting to overthrow the government. The plot seems fantastically improbable, but it isn't. When a man can be conditioned to respond to a certain cue, and then do the most improbable and outrageous acts, like jumping into a lake or assassinating someone, then there's a definite problem, as portrayed in this movie. Laurence Harvey, Frank Sinatra, Angela Lansbury, James Gregory and the rest of the cast are excellent in this real Cold War thriller. Indeed, this movie causes one to re-examine the entire McCarthy era. Senator McCarthy may have been right in his warning about the infiltration of Communist subversives into the U. S. government; he was just accusing the wrong people of being the subversives. This is a movie to take seriously because it's credible ... maybe too credible. By the way, if you are a fan of hypnotism or are attracted to the Queen of Hearts then this movie is definitely for you.**

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## **The Man Who Would Be King (1975)**

**Awful, overblown, overrated, boring. Where's Abbott and Costello when we need them?, 24 June 2007**

**3 star**

**What an awful, overblown, overrated, boring movie. The only thing interesting about this movie is how many holes can be punched through the dumb, simplistic and unconvincing story. Two ex-British soldiers, supposedly Freemasons, conspire to bamboozle and defraud an entire country? Yeah ... right. These two characters are so dumb that they couldn't even defraud each other. No one in their right mind, or even in their wrong mind, would have had anything to do with these obvious phonies. There is such a thing as literary license, but literary license has its limits too which this movie blatantly ignores. And what's even worse is the movie's ridiculously shabby portrayal of Freemasonry, a treatment that is entirely unwarranted and which undeservedly casts Freemasonry in a negative light. This is the kind of movie that would have been perfect for Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello ... or maybe Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton ... or better yet, Sergeant Bilko and Corporal Paperelli or Jack**

**Benny and Rochester. Or what about Laverne and Shirley or Lenny and Squiggy or Pat and Mike or Popeye and Bluto or Mickey and Minnie Mouse or Dobbie Gillis and Maynard G. Krebs or George Jefferson and Archie Bunker? Or what Rain Man and Alvy Singer? Put these characters in the lead roles and you have a first rate comedy.**

**If you want to watch a good movie from the charlatan-masquerading-as-king genre, watch the Emperor Jones, or better yet read the play.**

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### **The Mighty (1998)**

**The Mighty is mighty, 31 March 2007  
10 stars**

**Normally, I don't compare movies. It's like trying to compare apples and oranges. Both are food, yet are different and must be judged accordingly. However, in this case I will make an exception. I will compare this movie with the movie "300", which I also critiqued. This movie has a story; "300" is a special effects cartoon; this movie contains character development; "300" has violence; this movie has excellent acting; "300" has acting out; this movie dramatizes the power of friendship; "300" dramatizes duplicity; this movie is special; "300" is mere noise; this movie is about people who transcend their disabilities; "300" purports that the disabled are to be discarded (there is no way that I will ever believe that the Spartans deliberately killed or exiled their disabled); this movie portrays ordinary people who are heroic; "300" portrays soldiers as being little more than disobedient ruffians dressed in robes. This movie rates a 10; "300" rates a 4, and I'm being charitable.**

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### **The Miracle of Morgan's Creek (1944)**

**Interesting, dated antique. Great movie for William Demarest fans., 16 June 2008  
6 stars**

**There was second Lucille Ball, her name was Betty Hutton. The latter's resemblance to the former is uncanny, especially in this movie. As for the movie itself, although there are amusing moments, the movie is woefully dated with a story that's a stretch. But the real star of this movie is William Demarest who gives one of the great performances in a Hollywood movie. Although Eddie Bracken and Betty Hutton got top billing, this movie is a vehicle for William Demarest whose performance outshines that of the**

other performers. This movie offers an interesting glimpse of Hollywood's impression of the American military personnel circa World War Two. The movie has not aged well, it's story is corny, full of hokum, and suggests an amazing naiveté. All the performances are good but the story is simply too weak to make this movie more than just an interesting antique.

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### The Missing (2003/I)

Tommy Lee Jones as an Indian? C'mon Now., 2 August 2005  
4 stars

\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\*

This movie is not bad; the problem with the movie is that Tommy Lee Jones is miscast as a white man playing an Indian. This has to be one of the worst cases of miscasting in recent Hollywood history. Mr. Jones is so unbelievable in the role that even the real Indians in the movie can't buy it and they literally role him down the side of a mountain in an effort to rid this character from the story. I did like the beginning of the movie where the lady wants to pull the last remaining tooth out of the mouth of a very old woman, who doesn't want to lose that tooth. I don't know how that was relevant to the story, but it showed how the the lady was an good dentist with excellent bedside manners (she succeeds in pulling the tooth). Then again was it really appropriate to begin a movie with someone poking around in somebody else's mouth? Then again, what was Tommy Lee Jones doing in this movie in the first place?

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### The Mist (2007/I)

Devine retribution or just a stupid accident? Also, beware of the final five minutes., 22 November 2007  
6 star

Let's discuss the ending of this movie. Without revealing the details of the ending, this movie's ending is, to put it politely, remarkable. Most of this movie is like a train going full speed ahead, destination unknown. The audience is going for a ride and things are happening really fast and everything is hectic. Then the train suddenly arrives at its destination, and there's nothing, complete zero. That's the way this movie ends. Why this movie's creative team chose to do this is for them to explain, but most good movies have memorable endings that fit logically into the overall story, but here, in the climactic final moments of the movie, the part of the

movie that's supposed to make the entire movie worth watching, the story takes a sudden detour that is so contrived, so utterly and obviously inconsistent with the rest of the story and so inexplicably predictable that it causes one to reasonably ask: why? This movie violates the first and second laws of movie-making: 1. Never make a good movie with a bad ending. 2. A bad movie may have a good ending, but a good movie never has a bad ending.

Now regarding the element of religion in the story, this is one of the movie's strong points. The story offers a strong and compelling portrayal of how religious teachings can be used to whip up hatred, fear and promote violence. Here religion is used as means of terrorizing people, sowing the seeds of discord and inflicting mental anguish. It's much easier now to understand how, for instance, during the Middle Ages, when seemingly inexplicable disasters occurred, like the plague that killed millions, people, suffering and groping for answers, could start looking around for someone to blame, using religion to justify the most horrendous acts. And this kind of stuff still goes on today.

This is one of the better sci-fi movies, no question about it. Except for the ending, which is weak, the movie presents a powerful story that raises questions. Is the mist and what it contains an act of God? An act of man? Or a combination of both? Is it an experiment? An accident? Or what? But most compelling and entertaining was not the special effects or the unique story, but the performance of Marcia Gay Harden. Ms. Harden is the star of this movie. Her powerful and dominating performance transforms this movie into a cinematic masterpiece, a word which is not used lightly here. I expected another idiotic Hollywood scare 'em movie. It's tempting to reveal details of the story, but suffice it to say that after you watch this movie you'll never take insects for granted and whenever you see the fog, you may wonder: what's it hiding?

Some other comments. Amazingly, unlike most Hollywood movies, especially of the sci-fi genre, this movie offers a story that actually has substance. What happens when people find themselves in extreme life-threatening situations that overtake them without any warning? This movie offers a stark portrayal of how religion can be used not as a source of comfort and support but as a tool of terror. When bad things happen to be people, is this divine retribution? Unbelievable as this may seem, this movie actually explores this subject, which for Hollywood movie is absolutely astounding. Were the deaths of millions of people let's say for instance in World War Two a man-made catastrophe or was it punishment inflicted on humanity by some higher power for past transgressions?

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## **The Mortal Storm (1940)**

**A family in crisis., 14 December 2005**

**10 stars**

**Any movie that has Robert Young, Robert Stack and Ward Bond cast as Nazis is at least worth watching. And this movie does not disappoint. This movie portrays the disintegration of a German family in the immediate aftermath of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933. The family splits along political lines, with some for and others against Hitler. This family is symbolic of what probably happened to families throughout Germany as people had to choose whether to support Hitler, even against their better judgment, or rely on the strength of their convictions and face the consequences - ostracism, beatings, arrest, internment and death. This movie also suggests that although most Germans wholeheartedly welcomed Hitler's rise to power and gladly rallied around the Nazi flag with its infamous symbol, the swastika, some Germans rejected the Nazi message of bigotry and violence. Robert Young's portrayal of a loyal Nazi with a guilty conscience and Frank Morgan's portrayal of a "non-Aryan" physics professor are particularly noteworthy performances. Although the movie was made in 1940, its message transcends the bounds of time and therefore is definitely worth watching.**

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## **The Mouse That Roared (1959)**

**Political statement masked as a comedy., 24 July 2008**

**8 stars**

**On the surface this movie seems to be little more than a light comedy, a spoof on the Cold War, and something to generate some laughs. But actually it is much more: a dramatization of what can happen when an irresponsible government conducts a ludicrous foreign policy which leads to unanticipated consequences that put the whole world at risk. Peter Sellers is wonderful in this movie as he plays three principle roles and the rest of the cast, most notably Leo McKern, are also great. It is easy to dismiss this movie as being just another silly comedy but in actuality it's more than a comedy. It examines serious themes and makes a cinematic statement about the world that is as relevant today as it was when this movie was released in 1959.**

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## **The Nativity Story (2006)**

**Good movie, tells a story, 14 December 2006**

**9 stars**

**A movie without gore and gratuitous violence. A movie without profanities. A movie without major "stars." A movie that presents a coherent story. Yet the movie is not boring. It presents an interpretation of Biblical events, with certain implications that could be considered controversial. However, the movie is not sensationalistic but thought-provoking; not outrageous, but almost humble (which easily puts it apart from the typical work produced by Hollywood today). The producers of this movie seemed to have decided that they will not follow the path of other Biblical extravaganzas, with their glitz and bombast, but would actually present a story in a serious yet engaging manner befitting the subject-matter itself, which has to do with the subject of faith.**

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## **The Nazi Officer's Wife (2003)**

**Jewish woman marries a Nazi. Credibility issues here., 9 April 2008**

**5 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**Wait a minute! Wait ... a ... minute. Here is a Jewish woman telling us that Nazis helped her to survive? That she actually fooled Nazi officials into believing that she was not a Jew? Yeah. Right. Whatever you want to say. While her mother is in a concentration camp she is living with a Nazi ... and wants to have a baby with him? Apparently she identified herself so thoroughly with the enemy that she became the enemy. She liked it. She was born a Jew but became the wife of a Nazi and became the lie. Although this may seem judgmental, nobody made her publicize her life. As evidence of the unbelievability of this woman, she baptizes her daughter AFTER the war, wanted to stay married to her Nazi husband and refused to tell her daughter the truth of her Nazi past which the daughter had to discover on her own. Jewish woman marries a Nazi and insists that she always maintained her Jewish identity? Believe what you want.**

**This documentary is further proof of the need to be highly skeptical of any assertions of fact no matter how convincing they may sound. That a woman who purports to be Jewish claims to have married a Nazi, had a child with this Nazi, and did not want to divorce the Nazi WHILE her mother was shipped to Auschwitz and to her death is a big, BIG pill to swallow.**

**That this documentary further purports that Nazi officials knew about this woman's false identity and covered for her thus making her story even more fantastic and difficult to believe. NO WAY would a Nazi EVER protect a Jew unless it was for pure financial gain and she did not have money. Indeed was this woman even Jewish?**

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### **The New World (2005)**

**Long boring movie., 9 April 2008  
5 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**This movie was nominated for an Academy Award? For what? For best movie for producing boredom? What a long ... drawn out ... ponderous ... pretentious ... piece of Hollywood pseudodocudrama. (Yawn) Oh, watching Captain Smith and Pocahontas doing touchy-feely while the whites and Indians are literally preparing to kill each other was extraordinarily underwhelming. The arrival of the English in 1607 was an important moment in history but as usual Hollywood reduces it to a mere historical backdrop for an improbable and ludicrous love story between a little Indian girl and bedraggled discredited Englishman who, with the rest of his group, were unwelcome guests on someone else's turf. What this movie fails to answer is: Why did this little girl love John Smith? According to the movie, Captain Smith had no leadership skills, was universally disliked, was a failure as a soldier and inspired scorn from amongst his peers. The actress who plays Pocahontas is cute but her acting skills need further development. She simply is not convincing in the role nor did she look the part. If you like long boring movies then this movie is for you.**

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### **"The Office: Local Ad (#4.5)" (2007)**

**A wonderful episode., 1 November 2010  
10 stars**

**This is an excellent episode. Besides being humorous, the story is wonderful. Michael makes a commercial that constructively engages his staff in a project that makes them feel good and sells a product. Yet his ad is rejected purely for political reasons and Michael knows it and he is miffed for good reason. Corporate's ad is flashy but unimaginative and highlights the company as a corporate entity instead of the people who work for the company. What a downer. The episode also shows how Jim**

really likes Michael and does something to lift Michael's morale and the morale of the entire staff. Although Michael is self centered and boorish and commits numerous faux pas, this episode shows that he is also caring, engaging, and in his own way likable. What a great episode.

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### **The Onion Field (1979)**

**A powerful movie., 11 October 2005  
9 stars**

Ted Danson usually is found jokin' and schmoozin' in sit-coms. But there's no jokin' or schmoozin' in this movie. Here, Mr. Danson plays a police officer who is brutally murdered by two no-account thugs while his partner, completely terrified, looks on and does nothing and then is methodically hunted and only by sheer luck escapes. Remember, the two thugs actually kidnap and terrorize not two hapless civilians, but two police officers armed with their weapons. The message of this movie to me is clear: if this can happen to them, it can happen to anyone, so beware. This is a powerful movie, not only because of the story, which is intense and provocative, but also because of the acting, which offers chilling portrayals of two psychopathic criminals who offer no apologies for their wanton and heinous acts and of an emotionally shattered police officer who is experiencing a nervous breakdown secondary to post-traumatic stress exacerbated by his overwhelming feelings of guilt over having done nothing to save his partner's life. This movie also shows how the criminal justice system reduces this act of terrorism to the level of being just another case as the case drags on for years in the courts. Indeed, the tragedy and terror of the event soon becomes eclipsed by the sheer mountain of legal paperwork it generates in the courts. This is a great movie which is based on an excellent book, which in turn is based on an actual event.

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### **"The O'Reilly Factor" (1996)**

**Credible News Show, 3 August 2006  
9 stars**

Critiquing a news commentator is like trying to critique an editorial page editor. Everyone has opinions and on the "O'Reilly Factor" opinions are flying all over the place. Mr. O'Reilly has his opinions and his guests theirs.

He confronts his guests and elicits responses. What makes this formula effective is that Mr. O'Reilly pulls no punches and gives his guests ample opportunity to respond, leading to interesting and revealing exchanges of opinions on a wide variety of controversial topics. Also, Bill O'Reilly doesn't duck anyone, and on every show presents his views and invites comment. This format gives "The Factor" credibility and is therefore a news program that should be watched.

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### The Palm Beach Story (1942)

Sturges at his worst., 26 May 2008  
2 stars

What a clunker! What was Preston Sturges thinking when he made this movie? There is nothing funny about this movie. Lots of slapstick, people falling over each other, contrived scenes with a deaf man, dumb story, stupid lines, idiotic scenes, just lots of noise, all based on the story that defies all belief, even though it's a movie. The movie is shrill, annoying, unentertaining, and intellectually a void, and something that you may want to avoid. Unless you are a student of Preston Sturges, there is no reason to watch this movie. The movie has a great cast, but a great cast does not guarantee a great movie and in this movie the dumb story trumps the cast. Now if this movie featured, for instance, Abbott and Costello or Laurel and Hardy, then maybe the movie would have worked, but to accept Claudette Colbert and Joel McCrae acting like Lucy and Ricky is a bit much to swallow, even for a movie buff. You want stupid, goofy and funny? Watch the Three Stooges instead. Or watch Jack Benny. Or Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows. Or William Bendix and Marjorie Reynolds. Moe, Larry and Curly would have acted rings around this clunker because they were unpretentious and good at what they did. You would no more expect Moe Howard to play a lead role in a major dramatic motion picture than Joel McCrae play a buffoon falling over himself, but Mr. Sturges attempts this strange casting in this movie, and it does not work.

This dumb movie was made in 1942, during World War Two. The entire world is at war, international law and order had completely broken down, Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo were on the rampage, and Hollywood produces a trite piece of celluloid junk, featuring major actors in something that would have entirely ignored if it weren't a Preston Sturges product. Somebody must have really liked Mr. Sturges to finance this completely ridiculous movie. You want comedy? Watch Will Ferrell or Steve Martin.

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## **The Passion of the Christ (2004)**

**Graphic., 28 September 2005**

**8 stars**

In this movie, Mel Gibson offers a unique and candid portrayal of the the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It's not a pretty movie, but in all honesty, it's not a pretty story, because we all know how cruelly Jesus was treated; here Mr. Gibson shows us the cruelty. Is the violence merely gratuitous or does it have a legitimate place in the story? It's a judgment call (no pun intended). If you believe the biblical account of Jesus's last hours on earth, then the violence cannot be excluded from the movie. But did the violence have to be so graphically portrayed? Wasn't it enough just to know how Jesus was being tormented without having to actually witness it? Again it's a judgment call. So if you want to watch a movie about the crucifixion of Jesus, this is the movie to watch, but beware: it's graphic, it pulls no punches and offers no apologies if the you leave the theatre upset or perturbed.

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## **The Pawnbroker (1964)**

**Compelling Movie, 30 July 2005**

**9 stars**

The Holocaust was a tragedy of immeasurable proportions. Its impact was felt not only in Europe, where the crimes were initially perpetrated, but around the world. Indeed, the world has never been the same. But what happened to those who survived? How did they cope with the loses they suffered? Could they ever re-integrate into society, ever again become functional human beings? This movie explores these issues through the character of Sol Nazerman, a concentration camp survivor now living in New York City. Nazerman is a pawnbroker (hence the title of the movie), yet he is more than a business man, he is an observer of life, a man so overwhelmed with rage, and anger and grief, that he is reduced to being a mere cynic who has lost his sense of compassion. To Nazerman, the entire world is one big concentration camp. For Sol Nazerman, powerfully portrayed by Rod Steiger, life is painful and like Job he is suffering for reasons that he cannot surmise. Yes, Nazerman is a marked man, but why? The movie does not answer that question, cannot answer that question. But the movie does provide a in-depth study of man who is suffering and for whom one cannot help but feel deep sympathy. And this is why this movie is so important and so great: because it brings home the stark and undeniable fact that the Holocaust DID happen and that such an indescribably despicable event cannot be permitted ever to happen again.

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### **The Perfect Score (2004)**

**Dismal, unfunny., 9 July 2008**

**4 stars**

**This movie is dismal, unfunny, and causes one to wonder why this movie was made in the first place. We know about the SAT and the complaints about how these standardized tests are given so much weight in determining one's eligibility for admission to college. But this movie trivializes that issue and reduces it to a mere subject for a weak, phlegmatic story. Then again, one can wonder if this vacuous movie is even worth any commentary. Once again Hollywood takes a sensitive subject and makes it into artistic mush. The pressure placed on high school students to get into college is a major problem and this movie further confirms that Hollywood does not have the answer.**

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### **The Phantom of the Opera (2004)**

**The Titanic of Movie Musicals., 12 August 2005**

**2 stars**

**Normally I don't make reference to other reviewer's comments. But in this case I must make an exception. For those reviewers who rated this movie at 8 or 9 or 10, I must conclude that either they confused "Phantom" with another movie or are employees of the production company that produced what has to be one of the worst movie musicals in the history of movie musicals. "Phantom" is so bad that it makes "Evita" seem like "West Side Story" or "Chicago." The story was pretentious, the acting, with the exception of the leading lady who played Caroline, was abysmal, but above all, the music was awful. It was the music that ultimately sinks this movie. In fact, this movie is the equivalent of a musical Titanic - big, gaudy, doomed to fail, and fail BIG! If the movie jettisoned the music and stuck with the story, it may have worked. But the music was the iceberg that sunk this ship. Maybe on the stage this story plays well as a musical, but on the screen it is a flop. Nothing could save it except a major re-write. It may interest you to know that the original story was based on a novel. This movie is proof that it's best to leave well enough alone. I rate this movie a 2 only because of the young lady who plays Caroline. She deserved better. As for the Phantom, I have one bit of advice - stop being such a grouch.**

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## **The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945)**

**Appearances can be deceiving., 31 July 2005  
10 stars**

**A man sells his soul and the results are tragic, not only for the man but for everyone around him. Yet no one knows that he sold his soul, because on the surface he is quiet, urbane and seemingly respectable, which is what makes this movie so chilling. For who can say what's going on INSIDE a person, below the veneer of civility and social formality? "The Picture of Dorian Gray" deals directly with this question and presents to the viewer a situation involving a man who is emotionally torn apart, and a profound hypocrite as well, yet on the surface seems completely intact. It is only through the picture noted in the title that the viewer finally perceives the depth of Gray's moral corruption, and by then it's too late. The cynical commentary of Lord Henry Wotton adds to the dark and foreboding mood of the movie, as the Wotton character explains what is happening to Dorian as Dorian sinks lower and lower into the abyss from which there is no return. As the saying goes, appearances can be deceiving.**

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## **The Pink Panther (2006)**

**Very funny movie., 14 February 2006  
9 stars**

**If this movie doesn't make you laugh, then you're devoid of any sense of humor. This is Steve Martin's funniest movie in years. Mr. Martin proves once again that he is the king of Hollywood comic actors. And Beyonce is wonderful. And the movie is silly and corny and contrived, which is to be expected for a comedy. And although Inspector Clouseau is a buffoon, he's really likable. The airport scene and the good cop/bad cop scene are hilarious, especially when the Inspector demonstrates an interrogation device - on himself. At times the humor is crude, but remember, it's a comedy, so instead of being critical, why not just enjoy the movie and have some laughs.**

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### **The Pink Panther 2 (2009)**

**Amusing and at times outright funny., 12 February 2009**

**7 stars**

**Not as good as the first Steve Martin remake, but still amusing and at times outright funny. Most of the humor consists of sight gags and slapstick, but there are some quite funny scenes such as when Inspector Clouseau interrogates the Pope with hilarious results or Inspector's lessons on proper etiquette from Mrs. Berenger played by Lily Tomlin who is wonderful in this movie. Other parts of the movie fall flat. The rest of the cast is also funny. John Cleese playing a Frenchman was excellent. This story is innocuous enough to have been rated G. Good movie, entertaining, light fare. One problem with the movie is that Jean Reno seemed to be miscast. In the first movie he plays a serious role but here he plays a buffoon and sidekick to the hapless Clouseau. It did not work. A strong actor like Jean Reno should have strong roles.**

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### **The Power and the Glory (1933)**

**Boring., 12 May 2008**

**5 stars**

**Surprisingly mediocre Preston Sturges script. The story is corny, dull, stagy, and devoid of any strong dramatic content. That is, it's just plain boring. Some say that this movie is a precursor to Citizen Kane? Any resemblance between a unique masterpiece like Citizen Kane and this movie has to be purely coincidental. Spencer Tracy gives what has to be his weakest performance of his movies. Some of the acting is almost laughable. The plot is contrived and implausible. The movie became livelier in the scene with the strike but only for a few moments. The movie has the quality of a television soap opera but doesn't generate enough dramatic tension to maintain interest.**

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### **The Prestige (2006)**

**Tribute to Nicola Tesla, 26 November 2006**

**10 stars**

**This is a great movie and proof that Hollywood CAN still create excellent movies WHEN IT WANTS TO (which is not too often). The acting is**

excellent and the story is original and quickly engages the audience. Also, this movie is a tribute to one of the great inventors in history, Nicola Tesla. Mr. Tesla was responsible for the introduction of alternating current and knowing that will make the movie even more entertaining. Indeed, perhaps Hollywood should make a movie about the life and career of Nicola Tesla. All the actors in this movie are excellent and offer compelling and powerful performances, especially by Hugh Jackman who proves once again that he is one of the premier actors in Hollywood today. Watch this movie.

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### **The Proud Valley (1940)**

Another Paul Robeson gem, 24 February 2009  
10 stars

Paul Robeson. The mere mention of the name evokes images of the consummate performer, a Da Vinci of the stage and screen, a presence fully deserving of admiration. Yet, despite his exemplary talent and popularity, his list of movies is pathetically small, which can be attributed to two factors - racism and politics. How sad because Paul Robeson was undoubtedly one of the major figures in U. S. entertainment history and if one wants to know why, one just has to watch the movie Proud Valley, directed by Pen Tennyson. Here Paul Robeson plays a role that transcends the ludicrously ridiculous racial stereotypes that Hollywood wanted Mr. Robeson to play. Imagine for a moment, my friends, Paul Robeson playing a shuffling, mumbling sycophant. An outrage! Yet this is exactly the kind of silly roles that Hollywood would have had Mr. Robeson play if he had so chosen. That he starred in such movies as Show Boat and The Emperor Jones was due in large part to the fact that these films were directed by British directors who truly appreciated Mr. Robeson's talents. In Proud Valley, Robeson delivers an outstanding performance as a miner who makes the ultimate sacrifice so that others may live. The story may seem contrived, but it isn't. The movie is neither sensationalistic or melodramatic. Rather it presents in a straightforward way a story that the audience can understand, appreciate and applaud due in a large measure to the presence of one of truly legendary giants of American stage and screen, Paul Robeson.

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## **The Purple Heart (1944)**

**Compelling story, 27 July 2005**

**9 stars**

**This is the quintessential World War Two movie. It has heroic American airmen, a sinister enemy, righteous indignation, and jingoistic dialogue that probably is unmatched by any other movie of its genre. The dialogue between Captain Ross and his interrogator, who wants, more than anything else, to find out where the Americans launched their attack, emphasizes the point that America is angry and will stop at nothing to defeat what it considers to be an evil enemy. And when the Americans are put on trial, their resolve deepens, even as they are subjected to humiliation and torture. It's easy to dismiss this movie as mere World War Two propaganda, with two-dimensional portrayals and a slanted, pro-war point of view, yet such a conclusion would fail to take into consideration the fine acting, fast-paced action, compelling story and powerful dialogue that makes this movie more than just a celluloid polemic, but a credible work of art.**

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## **The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985)**

**Cinematic masterpiece, 24 March 2007**

**10 stars**

**It's usually not my practice to make broad expansive statements about a movie, but here I shall make an exception. This is one of the greatest movies ever made and it's easily Woody Allen's best movie. The movie is more than a comedy, it is a poignant story featuring some of the best acting I've ever encountered in a Hollywood movie. There is nothing that I can say of a negative nature about this movie. It is as if Woody Allen reached deep down into the depths of his creative process to create this marvelous work of art. This movie could have easily become just another goofy piece of Hollywood corn, but Woody Allen invested this movie with a special quality that transformed it to a sublime work of art. This movie deserves all the praise it has received and Woody Allen must be given the credit for making what is nothing less than a cinematic masterpiece.**

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## **The Reader (2008)**

**Who are the real criminals?, 30 January 2009**

**9 stars**

**If any actress deserves to win two Academy Awards for Best Actress in the same year (for Revolutionary Road and The Reader) that actress is Kate Winslet. Only an actress of Ms. Winslet's skill could have performed the role of Hanna Schmidt. Although a concentration camp guard and Nazi war criminal, one can develop a measure of sympathy for this character who herself becomes a victim. At no times does this movie offer any excuses for Schmidt's behavior. She was following orders and it resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people, deaths that could have been easily prevented. But was she acting alone? Did she give the orders? Or was she just a cog in a huge murder machine which years later makes her a scapegoat? The audience is presented with a plain-looking but passionate woman who is just trying to survive and has a personal secret which she wants to hide. And although she served in a criminal organization and was party to the commission of horrible crimes, it seems that the real criminals are those who fail to reveal information about her that would have at least mitigated her guilt. Although Ms. Winslet correctly is the star of the movie, the driving character in this story is the boy lover who many years later fails to act to save his one-time lover. The first part of this moving which tries to show the intensity of the initial relationship is unconvincing. There's lots of steamy bedroom scenes but ultimately they fall flat as boy-man is just a little too boyish and Hanna Schmidt is just a little too aloof to convey a sense of a powerful bond. So the audience has to accept as a given that the bond exists in order for the rest of the story to be effective. The movie however does pick up in pace and intensity when the boy now a young man sees his ex-lover on trial for war crimes, crimes that he knows, and has evidence to prove, she could not have committed or at least ordered. The conflict is framed. The players are on the field. Hanna Schmidt is hapless; her secret obvious; her victimization complete. She was doing her job, doing what she was ordered to do. Did that make her a criminal? Indeed, who are the real criminals?**

**Bruno Ganz is great as the boy-man's teacher and mentor.**

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### **The Reagans (2003) (TV)**

**Mediocre and slanted., 23 December 2005**

**5 stars**

**Let me get right to the point: The problem with this movie is its utter lack of dramatic content. The story of Ronald and Nancy Reagan is so well known that this movie cannot offer any surprises. Further, the movie mocks Ronald and Nancy Reagan for being who they were - an actor and his devoted wife, and offers a simplistic portrayal of Mr. Reagan as being part Jed Clampett and part Gomer Pyle. What the movie glosses over is Ronald Reagan's career - college graduate, a Captain in the U. S. Army, the president of one of the most influential labor organizations in the entertainment industry, Governor of California and President of the United States. Pretty good resume for a small-town guy.**

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### **There Will Be Blood (2007)**

**Daniel Day Lewis give a strong performance in an otherwise completely implausible movie., 30 August 2010**

**7 stars**

**When you talk about pretentious, this movie is it. Mister Day-Lewis is fine as the lead character and the actors are excellent too, but it's the story that brings this movie down. What a contrived, melodramatic bunch of gump. Here's an angry man beating up on the earth, and the audience is supposed to believe that anybody would do business with him? Even a Hollywood movie requires a certain amount of plausibility. This man is so angry and maladjusted that it is hard to imagine how he could get it together to do business and make money. This fellow does everything he can to intimidate and drive people away yet the movie is about him interacting with people. How could anyone be expected to take this character seriously? He yells at people, is violent and at times is completely obnoxious. Okay, if this what the audience likes, so be it. But the next time you come across a businessman with a scowl on his face, ask yourself: Is this guy about to blow up on me, like that guy does in that oil movie? I give this movie a 7 only because of DDL's strong performance.**

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## **The Sand Pebbles (1966)**

**Great Movie., 3 November 2005**

**10 stars**

**Steve McQueen is usually associated with action movies. This movie has action too, but also offers a complex and compelling story about a sailor who finds himself trying to survive in a situation marked by tremendous and sweeping change. For the movie takes place in China at a time of political turmoil and unrest when China is beginning to assert its independence from the West. The result is a clash of cultures as the representatives and symbols of Western Imperialist power and influence struggle to preserve and defend their presence in a country that is becoming openly hostile to anything Western. The Chinese want the Westerners to leave ... just leave. The Chinese wave their flags, and anyone who cooperates with the Imperialists are treated as traitors and punished accordingly. Yet, Steve McQueen's character is apolitical, which makes his performance that much more notable, compelling and powerful. He just wants to get by and survive, but is not willing to sacrifice his principles. As a result, Mr. McQueen's character is heroic but without fanfare, which to me makes this movie special.**

**By the way, wasn't Richard Crenna a great actor?**

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## **The Searchers (1956)**

**A Classic, 6 October 2005**

**10 stars**

**When one attempts to define the term "Great Movie," it might do them well to watch this movie and then form a definition. The movie has everything - an excellent story, interesting characters, racial conflict and great acting. This movie shows John Wayne at his best. Here he is driven by an overwhelming obsession to rescue his niece who he also despises. Watch this movie. It's great. It's wonderful. It's fantastic. It's charming. It's a classic. It's Hollywood at its best. It also shows how Hollywood was capable of making Westerns that did not insult one's intelligence and presents a credible story with characters that were more than mere facsimiles of human beings, but rather were portrayed as people with complex personalities with whom the audience could relate, or at least empathize with.**

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### **The Sentinel (2006)**

**Michael Douglas's worst movie., 13 May 2006**

**3 stars**

**WARNING: Movie trailers can be misleading! After watching the coming attractions for The Sentinel I placed this movie on my "must see" list. That was a BIG MISTAKE! What I had expected to be a first-rate action-packed thriller turned out to be a humdrum "B" movie, that had all the trappings of a first-class feature, but without the substance. The story was inane, the character development was non-existent, and the acting was profoundly mediocre. This is Michael Douglas's worst movie. Not only was his performance entirely unconvincing, the idea of a secret service agent having an affair with the First Lady is so ludicrous that it, and this movie, deserves no further comment.**

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### **The Sin of Harold Diddlebock (1947)**

**Not a funny movie., 12 April 2008**

**6 stars**

**This movie is billed as a comedy but the story gives little cause for laughter. Instead the movie dramatizes the plight of workers who labor for years in utter obscurity, buried alive in huge bureaucracies where they labor and are then discarded like a worthless commodity. That is not funny, even if it's Harold Loyd acting the role and Preston Sturges as the director. At first the movie seems to be little more than a cheap two-reeler, almost amateurish in its production. But after a while it becomes apparent that the movie contains a subliminal message relating to the human condition and how people have to become almost crazy in order to break through the shackles that smother their individuality and creativity. This theme does not inspire laughter. Indeed it is baffling why this movie was made at all.**

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### **The Social Network (2010)**

**Once we built things, now we build websites., 2 October 2010**

**9 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**As further evidence of the decadence of modern society, this movie fits the bill. In the nineteenth century the electric light replaced the candle; the**

telephone replaced the telegraph. These were two landmark inventions that changed the world for the better and marked new developments in technology that benefited all of mankind. Then in the twentieth century came the airplane and penicillin, two more inventions that changed the world forever. Then in 2003 came ... Facebook! Wow! According to the movie, this cyber-network was launched by an angry computer geek who stole the idea from three snobs at Harvard who in turn were determined to make the geek pay for his thievery. The story seems shallow but is actually a compelling and fascinating as the movie shows how one person became the center of a whirlwind over something that is little more than a toy. Unlike the financial barons of the past, who dealt with railroads, steel mills, coal mines and oil refineries, our modern day billion-dollar entrepreneurs are computer-savvy operatives who create web networks. It's not exactly building a factory or creating anything actually new. There are no new technological breakthroughs, nothing that improves the condition of the human race. Rather, these new "captains of industry" are creating playthings, gimmicks, facilitating a service that is intangible, that people cannot consume but meets a need to feel connected in a world in which one can feel very alone. Jesse Eisenberg gives an incredible performance as the main character in this movie. He projects the main character's personal shallowness, intellectual narrowness, mental disturbance, sociopathic inclinations and essential nastiness. Whether this unflattering portrayal is a true depiction of the actual founder of Facebook is another question, but if it is, then he has serious problems. In the nineteenth century the United States built the transcontinental railroad; in the twentieth century discovered atomic power and placed men on the moon; and now in the twenty-first century there is a program that allows millions of people to communicate by computer. Wow! Better get yourself a pc so you can get online and start communicating with all your friends and neighbors and employees and fellow human beings, and maybe even with aliens from outer space if you believe in that. Oops! You're not computer literate? No problem! Leave it to a "computer-savvy" college student to invent a computer program designed specifically for the computer illiterate, THEN build a website, and then let the whole world know that now EVERYONE, even the most staunchly computer illiterate, can now communicate by pc, for a price. But if somebody does invent such a program and launches such a website, remember: IT WAS MY IDEA!!! and if you steal it I will sue ... and I won't go complaining to the college president first.

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## **The Sound of Music (1965)**

**Historical Revisionism Masked as a Musical, 1 August 2005**

**6 stars**

Recently I had an opportunity to watch "The Sound of Music" and within minutes I was wondering: "Why am I watching this movie?" This movie is corny, contrived, and deals with a story that not only I could not relate to, I couldn't care less what happened to the characters. When a movie suggests that non-Jewish Austrians were also victims of the Nazis, then that movie loses all credibility. The fact is that the Jews were the special targets of Nazi rage; other groups at least had the choice of conforming to avoid being targeted. The Jews did not have that choice. It's too bad the Von Trapps had it rough, but that's because they made it rough on themselves. And by the way, who told the Austrians to invite the Germans into their country? The Austrians welcomed Hitler as their savior and salvation. That is a matter of historical fact. So please don't tell me about an Austrian family that has to flee Austria, and is singing their way through the movie in the process. The Jews in Austria had to get out and so I can understand a movie about, let's say, a Jewish family having to flee for their lives. But a non-Jewish Austrian family, in which the father is a naval officer, having to flee? That's really missing the mark for gaining any kind of empathetic response. And although the musical numbers are catchy, they do not suffice to rescue this movie from the corniness that renders it suitable only for young children who want to learn catchy songs. But if you want to learn what really happened in Austria in 1938, and how Austria openly embraced Nazism, read any credible book on European history during the inter-war years, or better yet, read up on the life and times of three well-known Austrians associated with World War Two - Adolf Eichmann, Adolf Hitler and Kurt Waldheim - and then tell me about the "plight" of the Austrians. Indeed, one can only wonder what J. S. Bach or J. Strauss would have thought if they had been around to witness their country's pitiful decline.

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## **The Star (1952)**

**Stagy but good., 19 August 2006**

**8 stars**

What's a washed up actress who refuses to accept her situation supposed to do? That is the question this movie attempts to answer. Betty Davis gives an outstanding performance as an over-the-hill movie star who still thinks that she has what it takes to get top billing. Although a good movie, with excellent performances, the movie's theme, which is about coping

with change, is treated in a somewhat overstated matter which transforms the movie into something resembling a stage play. Nevertheless, it's still a good movie and worth watching, if for no other reason, because it stars one of the icons of American cinematic history, Betty Davis.

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### **The Swimmer (1968)**

**Self-discovery., 24 October 2005  
10 stars**

I'm not sure what this movie is all about, but who cares? This is a Burt Lancaster vehicle, and he makes this movie happen. He's a man who's lost something and is on quest to retrieve that something, even though it's never clearly spelled out what he has lost. Maybe he lost money, maybe he lost his good reputation, maybe he lost his family, maybe he has lost his mind. But that's not important. What is important in this movie is not the final destination, but the journey itself and the traveler who is embarking on this journey. What we do know is that Ned or Neddie was both liked and disliked, loved and loathed, and popular and scorned, for reasons that are never actually articulated. Instead the movie portrays a man rehashing his life as he goes from pool to pool, each encounter more painful and poignant as he continues on to his ultimate destination. Ned seems to be a good man and a kind man, but is he? We really don't know, but we don't have to know because the movie is not about Ned but about the process of self-discovery itself.

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### **The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3 (2009)**

**Good movie but does not eclipse the 1973 original, 13 June 2009  
7 stars**

If one has not seen the original 1973 edition of this remake of a remake, then you will probably like this movie very much. The problem is that this movie IS a remake of a remake, and shows it. Trying to update the story for a contemporary audience just cheapens the plot and makes it seem contrived, unlike the original that did not require all the noise and chaos shown in this movie to sustain the plot. The major problem with this story is that the main criminal, played convincingly by John Travolta in one of his better performances, actually has a reasonable rationale for wanting to terrorize the city. Okay, the crime is outrageous but he has a motive for doing what he does, unlike in the original movie where motive is irrelevant

and where the crime itself is the story and where the players are anonymous, making their audacious crime seem that much more perplexing and sinister. In this movie the audience soon finds out the identity of the terrorists which takes away their aura of invincibility. In the original, the audience is told very little about the identities of the bad guys (with the exception of the motorman, and even with him, all the audience finds out is that he's a motorman, period). One part of the movie that is an improvement over the original is the portrayal of the mayor, ably played by James Gandofini. Here the mayor becomes much more directly involved in the story which actually strengthens the plot as the mayor is soon revealed as being utterly powerless to do anything despite his authority, thus further empowering the John Travolta character. Denzel Washington plays a lead role but surprisingly does not dominate this movie, which is actually dominated by John Travolta whose strong performance raises this movie from the level of mediocrity to good. But in no way does this remake of a remake eclipse the 1973 original, starring Robert Shaw, Walter Matthau, Martin Balsam and Hector Elizondo, which remains a classic. By the way, although a wonderful actor and despite winning the Academy Award for Best Actor, Denzel Washington is no Walter Matthau and John Travolta, despite his strong performance in this movie, is no Robert Shaw, whose performances set the standard for this genre of movie.

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### **The Ten Commandments (1956)**

**Charlton Heston's Greatest Role., 4 August 2005  
10 stars**

Watched this movie again and again this movie warrants only superlatives. GREAT story, GREAT cast, GREAT acting, GREAT special effects, GREAT costumes, GREAT EVERYTHING. This movie is one of the greatest epics ever produced by Hollywood. The scenes with Yul Brynner and E. G. Robinson and Charlton Heston are iconic; the scenes between Mr. Heston and the beautiful Anne Baxter are cinematic gems. Moreover the story is told in a straightforward way giving the movie the continuity it requires to stay on track, which is essential for a movie that is almost four hours long. Moses was a hero, Rameses his nemesis and Nefeteri the woman who had and then lost the man she loved, a Hebrew man named Moses.

The acting is stagy, but the story is great, and Charlton Heston IS Moses. This is Charlton Heston's greatest role. He is what makes this movie work. Heston gives one of the greatest performances in the history of Hollywood. Whether as the prince of Egypt, or as a slave, or as a shepherd, or as a leader and a prophet, Charlton Heston is the central player in this story. Yul

Brynner, Anne Baxter, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, E. G. Robinson, etc., are great in their supporting roles too, but this is Charlton Heston's movie. This movie conveys the intensity of a time when a people held in cruel bondage were soon to be freed and were soon to be led by someone whose emergence onto the scene is so improbable as to confound everyone around him. For who was Moses? Was he an Egyptian posing as a slave? Was he a Hebrew masquerading as an Egyptian prince? Was he a prophet? Or was he an opportunist, using the plight of the Hebrews to gain a following and thereby confront and defeat his rival Rameses? The movie raises these questions. Now the movie may not be historically accurate, but that's not important. What IS important is the story this movie tells, which is about a man who is on a mission to liberate an entire people from the shackles of slavery and sacrifices everything - wealth, power, the love of Pharaoh's daughter - to accomplish what he sets out to do - and does it.

There are some critics who make fun of this movie for its stagy acting and stodgy story. Well, this is complete balderdash. Yul Brynner and Charlton Heston were never better and Anne Baxter is positively beautiful. The movie is a story about liberation, redemption and hope. It's about people who were led from the house of bondage and became a nation, guided by the great and profound prophet, Moses. That this movie is remembered over fifty years after its release is proof enough of its timelessness.

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### **The Thing from Another World (1951)**

**Beware of unknown frozen objects in the ice., 8 October 2005  
10 stars**

A group of soldiers manning a base in the middle of the polar wilderness confront an unknown alien and engage in a struggle. Nobody knows why this alien creature is there, nor is this creature particularly interested in engaging in peaceful dialogue. All these soldiers know is that it's them against IT, and they can't afford to lose because if they do, all humanity may be doomed. The simplicity of this story coupled with some fine acting makes this movie a science-fiction classic. Noteworthy as well is the presumption that the alien is an enemy and how the alien was discovered - frozen - in a manner to make humanity complicit in its own demise as the soldiers unwittingly free the creature from its icy tomb. Unfortunately, the audience never finds out the creature's story, but there was no time for that. Mankind was too busy defending itself.

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## **The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (1948)**

**Walter Huston, 25 June 2007**

**10 stars**

**This is a great movie. Compelling story, wonderful acting, interesting characters, great screenplay. The movie is a somewhat stagy, but that is offset by one of the best performances ever in a Hollywood movie, namely that of Walter Huston. Mr. Huston is truly the star of this movie. He is without a doubt the actor who transforms this movie from just another two-guys-down-on-their-luck-Western into a cinematic work of art. Tim Holt and Humphrey Bogart also give excellent performances, but this is Walter Huston's movie. This movie does for Walter Huston what The Westerner does for Walter Brennan. Whether deliberately intended or not, in both movies the topped billed actor is out-shined and out-acted by the other actor who's not the main star. In this movie Humphrey Bogart is the topped-billed star, but it is Walter Huston who really stars. And let's not forget Alfonso Bedoya as the bandit. Then again, in this movie who ARE the real bandits?**

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## **The War of the Worlds (2005) (V)**

**If you're really interested in the story, read the book., 18 April 2008**

**4 stars**

**The movie is not as bad as some suggest. The special effects and acting are laughable but unlike other versions of this movie, this one actually follows the book, making it at least something worth watching. Where the movie really fails is in the acting. This movie contains some of the worst acting this reviewer has ever seen in a feature motion picture and the acting is made even worse by the ludicrous special effects that were transposed onto the screen and completely fail to convey the horror of the Martian attack. At times this movie seemed to be a cartoon but without the colorful animation. Also, the main character's constantly running to and fro, or hither and yon, was almost laughable and entirely perplexing given the infestation of Martians who were lurking everywhere, ready to snatch a unwary human for a meal. But despite all these drawbacks the movie still manages to tell a story so for that reason alone it's worth a look. But if you are really interested in the story, read the book.**

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## **The Westerner (1940)**

**Walter Brennan's Greatest Movie., 8 August 2005**

**10 stars**

**This movie contains what has to be one of the great performances by Walter Brennan as Judge Roy Bean. Indeed, the title of this movie should have been "The Story of Judge Roy Bean" starring Walter Brennan. For it is obvious that this movie was a vehicle for Walter Brennan, not for Gary Cooper, who actually was cast in a supporting role in this movie. It is obvious that someone in the studio saw potential in Walter Brennan to star in a major motion picture in which Brennan, who was normally cast in supporting roles, carries the movie. What makes the movie even better is that it is based on a person who actually lived, which made the role even more challenging. Walter Brennan carries this movie and transforms what would have otherwise been just another western into a classic.**

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## **The Wizard of Oz (1939)**

**It's Not a Children's Story, 10 October 2005**

**10 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**An interesting treatment of the human unconscious can be found in the 1939 movie The Wizard of Oz directed by Victor Fleming and featuring Judy Garland, Margaret Hamilton, Billie Burke and Frank Morgan. A young adolescent girl, Dorothy, living with her aunt and uncle on a farm in Kansas, is threatened with the loss of her dog, Toto, who is not only her pet but her best friend, confidante and closest companion. Powerless to prevent Toto from being removed from the home (Toto had bitten Ms. Gulch, the town sour puss), Dorothy runs away from home, taking Toto with her. On the road she encounters a kindly traveling salesman who through clever trickery convinces the highly suggestible girl that she must return home at once. Now alarmed, Dorothy rushes back to her home but on the way a tornado is fast approaching the farm. When she finally arrives home, the family has taken refuge in the cellar and cannot hear Dorothy's frantic banging on the cellar door. Now terrified, Dorothy and Toto rush into the house which is shaking violently from the tornado which is now directly over the house. Dorothy is struck on the head by flying debris and is knocked unconscious. She awakes to find herself in a strange new land called Oz where she meets many interesting characters and experiences many adventures as she struggles to find her way back home. She is told**

by the good witch of the north that she has to follow the yellow brick road. While traveling on the yellow brick road Dorothy's fortitude is repeatedly tested as she fends herself, Toto and her friends against the wicked witch of the west, a violent and malevolent figure who blames Dorothy for the death of her sister, the wicked witch of the east, and has vowed revenge. Finally, after finding the Wizard of Oz, who is revealed to be a fraud, Dorothy is preparing to leave the land of Oz by floating back to Kansas in a balloon. But her plan goes awry when Toto jumps from the balloon and Dorothy follows leaving her stranded as the balloon floats away; at this point she awakes and is disoriented, adamantly insisting to her family and farm hands, who are standing around her, that her dream was real. Dorothy however has changed. At the start of the movie, she is behaving like a frightened little girl, whining and cranky, but after she awakes she has matured and is now aware of the power and strength that was buried deep inside her unconscious and which surfaced in the dream and is now part of her consciousness. Besides presenting a unique and provocative story, what makes this movie particularly effective as a work of art is the strong acting, especially that of Margaret Hamilton whose portrayal of the wicked witch of the west, with her loud, cackling laugh, ugly, distorted sneer, and greenish skin, is the epitome of evil. Far from being campy, this movie explores several psychological themes, including consciousness vs. unconsciousness, developmental issues, inter-familial dynamics, the nature of dreams, and behavioral issues, and highlights virtues such as courage, fortitude and loyalty, delves into the nature of conflict, the nature of terror, provides a credible portrayal of separation anxiety, and explores gender roles and death. Further, a particularly intriguing feature of this movie is that both the protagonist (Dorothy) and antagonist (the wicked witch of the west) are strong female figures locked in a life or death struggle in a hostile, unfamiliar environment. Indeed, the wicked witch of the west directly commands an army while Dorothy directly commands three male figures, including a lion and later the wizard of oz himself. The male characters are portrayed as being dependent, indecisive, vulnerable and subordinate to the females who dominate all facets of the story. And what makes this movie even more impressive is that it was produced not by mental health experts but by a Hollywood studio wanting to create a commercial product based on a book for children written by a journalist. The movie also features several songs that have become iconic fixtures in contemporary western culture and still attracts a large audience, seventy one years after its initial release. The Wizard of Oz may be the most-watched movie in history.

Don't let the title fool you. It's not a children's story. Rather it's a complex tale involving a confused and rebellious teenage girl who runs away from home, is knocked unconscious in a storm and has a dream that is essentially one long nightmare, as the terrified girl desperately seeks a way to return home, a home that she had forsaken. In her nightmare/dream she

meets many bizarre characters, all of whom are caricatures of people she knows in her real life, and these characters are strange and scary, especially the wicked witch who absolutely loathes the girl, who has no one to protect her except three companions whose inadequacies are a central feature of the story. In fact, the girl would have done better to have avoided these characters -the lion who is a coward, the rusty tin man with no heart, and the scarecrow with nothing but hay inside him - but then there would not have been a movie. The music is catchy, and Judy Garland's rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is truly classic, and the color cinematography is great, so I definitely recommend it. But this movie could frighten young children who do not understand the complexities of the story and characters, and could frighten adults as well, especially those adults who are afraid of screaming green skinned women who fly around on broom sticks and melt when they are doused by a bucket of water.

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### **The Woman in the Window (1944)**

What a great movie., 3 September 2010

This movie is a cinematic masterpiece. There is nothing that can be done to improve this movie. It is as close to perfection as is humanly possible to achieve. Outstanding acting, a wonderfully engaging story, snappy dialog, and terrific cinematography make this movie one of the best ever. Edward G. Robinson shows why he is one of the greatest actors in history and Joan Bennett was fantastic as the woman who is the center of all the ruckus. But it was Dan Duryea's performance that is particularly noteworthy. Further compliments are superfluous. The movie speaks for itself. Its continuity, marvelous acting and fast pace are evidence of great direction. What a great movie!

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### **"The Wonder Years" (1988)**

Good TV series, 10 July 2007

I rarely comment on television series. Given the linear nature of the medium, it is difficult if not totally impossible to offer commentary applicable to an entire series, which can comprise dozens of episodes. Quality will vary. However, based upon the episodes I watched, I have concluded that this is a high-quality television series that contains good acting, amusing stories, engaging and likable characters and a credible storyline. Some sitcoms are brilliant, others not so. This sitcom is an

example of high-quality television entertainment that network television is capable of creating when it wants to. Apparently in this case, television wanted to because otherwise it would have been totally forgotten, especially be me.

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### **The Wrestler (2008)**

**Wrestling is fake ... or is it? Mickey Rourke gives an incredible performance., 10 January 2009  
10 stars**

Not since *Requiem for a Heavyweight* has Hollywood produced a more intense movie in the sports genre. A beat up, over-the-hill wrestler portrayed as a hero who finds purpose and redemption in what he does best. Mickey Rourke gives one of the great performances in the sports' movie genre. His performance as the wrestler ranks up there with John Garfield's performance as Charlie Davis in *Body and Soul* and Robert DeNiro's performance as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*. In some respects Mr. Rourke's performance exceeds that of the aforementioned actors. In addition, kudos to Marisa Tomei's powerful performance as a stripper who befriends the wrestler. What makes this movie even more impressive is that it avoids becoming another sappy Hollywood melodrama and instead stays true to the story, which is about the wrestler. After watching this movie, one may come away with a different impression of professional wrestling. Not a mere bunch of overgrown clowns who make fools of themselves, in this movie they are portrayed with dignity and as performers who do difficult and dangerous work. This movie is wonderful. Congratulations to Mickey Rourke and Marisa Tomei for a job well done.

This movie also provides a respectful and sympathetic portrayal of deli countermen, those unsung workers who toil behind the counters at delis, bagel shops, bodegas and supermarkets. How often is a deli counterman the subject of anything, much less a motion picture? After watching this movie you will have a greater understanding and respect for those hardworking fellows, taken for granted, who toast the bread and slice the meat for a hungry public. Indeed, this movie is actually a tribute to working-class people who, like the wrestler, toil to earn a living.

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### **"The X-Files: Dreamland (#6.4)" (1998)**

One of the better episodes., 19 October 2007

10 stars

X-Files is not known for its humor. But this episode is an exception. The switching of personalities is hilarious, especially since the two characters involved in the switch are utterly different in temperament and don't even like each other. Michael McKean is wonderful in this episode. His performance as Morris Fletcher is one of the better TV comic performances. And although Fletcher has his personality quirks he is still likable. This episode proves that a TV drama can delve into comedy without losing its identity or sacrificing dramatic impact. For despite the farcical nature of the story, the underlying premise, that an extraterrestrial entity is somehow involved, remains intact, consistent with the series' theme.

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### **"The X-Files: Triangle (#6.3)" (1998)**

Excellent episode, 22 December 2006

10 stars

Normally I don't comment on individual episodes of a television series, but here I will make an exception. This episode was exceptionally good. It is apparent that the creator of this show decided to "go the extra mile" and "dig a little deeper" to present a compelling story. Here the imagination abounds as Mulder finds himself in a situation that requires making certain difficult choices. The acting is superb and the cinematography is appropriately foreboding. But what makes this particular episode most unique is the non-stop action as two groups fight over control of a ship that contains the key to victory or defeat. Although a work of science fiction, the story provides a glimpse into a period of time when peace was replaced by the sound and fury of war. This episode is excellent.

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### **They Were Expendable (1945)**

Excellent movie., 28 September 2008

9 stars

This movie pays homage to the American soldiers, sailors, airmen, nurses and civilians who answered the call of duty during some of the darkest hours in the war in the Pacific against Japan during the days after the

attack on Pearl Harbor. Although the title of the movie suggests otherwise, none of the brave Americans portrayed in this movie were expendable; each one served their country and did what duty required as part of the war effort, and unlike the wars of today, in this movie there is no ambiguity of purpose, no second-guessing, none of the self-doubt that questions the credibility of why they fight. True there are some who might criticize this movie for its attempts at sentimentality, which seem oddly out of place within the context of the nature of the story, or maybe question why the United States did not more accurately appreciate the Japanese threat to the Philippines and placed its forces in such a vulnerable strategic position resulting in probably the worst single military defeat in U. S. history, but maybe that was just the way movies were made at the time. The cast was great, with Robert Montgomery, John Wayne, Donna Reed, Ward Bond and many others, all of whom give wonderful performances. It's too bad that Ms. Reed was not included in more scenes. But what makes this movie especially effective is the story itself, about Bataan, Corregidor, and the brave Americans who did their utmost under the most challenging circumstances to stave off the enemy and defend the United States until help could arrive, help which they knew would not be immediately forthcoming, the knowledge of which nonetheless did not deter them from doing their duty. Excellent movie.

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### **Thirteen Conversations About One Thing (2001)**

Excellent but sad movie., 6 December 2008  
8 stars

This is an intense, sad movie, with an excellent cast, well crafted but disturbing. This movie attempts to bring the audience in touch with the vagary of life. Whether this can be considered entertainment is debatable. The characters are forlorn, lost souls who are wallowing in disillusion and are bitter about their lives. Pretty heavy stuff. The movie dramatizes their struggle to find meaning in their lives and to discover an explanation for why things turn out they way they do, and here the movie fails. The movie bites off more than it can chew. When a movie delves into the more esoteric aspects of life, like the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, fate vs. coincidence, it's treading on thin ice and it's the rare movie of that genre that succeeds in avoiding the cold water. This is the case because unlike a conventional story that has a beginning, a middle and an end, stories with complex themes leave the audience hanging; they offer no answers, no resolutions, which is frustrating and unsatisfying. Once the director opens the Pandora's box of emotions, either close the box by bringing resolution to whatever is bothering the characters or don't go there in the first place. The movie makes a point that people are bitter. Now

what? Where does the movie go from there? This movie does a great job in dramatizing personal dissatisfaction and the bitterness associated with unfulfilled wishes, but doesn't bring closure. So if you want to watch some fine acting, then this movie is for you. But be warned: it's not a happy movie.

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### Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo (1944)

It's about the Doolittle Raid., 3 August 2005

I know it's a World War Two propaganda movie. And I know that Hollywood treatments of historical subjects must be taken with a huge boulder-size grain of salt. That being said, this is a credible movie that is worth watching. The fact is that the Doolittle Raid DID happen, that in early 1942 the outcome of the war against Japan was at best uncertain, and that Japanese aggression post Pearl Harbor posed a clear and imminent threat to the United States. It's hard to believe that Japan was THAT powerful, but it was. Japan occupied or controlled about one-quarter of the surface of the world, including most of eastern China, all of Manchuria, the ENTIRE Korean peninsula, ALL of southeast Asia, including ALL of Indonesia and Singapore, the Philippines, and the entire western Pacific Ocean. And Japan accomplished this ALL BY ITSELF. So the Doolittle Raid was a truly momentous event, as the movie aptly shows, and thus even with all the clichés and all the stilted and corny acting, the movie is still worth watching. The Doolittle Raid marked the beginning of the end for Japan, because it blew away the myth of Japanese invincibility and proved to the world that it was just a matter of time before a fleet of sixteen B-25 Mitchell bombers would be followed by huge air armadas of B-29s that would crush Japanese militarism for all time and eventually convert Japan from an implacable enemy to an allie and a friend.

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### ¡Three Amigos! (1986)

Any movie with a character named Dusty Bottoms has to be funny., 9 March 2009  
10 stars

There are few if any movies more hilarious than Three Amigos. In this wild and goofy movie, Martin Short, Steve Martin and Chevy Chase are at their comical best. They are assisted by an outstanding supporting cast, including Alphonso Arau, whose portrayal of the villain "El Guapo" is absolutely hilarious. The movie is essentially a spoof on actors who play

actions heroes, mere figments of others' imaginations, yet perceived by the public as being real. What happens when the actors are forced to be the actual characters that they play? The results in this movie are hilarious as the three amigos are confronted with real-life bad guys who themselves are spoofs of Hollywood bad guys. All in all, this is a wonderfully amusing movie. After all, what would you expect from a movie in which Chevy Chase plays a character named Dusty Bottoms?

This is one of the funniest and cleverest movies Hollywood has ever made. Not only are the three main characters hilarious, the bad guys are hilarious too, which makes the movie even more ... hilarious. The story is a spoof on the phoniness of Hollywood movies and how easily people can mistake what is shown on the screen for reality. Given the nature of cinema, this is all too understandable. The heroes and villains projected on the screen are but the products of others' imaginations, yet they are presented in such a clever manner that audience comes to believe that those characters are real or at least wish that they were. Martin Short, Steve Matin and Chevy Chase are at their comical best as three bungling actors who find themselves having to play their roles for real. Although some of the humor may seem corny and contrived, it is the very corniness of the humor that makes this movie so laughable. The name of Mr. Martin's character, Dusty Bottoms, is in itself goofy. What would YOU think of anyone with a name Dusty Bottoms

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### Thumbsucker (2005)

Sometimes your best friend is your thumb., 31 March 2009  
8 stars

This maybe Keanu Reeves' and Vince Vaughn's best movie. Here are two actors who are playing roles that are way outside their usual cast type, and both give excellent performances. This is what happens when actors are given a chance to broaden their performances and in the process show certain sides of their talent that usually are never tapped. It's like Lucille Ball, for instance. Prior to I love Lucy, who ever knew that Lucille Ball had a flair for comedy? Or what about Richard Gere singing and dancing in Chicago? Or Meryl Streep doing the same in Mamma Mia! Hey, ya never know, do ya? As for the story itself, it's actually quite engaging as an insecure teenager struggles to overcome his shyness. As for the thumb sucking, the movie causes the viewer to wonder, who has the problem: the thumb sucker or the people around him.

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## Titanic (1997)

Even though the ship sank, it's still a very good movie, 31 July 2005

9 stars

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

Titanic is Hollywood's biggest moneymaker in history and for good reason - it is a great movie. This movie is about sacrifice, selflessness, love, devotion, joy, passion, all occurring on a doomed ocean liner that suddenly and without warning sinks, resulting in one of the worst maritime catastrophes in history. Kate Winslett is magnificent as the young girl, Rose, barely a teenager, who is being pressured by her overbearing mother to marry Cal, a nasty, brutal man who has only contempt for his unwilling fiancé. That Cal is rich just makes his behavior worse. Rose, by nature a gentle spirit, is angry and desperate to escape, so much so that she is about to commit suicide when she is saved by a young man, Jack, who, despite his shabby appearance, is a well-traveled, sensitive and upbeat artist who treats the troubled young lady with gentleness and respect and she responds. Their love for each other is instantaneous and unconditional and they are willing to die for each other. This is not such an implausible scenario and there is absolutely nothing immoral about their behavior. Rose willingly gives herself to Jack out of love for him, and even decades later still thinks of him as her one and only true love, the man who died for her so she could live. That is love. That is sacrifice. That is life. That is Christian. That they were not formally married is a mere technicality. Given the circumstances of their meeting, a loving and understanding G-d will forgive them. Now regarding the diamond that was given to Rose, instead of cashing it in like she could have, she kept it as a memento to her one true love. That is called character. Nothing unchristian about that. Indeed, the movie is actually about how Rose undergoes a complete transformation from a passive, unhappy, moody adolescent into a composed, mature, independent and beautiful woman, even changing her name, now prepared to go on to live a long and active life. That is, she experiences an epiphany. That is called personal growth which is quite Christian and most exemplary. As for Jack, he is with Rose in spirit and she lives her life accordingly, knowing that if it were not for him she would not have survived. Jack gave his life for Rose so she could live. That is powerfully compelling and completely consistent with Christian teachings.

Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I will: I was waiting for the ship to sink because I was hoping that when the ship sank the movie would end ... but it didn't, and for that I was disappointed. To me, the story of the the Titanic is what happened to the ship, not some contrived, fictional, and highly improbable love story between a Little Miss Rich Girl and a Mr. Nice Guy Ne'er Do Well. The movie is weak for two reasons: First, the movie is

asking me to believe that a young lady would dump her handsome, powerful, influential and above-all wealthy fiancé who has her mother's approval in favor of a no-account nobody who didn't even belong on the ship. Second, since we already know what's going to happen to the ship, much of the excitement is lost. Nevertheless, the portrayal of how the ship actually sank, and the resulting pandemonium, was effectively done. So if the movie had gotten rid of the love story and concentrated instead on how the passengers and crew coped with the impending sinking of the ship, that could have been the basis for an exceedingly dramatic story. But Hollywood being Hollywood, if the story doesn't include at least a smidgen of sex and a big dose of sentimentality, no matter how contrived, then that story won't be the one that makes it onto the screen, and this movie is proof of that statement. As further proof of that statement consider the final scene in which Little Miss Rich Girl, who's now something like 100 years old and a great-grandmother, tosses a multimillion-dollar diamond overboard in the name of love. Even for a movie that's unbelievable. It would have been better if she had used the diamond to pay for a salvaging operation to recover the divan on which she had posed nude for her boyfriend, Mr. Nobody, who, by sheer coincidence, also happened to be an accomplished artist. (Duh!) Now THAT would have made for a good story. The movie could have been entitled: "The Titanic - The Story of a Woman and the Divan that Made Her Famous." Now if somebody out there would like to advance me 50 or 100 million dollars to make this movie, then we'll be in business.

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### **Total Recall (1990)**

Rachel Ticotin's greatest movie, 12 October 2005  
8 stars

Okay, you may ask yourself: "Who is Rachel Ticotin and why should I know about her?" The answer: two movies: "Fort Apache, the Bronx" and this movie. I won't comment here about her role in "Fort Apache..." but as for this movie, although Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sharon Stone have top billing, as far as I'm concerned, it is Ms. Ticotin who made "Total Recall" work. In this movie she is beautiful and heroic and sensitive and loyal. She dominates every scene that she is in and carries the movie. In one scene, she slaps "Doug" and throws him out, and then in the close-up of her face she reveals all of her anguish knowing that she has spurned the man she loved ... and still loves. The inclusion of such a scene came as a surprise to me. It was a great scene. As for the story itself, it's intriguing and the main characters are either very good or very bad. Nothing new there. But if you're a fan of Rachel Ticotin, then watch this movie.

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### **To the Shores of Tripoli (1942)**

**Before Sgt. Foley there was Sgt. Smith., 31 May 2006**

**8 stars**

**After watching this movie, I now know where the "Officer and a Gentleman" screen writers probably got their idea for the character Sgt. Foley. Randolph Scott was the Sgt. Foley of the 1940s. This movie was made during World War Two, but it spares us the jingoistic propaganda associated with most war movies of that era and offers interesting and likable characters, especially Maureen O'Hara as a Navy nurse and John Payne as the recruit. While watching this movie I thought of Richard Gere and how he would have fit in well in this movie. The similarities between this movie and "Officer" must be more than just coincidental. "Officer" was more intense but this movie did not need to rely on such theatrics to maintain audience interest because the star of this movie was the USMC itself.**

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### **Trading Places (1983)**

**Dan Ackroyd's greatest role., 7 November 2005**

**10 stars**

**This movie is supposed to be a comedy. Well, it isn't. It has its funny moments, but the theme is profound and serious, namely, what happens when a man, portrayed by Dan Ackroyd, who has money, a house, a butler, and a beautiful girl friend, is suddenly and inexplicably divested of every symbol of who he is as a person, leaving him completely baffled, utterly destitute, and for the first time in his life, totally alone. So complete is the man's fall that his rage soon turns into an overwhelming despair that soon compels him to attempt suicide, which fails, further reinforcing the his feelings of utter destitution. For he has no idea why this has happened to him; has no idea that he is the patsy in a cruel game devised by his bosses who hold him in utmost contempt. And what makes this "joke" even more outrageous and emotionally devastating is that the man, who is smug, conceited, vain, foppish and entirely clueless as to how little he is liked, is immediately replaced by a street person, played by Eddie Murphy, thus proving that he is easily replaceable, entirely expendable, and therefore of no real value to anyone. The effectiveness of this movie depended on having an actor who could convey the frantic desperation of a man whose life has been turned upside down and whose false sense of security has**

been forever shattered as he is forced to come to terms with the precariousness of his own existence, and here Dan Ackroyd does the job. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Ackroyd's performance warranted at least a nomination for best actor award. Eddie Murphy was excellent too as the homeless man who unwittingly is also a pawn in this elaborate game of switching places, but this movie is first and foremost a Dan Ackroyd vehicle. This is Dan Ackroyd's greatest movie.

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### **Training Day (2001)**

Police officer goes bad -, 11 December 2005  
8 stars

If you are a cynic and desperately need to find a movie that will confirm your cynicism, then this is the movie for you. This movie offers a frank and graphic portrayal of a corrupt police officer. The police officer in question, played magnificently by Denzel Washington, is both a terrifying and pathetic character because he is a man who projects a facade of strength which is a caricature of the social misfits who abound in his universe. For the Denzel Washington character, rules of ethical conduct are utterly meaningless and are to be ridiculed and ignored. The problem with this movie is that it glorifies the corrupt cop who is portrayed as being tough and all-knowing when in fact his thinking and perceptions are completely distorted. Accordingly, his behavior becomes maladaptive and can lead only to disaster. As a result, he is ruined, both as a police officer and a man. Sad.

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### **Traitor (2008)**

Excellent movie., 2 September 2008  
9 stars

This is an excellent movie. This was evident by the fact that while the movie was playing the audience stayed absolutely quiet. Usually when a movie is a clunker the audience starts fidgeting and becomes restless. This movie kept the audience's attention. The star of this movie was Guy Pearce who gives a compelling performance as a government operative. Of course, Don Cheadle gives another excellent performance, this time playing a character whose loyalty is put to the test under the strangest circumstances. The story immediately grabs the audience's attention and dramatizes the dynamics and issues relating to the government's response

to terrorism and provides an interesting take on the challenges associated with police work and undercover infiltration.

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### **Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (2009)**

**Pull the plug on this pathetic, pretentious hunk of junk., 26 June 2009  
1 star**

**This movie is so awful, so devoid of anything that even remotely resembles a work of art that one can reasonably conclude that the director was instructed to sacrifice any vestige of artistic quality in order to make a quick buck. There can be no other credible explanation for why this weird cartoon/live action concoction was made in the first place. The producers of this movie must have gotten together and decided that they will make a movie suitable for a four-year-old but advertise it as a PG-13 movie and thus sucker in adults to watch this incredible cinematic mess. In fact, this film is so bad that no child should be made to have to watch this cacophony of noise. There are enough problems in this world that we do not need to add a movie that shows machines behaving like people and so-on-and-so-forth.**

**Sometimes a movie is bad because of poor directing, sometimes because of poor acting, sometimes because of a poor script, sometimes because of poor cinematography and sometimes because of other creative factor. This movie combines the worst features of all the categories mentioned. This movie, which is part cartoon and part live action, seems determined to delete or play down anything that even remotely resembles a coherent and intellectually stimulating plot. The fundamentally infantile plot is overshadowed only by the gratuitous use of special effects that are so cartoon-like that it makes one wonder why this movie even bothered to use actors at all. But what ultimately destroys this movie as a quality work of art is a ponderous, pedestrian, witless and implausible plot that asks the audience to root for or at least care about machines, big, noisy, ugly, clanking, machines, which is definitely stretching literary license to the limit. A machine is ... a machine and to invest it with human qualities is an untenable concept that is bound to destroy the plausibility of any story and this movie is no exception. This would be like having the USS Enterprise become one of the characters in Star Trek or a tank or aircraft carrier having something to say in a war movie. But that is what this movie asks the audience to accept, and it does not work because it cannot work. Machines fighting ... settling grudges ... discussing issues of good vs. bad ... ugh! Now, the movie does make an intriguing attempt to mimic the opening scenes from 2001 A Space Odyssey, but quickly slides back to a level of intellectual sophistication appropriate for a child - a very young,**

preliterate child. It is as if the director had no confidence in the screenwriter or lost confidence in the power of cinema to actually tell a literate story, and instead opted to fill the movie with ridiculous special effects a la the recent remake of King Kong with its plethora of incredibly hysterical special effects that reduced THAT movie to the level of a cinematic joke. Indeed, this movie might have worked better if King Kong HAD made a cameo appearance and duked it out with one of the bad guy machines. King Kong vs. The Machines. But that's another story. This movie is so devoid of intellectual content that it makes one of Michael Bay's other movies, Pearl Harbor, seem like a first-class production of Shakespeare. Enough already. Just pull the plug on this noisy, pretentious, ludicrous, inane, boring, and decidedly obtuse clunker. Or better yet, just take it out of circulation and stick it in the junk yard with all the other rusting and worthless pieces of junk.

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### **Tremors (1990)**

**Everyone should know a Burt Gummer., 9 September 2005**  
**7 stars**

This movie shows that during times of great adversity, when your very survival is being threatened by forces or things beyond your control, it always helps to have a guy like Burt Gummer around. You know - the guy who knows what to do and is willing to do it, no matter who or what is opposing him. You know - the guy who will roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty to make sure that whatever is broken is fixed, the guy who is part building superintendent, part auto mechanic, part infantry soldier and part lumberjack, all rolled into one. He's not a leader and he's not a follower. He's grouchy but friendly. He's not too fond of people but will give you the shirt off his back. He's a guy named Burt.

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### **Tropic Thunder (2008)**

**Strong action movie but not a comedy., 15 August 2008**  
**8 stars**

This movie has an interesting premise. What happens when the movie becomes real ... and the actors don't know it? It could work as a comedy, and here the results are mixed, but that is not surprising because it is primarily an action movie interspersed with some comedy scenes. Ben Stiller is quite amusing in as Simple Jack, which is a parody of Rain Man,

but it is Robert Downey Jr. who steals the show with his incredible performance as a white guy playing a black guy who gets so caught up in the role that he is on the verge of having a mental breakdown. This movie is further proof that Robert Downey Jr. is one of Hollywood's great actors. Give him a role, he will make it happen. What's next for Mr. Downey? Perhaps a musical? If so, you know he will be great. Jack Black was also wonderful and the rest of the supporting cast, particularly young Brandon Soo Hoo, give excellent performances. If you're looking for a comedy with lots of laughs, this may not be the movie for you. But if you want to watch an action movie with some excellent and at times amusing performances then this movie is for you.

**Additional comments:** I am revising my rating upward from 6 to 8. This is a good movie, with interesting performances, and with moments of humor that add to the movie without detracting from the action. The three lead actors are excellent and the story is unique.

This is not the first movie from the movie-turns-into-real-life genre. Three Amigos, The Purple Rose of Cairo and the French Lieutenants's Woman also have similar premises.

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### **Troy (2004)**

**Better than I expected., 25 August 2005  
8 stars**

When I heard that Hollywood was making an epic movie based on Homer that would star Brad Pitt and Eric Bana, I thought to myself: "NO WAY! IT WON'T WORK!" Subsequently I watched the movie and was pleasantly surprised. The movie "worked"; both Mr. Pitt and Mr. Bana were quite good and the story, although greatly condensed, was still credible and watchable. In fact, this movie restored my faith in Hollywood's ability to make an epic movie that's more than just a tedious exercise in special effects. For although "Troy" is loaded with special effects, it actually tells a story. Yes ... TELLS A STORY! So if you want to watch an epic movie with good acting and which actually tells a story, then watch this movie. By the way, this movie is also one of the great anti-war movies, and if you know the story of Helen of Troy, you will know what I mean.

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### **Twilight (2008/I)**

**Why was this movie made?, 27 November 2008**

**1 star**

**Some movies are so good that they are talked about, often quoted and thought of almost with reverence decades after their first release. Twilight is not one of those movies. Twilight is fluff, utterly forgettable, and gives cause to wonder why anyone would want to make this movie in the first place. This movie is so nondescript and so devoid of anything that is even remotely interesting that calling it a bad movie would give it too much credit. In times past this movie would have been assigned to the B portion of a double feature and be given little if any notice. The story contains certain interesting features but at no time does it make any dramatic impact worth noting. The movie may work as escapist fare if you feel like going to the movies to take a nap, but given the high price of tickets today, that is not an advisable option. So if you feel like taking a nap, go watch this movie when it comes out on a DVD or better yet when it is shown on network television at which time you can start watching it and then go to sleep in the comfort of your own home.**

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### **Two for the Money (2005)**

**Flip of a coin., 25 October 2005**

**9 stars**

**There's a saying: "Hope springs eternal." And there is no movie where this saying is more aptly dramatized than in this movie. Here, the main character is a gambler who is so consumed by his obsession that he hosts his own cable TV show which offers, for a substantial fee, "expert" advice on which football games to pick. And to conduct this business he hires football handicappers who, like stock brokers, advise their clients on which teams to pick. Now one of these handicappers is an ex-college football player who has an uncanny knack for making the right picks most of the time. Now the gambler/businessman/hustler believes that this handicapper has a special gift, when in fact IT'S PURE DUMB LUCK! But the gambler/businessman/hustler does not accept that, even when his star handicapper starts losing and losing BIG. Although the gambler/businessman/hustler projects the image of a successful businessman and TV impresario, he is nothing more than just another**

loser/gambler who is willing to gamble everything on a handicapper who is just another guy. Yet, what compels this gambler/businessman/hustler to believe in this guy and invest huge sums of money on this handicapper's picks is the hope, and fixed belief, that his star handicapper will pick that one big game that will bring in the dough and keep the action going.

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### **Undisputed (2002)**

**Maybe the best movie about boxing., 28 June 2009  
10 stars**

**What a great movie! In this movie there are no good guys or bad guys, just different shades of bad guys. Nobody in this movie is good. Cynicism abounds. Move over Rocky Balboa and Apollo Creed. Here comes Monroe Hutchens and George Chambers, and they're tougher, meaner and better actors than anything Balboa and Company could deliver. This movie is fast paced, action packed, tense, with a great plot, as two men immediately square off for the championship of ...? For this is why this movie is so great. It's about anger with no place to go, no place where it can be vented, except in the ring, as hardcore criminals take sides in a fight that plays into their violent natures. The Rocky movies don't even come close to portraying this aspect of boxing. In this movie the fighters ARE violent, they ARE unapologetic and they do NOT like each other. That is, there is no pretentiousness here. The question is a simple one: who will win and who will lose? There are some who may assert that that boxing is portrayed in a negative manner, but that is not the case. In this movie boxing is elevated to the level of a gladiatorial contest where more than money is at stake. So if you want to watch a movie about boxing, this is the movie to watch. It offers the most direct, unabashed, and straightforward examine of one of the most basic form of competition, boxing. Also, Ving Rhames gives a great performance and manages to carry this movie from beginning to the end, and proves once again that he is a great actor.**

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## **Untraceable (2008)**

**Look out for websites, 2 February 2008**

**6 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

The internet as a terrorist tool? What will Hollywood think of next? This movie had definite possibilities of being a very good, even great movie, but alas it was not to be. Mediocrity abounds; the bad guy does really gruesome stuff (which of course is graphically shown in the movie - don't want to leave anything to imagination), but he has a plausible reason for going bonkers - the mass media shamelessly exploited his father's death. So who's sicker - the bad guy (who by the way is young, handsome, well-groomed and articulate) or the mass media which televises a mentally disturbed man (who is a university professor) on a bridge committing suicide by shooting himself in the head and then showing the body falling onto the street below? This is not the first movie that's about a disgruntled person using technology to act out a gripe, but it is unique in the clumsy and heavy handed manner in which the scenario is presented. Other than that it's a good movie.

At the start of this movie I knew this was going to be a long movie. The movie was supposed to be a taut, suspenseful action/thriller/who-done-it, but turned out to be another Hollywood formula special-effects lemon with lots of gratuitous sado-violence that apparently Hollywood believes sells. Also, the actress Diane Lane was miscast and the movie reeked of mediocrity. As for the story, it had possibilities of being the basis for a good action/thriller but alas it was not to be. But the weakest part of the movie is the end which is anticlimactic and so formula-based. Hollywood seems to have a problem making movies with strong endings. But if you decide to watch this movie, do so with this warning: know your websites because by logging on to a website you may be aiding and abetting a crime.

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## **Up in the Air (2009/I)**

**Good and not so good., 22 December 2009**

**6 stars**

How does one go about firing someone? What is the best way to get rid of a worker? These questions are the basis of this movie which highlights the

precarious nature of our existence. George Clooney gives a strong and convincing performance as man who lives his life according to certain principles and when he abandons his own principles winds up paying the price. This movie is rather offbeat and in some ways reminds one of the kind of movies made by John Cassavetes, with his semi-documentary style that emphasized reality over conventional story telling. For this movie is based on a theme that we can all relate to, namely the unpredictability of life. Whether this movie succeeds as an entertainment piece is questionable, but as a social commentary, it does have merit.

There is a saying which goes something like this: know your limits. This movie completely ignores that maxim and the results are, not unexpectedly, a poorly crafted movie. While an attempt to explore the human condition is a commendable project, it may be asking a bit much for a Hollywood production company to do the job. Let's face it, Hollywood is good for churning out assembly line fluff but please, don't ask it to get into something as deep, serious and profoundly puzzling as the meaning of life itself. That is just being unrealistic, yet this movie, this Hollywood production, attempts just that, and not only does a poor job of it, but makes their effort even more embarrassing by trying to make light of the subject. You have a guy who basically lives in hotels and travels around the country doing corporate dirty work and we're supposed to expect that he has something serious to say? That he knows something that we don't already know? Yeah ... right. The theme of the rootless man was already treated in the movie *Trains, Planes and Automobiles* with far better results because whereas this movie is heavy handed and flat, at least John Candy and Steve Martin brought some comic relief to an otherwise dull topic. George Clooney is an excellent actor for certain roles but he's no John Candy so don't expect the laughs that Mr. Candy would have elicited playing the exact same role. His acting is wooden, his demeanor flat, his persona null. It has to be his worst performance. There was a time when Hollywood had the creative capability to produce credible cinematic works that explore various aspects of the human condition but those days are gone, a relic of history, replaced by glossy special effects extravaganzas and dominated by the stunt men who are now the real stars. Let Hollywood do what it's good at and leave it to others to create more substantive work. After all, it's only a movie.

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## Valkyrie (2008)

Tom Cruise gives a strong and dignified performance., 25 December 2008  
8 stars

A prudent movie goer approaches with caution any commercial movie that purports to be based on an actual historical event. Usually by the time the movie is released the facts are so distorted as to render the actual event almost unrecognizable. Surprisingly this movie is an exception. Although the actual assassination attempt on Hitler failed, this movie succeeds in establishing and maintaining the level of suspense required to keep the audience engaged. Tom Cruise gives a surprisingly strong and dignified performance as the German officer who plays a crucial role in planning and implementing the plot. The supporting cast, which includes several outstanding English actors including Terence Stamp who plays an uncharacteristically sympathetic role, are also excellent. What makes this movie especially effective is that it avoids stereotyping the Germans as a bunch of goose-stepping Nazis or in the case of the assassins a bunch of frantic anti-Nazi fanatics and instead stays true to the story which involves a group of individuals trying to stop a war against all odds. That they fail is not the point because the audience already knows that. Rather, that they were willing to take action at all is what makes this movie a special cinematic experience.

Another interesting feature of this movie is its treatment of how the German soldiers, including the plotters, dealt with the loyalty oath that every German soldier swore to Adolf Hitler. This meant that the mere thought of opposing Hitler was tantamount not only to committing treason but acting with dishonor which would cause that soldier to be held in utmost contempt by his fellow soldiers, a disgrace that few soldiers could endure. (Of course, when one considers who the German soldiers were fighting for and the crimes many of them committed in the name of their leader, one must question the extent to which ethical considerations played a role in anything the German soldiers did.)

Now here's the negatives about this movie. What is especially ironic is that while the Germans were invading countries, committing genocide and killing people by the millions, they could not assassinate one person. The Germans were systematically murdering Jews - they had no qualms about THAT - but apparently killing the Fuehrer was another story. Remember, the plotters were senior military officers, not unarmed civilians, who had access to all the weapons they needed to to the job. Yes, the Germans were very "brave" when fighting unarmed Jews but when it came to dealing with their Fuehrer, the person to whom they voluntarily swore allegiance, then their bravery failed them. Where was the opposition on September 1, 1939 (when Germany invaded Poland)? Or on June 21, 1941 (when Germany

invaded the Soviet Union)? May 29, 1942 (when the British obliterated Cologne)? Or on January 30, 1943 (when the Soviet Union captured the German 6th Army at Stalingrad)? This doesn't make the assassination attempt any less significant but it should be placed within an historical context. History records that Adolf Hitler was adored ... indeed loved ... by the German people, a fact that the German people will have to deal with for a long time to come. Germans opposed Adolf Hitler? So what? Too little, too late. And who were they to repudiate their oath of allegiance? Guided by a misplaced sense of honor, they chose to follow the Fuehrer, so they had no cause to complain. The Fuehrer had not duped them, they had duped themselves. This movie teaches that one should take great care to whom to swear allegiance. The same officers who plotted against Hitler also participated in aggressive war which set the stage for genocide. That they had second thoughts about the direction the war was going is commendable but it does not absolve them of their own complicity in implementing Hitler's policies.

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### Vanity Fair (2004)

Another Reese Witherspoon gem., 3 March 2006  
8 stars

This is not the first remake of the this movie, and probably it won't be the last. Be that as it may, this is a good movie, and for one reason: Ms. Reese Witherspoon. Ms. Witherspoon offers a wonderfully joyful and upbeat portrayal of the main character of the story, Becky Sharpe. She is absolutely wonderful. While all kinds of misadventures and problems befall her friends, Becky is there to provide support and encouragement, like the true friend that she is. It's apparent that this movie is a vehicle for showcasing Ms. Witherspoon, and she comes through with flying colors. If you're a Reese Witherspoon fan, then watch this movie. You won't be disappointed.

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## Vantage Point (2008)

Montage of confusion. Good try, but no cigar., 25 February 2008

5 stars

\This movie has an interesting format and a good story. The movie also contains good performances. Generally, I liked the movie, but (yes, the proverbial "but") after a while the movie became repetitive because of the repeated utilization of flashbacks. This movie is the king of the flashbacks. If you do not like movies with flashbacks, then stay away from this movie. I don't know of another movie where flashbacks are more extensively employed. The problem with flashbacks is that, when improperly placed, they interrupt the continuity of a movie and muddle the storyline. The story has to move forward otherwise the movie, like an airplane that loses speed in flight, stalls. And that is what happens in this movie. Also, this is not one of William Hurt's better movies. However, many of the supporting actors give strong performances but ultimately the movie cannot sustain what is a promising start.

One feature of this movie deserves special note. Although probably not intended as such, this movie contains one of the funniest car chase scenes in the history of Hollywood. The car chase is so ridiculous that it provokes laughter and adds to the movie's already baffling montage of confusion.

By the way, if you like watching scenes of bombs and mayhem shown over and over again, this movie will be perfect for you. Imagine watching the initial D-Day invasion scenes in Saving Private Ryan ten times from ten different perspectives. Watching it once is enough.

Another negative is the Sigourney Weaver's relegation to an almost minor role. A great actress like Ms. Weaver deserves better. Another case of miscasting, but what else is new?

Now, let me get back to the car chase. Sometimes a car chase adds to the story, but this is one time when a car chase, especially one that is shown over and over again and from different angles, is just plain dumb. And when the movie throws in a little girl into the vehicular mess, you know that the movie can now claim one more victim - originality. Where is Hopalong Cassidy when we need him? Or Roy Rogers? Or Gene Autry? Or the Lone Ranger?

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## **Vicky Cristina Barcelona (2008)**

**An Open Letter to Woody Allen, 27 August 2008**

**4 stars**

**Dear Mr. Allen: While I struggled to watch your movie, which cost me a certain amount of money and time, I could not help but arrive at this thought: maybe it is time for you to retire. I don't say this lightly. After all, you are fully entitled to continue pursuing your career but if you do, try not to duplicate this ponderous, pretentious clunker that was trying to make some kind of statement about people and relationships and life, but winds up just feeding the audience a bunch of pseudo-philosophical mush. If you're going to tell a story, at least try to make it interesting and ease off on the use of narratives. The characters in this story are uninteresting, uninspiring and unlikable and if you were trying to create another Sideways for women, it does not work. Your movie lacks the freshness and zest that made Sideways so wonderful. Relationships come and go, people are fickle and confused and are chronically wanting more to fill in the emptiness. We already know that and you don't have you take it upon yourself to try to drive these points home because frankly who can like a movie that goes out of its way to make people feel sad.**

**Also, your movie deals with issues such as marital infidelity, mental illness, cultural conflict and anger but does so in such a heavy-handed and pedestrian way that by the time the movie is over ... and in this movie time drags ... nothing has been resolved, everything is a mess, the characters go on with their lives and the conflicts persist. The American men are portrayed as vacuous wimps, the Spanish man as a cloddish fool, his ex-wife as a shrieking banshee and the American women as weak, suggestive dummies. Wow, what a movie! So Mr. Allen, please don't make another movie like this. Do a remake of Play It Again Sam instead.**

**By the way, your movie causes me to wonder whether you ever watched the movie For Whom The Bells Toll with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman. This movie is also set in Spain but unlike your movie, the characters, especially the women, are strong and resourceful. Or let's contrast the mushy characters in your movie with those found in Double Indemnity or Mildred Pierce. Mr. Allen, please ... Please ... PLEASE do not make another movie like Vicky Christina Barcelona. All you are doing is perpetuating groundless stereotypes that are not funny.**

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## **Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (1961)**

**Not the greatest movie but still worth watching., 22 June 2007**

**6 stars**

**This movie definitely is not one of Hollywood's better sci-fi flicks. It has its drawbacks. The story is weak, the props seem cheap (I'm certain they weren't) and some of the performances border on the embarrassing. But ... BUT ... this movie is still worth watching for one reason: Joan Fontaine. When considering who are some of Hollywood's greatest actresses, Joan Fontaine must be included on that list. Now this movie is not one of Ms. Fontaine's better works, but so what? That she is in the movie is enough to at least give notice about the movie. And let's not forget another great actor, Walter Pidgeon, who is also in this movie. This movie certainly has its weaknesses, but at least it features two of Hollywood's better actors, so for that reason it's worth watching.**

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## **W. (2008/I)**

**W - Spoof or drama? This movie gives the sandwich a bad name., 27**

**October 2008**

**3 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**Never has the sandwich figured more closely in a movie than in W. In this movie the sandwich is more than just an item for food, it is a security blanket and a source of great comfort for its chief user, the star of this movie, the main character, the main man, the chief honcho, our leader and devoted baseball fan, a man called "W". When confronted with adversity, when under pressure to make a decision, whenever perplexed or confounded, the sandwich makes its appearance. This movie includes some unique close-ups of W consuming food and drink. It is unclear whether these scenes are intended as a spoof or drama. Equally edifying is the charming bedroom scene in which W is having a heart-to-heart talk with his wife, Laura, while he is sitting on the toilet bowl performing a bodily function. Not exactly Shakespeare. Indeed, not exactly Popeye the Sailor either. And let's not leave out the scene where W wants to go "mano y mano" with his father who he calls "Poppi". The scene evokes laughter. The question is: is this movie a comedy intended to mock the current President or is it just a story about a rather intellectually stilted and emotionally troubled man, with no discernible talent for anything, who manages to become President of the United States.**

**This movie has several problems: 1. Lack of a strong central character. Here the central character, "W" is portrayed as a small minded, disgruntled alcoholic whose behavior, mannerisms and world outlook never changes. 2. Lack of any major dramatic conflict. The closest thing to an antagonist to W is W's father, who is an unconvincing and weak antagonist for the troubled W. 3. The characters surrounding W have little depth and with the exception of Colin Powell are as equally small minded and myopic as their boss, which makes for boring and unintentionally laughable dialog. This movie can best be described in one word: stultifying. Major historical figures are reduced to comic-book facsimiles more suitable for a cartoon and history takes a back seat to a futile search for something that even remotely resembles drama. Josh Brolin does a good job portraying W but the problem is that the character of W is smaller than life. On the plus side, this movie cast light on why Colin Powell did not run for President and why he endorsed Barack Obama instead of the John McCain. Mr. Powell's endorsement of Sen. Obama was payback for the disdainful manner he was treated by W and company. The movie also provides an interesting portrayal of the Bush's administration's struggle to extricate itself out of the quandary it created over the absence of WMDs in Iraq and the unbelievably haphazard way decisions were made by W and his clique, all a reflection of W's muddled and unsettled state of mind. If this movie accomplishes nothing else it at least gives credence to the belief that W could be the most ineffective and intellectually stilted President since at least World War Two and maybe in all U.S. history and leaves one wondering how such a petty person could have been elected to high office. If you follow politics then this movie is worth watching, otherwise skip it. Oliver Stone should be given credit for not reducing this movie to a political hatchet job, which in the case of W would have been easy to do, but given the paucity of any real dramatic content in this movie, one must grope for an answer for why this movie was made. FDR transcended his physical disability, Lincoln rose to the occasion to deal with the Civil War (a war he did not start), JFK became a martyr, Nixon experienced an incredible rise to and fall from power, and W ... and W ... and W ... was angry at his father? That's it?**

**There are two performances that warrant special mention, that of Richard Dreyfus as VP Cheney and Thantie Newton as Condie Rice. Their performances are among the most campy in all Hollywood history, with Cheney being portrayed as something resembling a shifty-eyed ferret and Rice closely resembling, and sounding remarkably similar to Alvin the Chipmunk (with no disrespect intended for either cartoon-like character.)**

**This movie also offers what is perhaps the most unflattering portrayal of cabinet level officers since Stanley Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove, except that W is based on actual people. All of the characters are portrayed as being petty, narrow minded, insensitive political hacks who place party ahead of**

country and are entirely clueless as to the extent of the damage they are causing and couldn't care less. So what else is new? But most apparent is the movie's utter lack of dramatic content. The main character, W, is an emotional dud. He goes through changes in his life but he does not incorporate these changes into his view of the world, which remains narrow and stunted. That does not make for a good movie. The story is entirely devoid of anything that even remotely resembles drama. We're shown the booze guzzling, the irritability, the shiftlessness, and the restlessness but none of it evokes sympathy as the character W is essentially unlikeable. The story of W would not even make it as a soap opera and although the movie touches upon substantive themes, such as substance abuse, personality issues, family conflict, obsessive ambition, and compulsive eating, they remain peripheral to the story. Instead, the director seems intent on portraying W as an emotionally stilted and intellectually narrow, spoiled brat. Like, what else is new? Ugh, what a waste of celluloid.

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### **Wake Island (1942)**

**It Actually Happened, 14 August 2005**

**8 stars**

"Wake Island" is one of those movies that cannot be dismissed as mere World War Two propaganda. The fact is that the battle for Wake Island actually happened, which is what this movie is about. Okay, some of the characterizations are pure Hollywood and the conflict between the military and civilian personnel is contrived, yet what is NOT contrived is the event itself. A small detachment of Marines and civilian contractors did hold the Japanese at bay for about two weeks and did this knowing that they were on their own and that there would be no reinforcements. So let's give credit where credit is due, and take the time to watch this movie. The men on Wake Island were heroes and this movie does them credit.

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### **Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story (2007)**

**Great spoof. However, if you are a bathroom sink, you will not like this movie., 2 January 2008  
10 stars**

**What a surprisingly funny and entertaining movie. This movie is one of the best spoofs on media stars to come out in a long time. Not only was John C. Reilly wonderful in his role as Dewey Cox, the entire cast was great. Special commendation must be afforded to Raymond J. Barry who plays Dewey's rambunctious father. Mr. Barry was truly hilarious. Now there a lot of nudity in this movie, but it's part of the story and without it the story of Dewey Cox could not be effectively told. If you like a clever script, strong comedic acting, and a movie that is a great parody of the entertainment industry and undoubtedly draws its material from the actual depraved behavior of some of the most well-known and internationally famous entertainment stars, then this movie is for you. Remember, though, the humor is adult and it's not for kids.**

**There are so many things wrong with Dewey the character. At times he can be downright nasty; most of the time he is thoughtless and self-centered. Nevertheless, the creators of this movie have succeeded in developing a character who, despite his myriad of shortcomings, is likable, and, unlike the mentally challenged and emotionally stilted Forrest Gump, is a creditable metaphor for the human condition - and for a Hollywood movie, that's impressive.**

**This movie also devotes a lot of time to some rather unconventional utilization of bathroom plumbing.**

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### **Walk the Line (2005)**

**Unflattering yet powerful portrayal of a music legend. Then again, any movie that features a pretty lady who plays the autoharp can't be bad.,**

**22 November 2005  
9 stars**

**Once again, Hollywood offers another sensationalist movie bio of a public figure, this time Johnny Cash, focusing on his personal problems for the sake of grabbing the audience's attention. Yes, Johnny Cash had a lot of**

personal problems - early in his life. Okay ... so what? Why focus on that? Why not focus instead on the fact that he was a U.S. Air Force veteran? Or that he was one of the most brilliant pop song writers in American music history? Or that for much of his professional life he was a social activist? Or that he got his substance abuse problem under control? The story of Johnny Cash is more than he had a substance abuse problem. The story of Johnny Cash is what he accomplished despite the substance abuse problem.

This movie offers an unflattering yet interesting portrayal of one of the most gifted popular musical artists in American history, Johnny Cash. The portrayal is unflattering because it shows Mr. Cash as being a self-centered, pill-popping, emotionally fragile philanderer who neglects his family and almost wrecks his career. But the movie also provides an interesting and engaging portrayal of a gifted musical artist who became an musical icon in his own time. The movie's suggestion that Mr. Cash had to overcome adversity to achieve success is unconvincing. Although he came from poverty, Mr. Cash's background was not one of deprivation. According to the movie, Mr. Cash's father was judgmental and overbearing, but so what? What the storyline lacks, however, is more than made up for by the music, and this involves an outstanding performance by Joaquin Phoenix who in this movie IS Johnny Cash. Indeed, Mr. Phoenix's uncanny portrayal of the musical legend is akin to that of Fay Dunaway's amazing portrayal of Joan Crawford in "Mommy Dearest." Also, Reese Witherspoon offers a strong performance as June Carter. What makes their performances even more remarkable is that neither one are known for being musical artists. Yet they sing, play musical instruments and are quite good. How many movies portray anyone playing an auto-harp? This movie is proof that when actors are given the opportunity, they can reveal a wide range of artistic talents that they otherwise would not be called upon to perform. His personal life notwithstanding, Johnny Cash was a great performer and for that reason alone this movie is worth watching.

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### Wall Street (1987)

Great Movie, 19 June 2006  
10 stars

This movie is great. It offers a substantive story, it's well-acted and the dialog is great. The character of Gordon Gekko is a classic. Gekko is the ultimate symbol of materialistic corruption. Gekko doesn't build, he destroys; he doesn't help, he hurts; he doesn't make things better, he

makes things worst. And all this takes place behind a glossy facade that hides his fundamental depravity. This may be Michael Douglas's best movie. He is truly the star of this movie. He gives an outstanding performance of a man who is driven by unrestrained greed, fueled by the desire to profit at the expense of others, and to use people for his own selfish purposes.

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### **Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps (2010)**

**Gekko as prophet. Wow, what a movie!, 29 September 2010  
9 stars**

**\*\*\* Spoilers \*\*\***

**This movie is a searing indictment on the venality of financial interests who almost destroyed the economy of the world in their reckless and selfish quest to get rich quick - at everyone else's expense. What's worse, when the financial system started collapsing, the highest levels of the government panicked and, responding to scare tactics that were utterly transparent, caved in to demands that the government fork over hundreds of billions of dollars of public money to bail out the system that the inside traders had ruined. The movie raises this question: what would have happened if the federal government had flat out told the banks, "You're on you own." Would the atm's stopped spewing out money? Would the banks have closed? Or were these alarmist predictions of doom just part of a transparent ploy on the part of some to shake down the taxpayers? What a Gordon Gekko did in the 1980s would have attracted scant attention if done today. Then, it took inside trading, cleverly concealed, to gain unfair advantage and earn public scorn. Now, according to the movie, mere innuendo is enough to start a panic and destroy entire brokerage houses, leaving behind the wreckage for the financial vultures to pick through at leisure. To knowingly disseminate false rumors in order to affect trading is a federal offense, but one would never know it from watching this movie. Here, EVERYONE, including the good guy, is violating the law as brokers use the trading floor to settle personal scores. In one scene, the good guy spreads an untrue rumor which causes the bad guy to lose 142 million dollars. One hundred forty two million dollars of capital, money that could have been used to build a hospital, schools, day care centers, down the drain, vanished, gone forever! That is economic warfare of the lowest and nastiest variety. Yet, according to this movie, that's business as usual and government regulators are no where to be found. It is as if those regulatory**

agencies don't even exist. Wow, what a movie! One might say that it's just a movie, don't read too much into it. Yet the events of 2008 did happen, so the movie is more than mere hyperbole. If anything, this movie probably understates the extent of the damage done. Josh Brolin should be nominated for an Academy Award for his outstanding performance as the most detestable white-collar snob since Cal Hockley in Titanic. And Michael Douglas should be nominated for an award for best actor in a movie where the heel becomes a hero and the cynic becomes a sage.

Banks and investment houses have a fiduciary responsibility to safeguard the money entrusted to them by investors. It's not their money. When this simple axiom is forgotten, then the problems start, as this movie so aptly dramatizes.

After watching this movie, one may think twice before investing money in the stock market. Not that this is a new story or should come as a surprise, but this movie drives home the point in a most unambiguous way. There is a legal term called fiduciary responsibility. That means when party A invests money with party B, party B promises to manage the money in the best interest of party A, and not to gamble with the money. After all, it's not party B's money. As we all know by now, by 2008 fiduciary responsibility had gone out the window, triggering a huge financial meltdown that ultimately required unprecedented bailouts by the government to keep the system from collapsing. What Gordon Gekko did in the 1980s would be a mere sideshow compared to the tens of billions of dollars lost in risky and financially unsound investments since 2008. Gekko is no longer the bad guy, he is now a prophet, a sage. His mantra has been transferred to an even more sinister character, Bretton Wood, admirably played by Josh Brolin, who makes Gekko look like Little Lord Fauntleroy at the piggy bank. The theatrics notwithstanding, this movie conveys an unmistakable message: investor beware - the money you invest is not secure. Unfortunately, history bears this out.

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## **War (2007)**

If you watch this movie, you're on your own., 25 August 2007  
1 star

Friends, being a movie buff is getting to be more and more of a challenge. Yes, when you go buy that ticket to (obviously) enter the theatre, one must never forget that timeless lesson: "Buyer Beware," a lesson that I know all too well but once again ignored, to my detriment. This movie was even

worse than I expected, and my expectations were low. I knew that this movie would not be a new interpretation of Shakespeare or even Abbott and Costello, but after I waded through all the gratuitous violence, all the crummy acting, the pathetically inane story and the incredibly bad music, I needed time to collect my thoughts and ponder: what exactly did I watch? After giving the question some thought, I could not arrive at a definitive answer, so muddled was this movie. Indeed, I began to question whether the problem was me. Was I being too critical? Too unfair? Too inflexible? The answer to those questions was emphatically NO!!!! It wasn't me. It was the movie. The movie stunk, pure and simple. So after reading this and you still decide to spend your hard-earned money to watch this movie and leave the movie disappointed, don't blame me because I told you so.

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### **War of the Worlds (2005)**

**Good remake of a classic story, 25 July 2005  
9 stars**

This is a very good movie. The special effects were excellent. But more importantly the movie was well acted, especially by Tom Cruise and Tim Robbins who were both excellent, and presented a story which conveyed two seemingly simple yet sublime messages: complacency can lead to disaster and that even the most minute living creatures have a purpose. In this movie Tom Cruise demonstrated a range of emotions that added immeasurably to the entertainment value of this movie. For this movie is more than just a mere sci-fi thriller with a lot of glossy special effects. Rather, it is a portrayal of people reacting to a sudden and unexpected catastrophe. The parallel to 9-11 is apparent. And although some of the scenes in the movie contain moments of Hollywood hokeyness, such as the scenes with the little girl who plays Tom Cruise's daughter, the main theme, that of people trying to survive in the midst of overwhelming crisis, remains intact, which prevents the movie from becoming a mere special-effects spectacle. The depictions of violence are graphic and convey the intensity of the dilemma confronting humanity. The invaders mean business and with their machines are intent on inflicting an immediate and lethal reign of terror meant to destroy all humanity. If you like a well-acted science fiction movie that tells a compelling story, then this is the movie for you.

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### **Watchmen (2009)**

**Excellent musical soundtrack in an otherwise mediocre movie., 11 March 2009  
6 stars**

**For a movie to be effective as entertainment, it has to tell a coherent story. This movie does not do that. Instead the story is a convoluted series of disconnected scenes. Also, the use of an alternative future does not work. It is too contrived. The superheroes are back, but so what? The acting was good, especially that of Stephen McHattie who is the star of the movie. The actor who plays the Comedian also gives an excellent performance. But the entire production seems to be little more than an animated comic book, which is not surprising since the movie is based on comic book characters. However, this movie offers one excellent feature: the music. The musical soundtrack includes "Sounds of Silence" by Simon and Garfunkle. Because of the musical soundtrack the movie, if not great, is at least watchable.**

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### **We Own the Night (2007)**

**Good movie, Russians once again are stereotyped., 11 April 2008  
6 stars**

**Good movie, old formula. One brother is a police officer, the brother is flirting with crime but is essentially a good guy. The story is good, the acting at times is powerful and contains a good mix of sinister and altruistic characters. Jaoquin Phoenix once again gives a great performance and not surprisingly dominates the movie. The other performances are also good and there are few lapses in the story. The portrayal of the Russians is somewhat ponderous and stereotypical (once again Russians are portrayed as criminals). Can't Hollywood make movies that portray Russians in a more positive way. Aren't there any law abiding Russians? Are they ALL criminals? For a more positive portrayal of Russians watch the Battleship Potemkin.**

**Let's give a more balanced picture of the Russians. December 1941. Hitler's army is moving east toward Moscow and then are stopped in their tracks by ... THE RUSSIANS. November 1942. Hitler's Sixth Army is inside the city of Stalingrad. This huge army is surrounded and destroyed by ... THE RUSSIANS. October 4, 1957. The first artificial satellite is launched into orbit by ... THE RUSSIANS. Yes, the people who Hollywood constantly**

depict as violent, cunning criminals, achieved numerous "firsts" that amazed the entire world. So, Hollywood, how about a movie about the life of, let's say, Yuri Gagarin? or Marshall Georgi Zhukov? or how about Pushkin, Tolstoy, Pasternak or Solzhenitsyn? (Oh, I forgot, they're not criminals so Hollywood would not be interested.)

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### **West Side Story (1961)**

**This movie is a classic., 18 December 2008  
10 stars**

**West Side Story is one of the greatest movie musicals in the history of Hollywood. The story is timeless, the dancing highly energetic and innovative, the acting strong, especially that of Russ Tamblyn who gives one of the great performances in movie musical history. The music and lyrics are classics and the dialog is strong, relevant and entertaining. This movie withstands the test of time. It could be released today and play to an audience. The choreography is stunning. It's like Grease, except that this movie is not a parody and is the original thing. The ethnic tensions, the intensity of the dialog, the snappy dancing, the actual time line of the story itself, condensed into a 24-hour period, makes for an exciting movie that keeps the audience engaged. One thing about this movie, you won't be bored. This movie is also unique in that it succeeds not through the leads but through the incredible supporting cast whose powerful screen presence makes this movie work, and work well. George Chikaris, Rita Moreno and Tucker Smith are great. One can only wonder how Larry Kert would have done in this movie. (Mr. Kert is the actor who originally performed the role of Tony on Broadway). There are some who criticize this movie but what is there to criticize? If you like movies with great music, wonderful dancing and a compelling story, watch this movie.**

**One other point: regarding the song "Tonight", this play takes the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet and propels it to new heights of dramatic power, transforming the poetry of Shakespeare into a musical number that is not only enjoyable, inspirational and memorable but iconic, especially the version as performed by the original performers of the song, Larry Kert and Carol Lawrence.**

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## **We Were Strangers (1949)**

**Before Scarface there was We Were Strangers, 17 June 2007**

**8 stars**

**Tony Montana and Tony Fenner. The former was the main character in Scarface, the latter in We Were Strangers. The parallels between both characters and both movies are uncanny. Both movies involve characters named Tony interacting on some level with corrupt police. Both include beautiful yet troubled women. Both involve Hispanic characters yet both Tonys are portrayed by non-Hispanic actors. Both movies glorify violence. In both movies each Tony is brooding, moody and when provoked capable of extreme violence. Both Tonys are anti-authoritarian and do not run away. The physical resemblance between John Garfield and Al Pacino is also uncanny. Also, both movies contain unmistakable political overtones involving the political situation in Cuba. Gilbert Roland's performance is outstanding. Jennifer Jones's performance is powerful. Equally noteworthy is Pedro Armendariz's outstanding performance as the corrupt and unstable Chief of Police. As the saying goes, they don't make 'em like this anymore.**

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## **When It Was a Game (1991) (TV)**

**A wonderful documentary about a bygone era., 2 November 2010**

**10 stars**

**Play ball! There's a saying: a picture is worth a thousand words and nowhere is this saying more apropos than in this documentary. Containing remarkable footage, this documentary chronicles an era in baseball that also reveals much about American society in a bygone time. Baseball was really special; going to a ballgame was a big deal, a major social event. The players were larger than life. They played in ballparks that were like cathedrals - to a sport. Far from being bandboxes, the old ballparks, which were once new ballparks, were huge, sprawling structures, places that projected an aura of greatness that made one feel that they were witnessing a major historical event. And what made it even more special was that each game WAS a major historical event. Every game made an indelible mark on American history. Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe Di Maggio, Hank Greenberg, Ted Williams, all are icons of American history. Ebbets Fields, the Polo Grounds, Shibe Park, Sportsmans Park, are places that are still recalled with reverence by grown men and women who went to those places when they were kids. And it's all gone, a mere memory, but what a**

wonderful memory, a time when baseball was king. Remember, it was a time before television, which made the ballplayers seem that much more ... godlike. And this is not mere hyperbole. The baseball players from the past had a style and class that made them objects of admiration. They were loved and respected. They played a game that was uniquely American. The game was clean. It was fun. Times have changed; baseball is now a huge multibillion-dollar business which is played around the world. Other sports have taken over the limelight pushing baseball, if not off the stage, then to the side. But one thing that has not changed is this: the public's fascination with a special group of athletes who have the ability to successfully hit a hard ball with a bat, and as long as that fascination persists baseball will remain an important part of the American cultural scene.

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### **Going Ape (1970) a. k. a. Where's Poppa?**

**Serious social problem trivialized., 1 September 2010**

**6 stars**

There are movies that withstand the test of time and then there are movies that don't. This movie is in the latter category. When first released in 1970 tastes were somewhat different, the problems of the frail elderly were perhaps less discussed and certainly were not on the front burner of our collective consciousness. So, not surprisingly, the movie was well received, hailed as a hilarious comedy and George Segal and the rest of the cast were accorded much praise for their performances. Yet there is little that one can find funny about this movie today. Not that the characters in and of themselves aren't funny, they are. It's just that it's hard to laugh at a story in which the behavior of a frail elderly senile woman is treated as a subject for humor. Okay, the son is frustrated and overwhelmed but is that really funny? It's not campy. Anyone who has had to care for an aging relative knows that humor is not part of the package. Maybe it was in 1970 but not now. It's too big of a problem and effects too many families.

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## **Whiteout (2009)**

**Exciting movie., 18 September 2009**

**8 stars**

**After reading some of reviews about this movie, I was expecting to another Hollywood potboiler, one utterly devoid of anything that even vaguely resembles a plausible story. But I was pleasantly surprised. Not only does this movie contain an interesting story, Kate Beckinsdale gives an excellent, believable performance as a U. S. Marshal who is trying to solve a baffling case. The story is plausible, the pace brisk, the acting strong and the cinematography impressive. In addition, the movie keeps the audience engaged from the start as events occur which at first seem inexplicable. The setting of the movie, Antarctica, adds to this movie's mood of foreboding and makes the story even more exciting and compelling.**

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## **Wild Hogs (2007)**

**Low brow comedy but funny, 22 March 2007**

**7 stars**

**This movie is proof that John Travolta is a great comic actor. He also dominates this movie. The movie itself is a goofy slapstick comedy with a lot of lowbrow humor, but that what generates the laughs. This movie is amusing and at times actually funny, if not outright hilarious. The movie's premise is weak, four middle aged guys who are seeking fulfillment by "hitting the road," but that's okay because this movie is a comedy created to inspire laughter, which it does. The movie is unpretentious. If you are looking for a serious dramatic story with an esoteric message full of subliminal meanings and delicate nuances, then this is the wrong movie for you. But if you want some laughs, this movie will meet your needs.**

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### **World Trade Center (2006)**

Misses the Mark, 22 August 2006

5 stars

When Hollywood tries to dramatize important and famous historical events, usually the results are mush. This movie is another example of Hollywood mush. 9/11/01 was a day of tragedy. The attack on the United States stunned, shocked, and appalled the American people and indeed people throughout the world. 9/11/01 turned our world upside down and things have never been the same. To accurately capture the feelings of the people on that sad day is a daunting task for the cinematic artist and in trying to achieve this goal this movie misses the mark by a mile. The results simply are flat. The scope of the movie does not capture the overwhelming feeling of collective horror that engulfed the city, the country and the world. 9/11/01 brought the United States literally to a halt. Everything stopped as people, bewildered and stunned, were forced to deal with a tragedy that directly affected every person on this planet. The events of 9/11/01 speak for themselves and require no further dramatization.

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### **X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2009)**

Substantive story, 5 May 2009

8 stars

The negative critiques of this movie notwithstanding, this is definitely one of the better movies of the science fiction genre. For this movie to work one must judge this movie for what it is: science fiction. Otherwise this movie will be barely watchable. Hugh Jackman gives a strong performance as Wolverine and the supporting cast led by L. Schreiber are equally good as the movie takes the audience on a wild ride through war and sibling conflict. Although based on a comic book story, the plot is sufficiently complex to actually maintain audience interest and that combined with excellent special effects raises this movie to a level that is somewhere between good and very good, and for a movie that features characters who are, to put it mildly, strange, this is saying a lot.

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### **X-Men: The Last Stand (2006)**

**A Powerful and Intense Movie, 20 June 2006**

**10 stars**

**What I thought would be just another dumb Hollywood special-effects piece of junk (indeed, I confess that I was curious as to how bad this movie would be), was, to my surprise, an excellent and well-acted science fiction movie. The acting was outstanding, the plot was original, and the movie had good continuity. This movie may be the best science fiction movie since The Predator. What makes this movie especially good is the how the mutants are a metaphor for all people who are considered different, who do not conform to what is considered to be the norm, and what the larger society will do to achieve conformity. Don't be fooled by the corny title. This is a powerful and intense movie. It's worth watching.**

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### **Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942)**

**This movie is more than just all right. This movie is Great!, 19 December 2005**

**10 stars**

**When discussing the movie musical biography genre, this movie must be rated at the top. There are not enough superlatives to attach to this movie. James Cagney sings ... and dances ... and acts ... and sings ... and dances ... and acts ... etc. This is James Cagney's finest film, a testament to his multi-talented versatility, which all too often he did not have an opportunity to show. James Cagney usually played "tough guy" roles. In this movie his character is completely different ... upbeat, optimistic, happy, a family man, and patriotic. Of course, one cannot forget Walter Huston's role as "Georgie's" father. Wasn't Walter Huston a great actor? If you want to watch a movie that will uplift your spirit and make you feel good, then this is the movie to watch. This movie is great!**

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## **Ya sluzhil v okhrane Stalina, ili Opyt dokumentalnoy mifologii (1989)**

**An interesting inside glimpse of a totalitarian regime., 27 September 2010  
9 stars**

**After watching this documentary, one can safely acknowledge that Joseph Stalin was human. He loved music. He was knowledgeable of the theater. He enjoyed going to the Bolshoi Ballet. Yes, the man was human. And a lot of people even admired him. After all, didn't children sing for him? Wasn't he lavished praise? Did not the Bolshoi Ballet welcome him with open arms and even take advice from him? Yes, Stalin was just another man, and if you believe this documentary, there was nothing sinister about him, nothing at all. For instance, in one scene there is Stalin, Khrushchev and Mao sitting at a table politely listening to the accolades of children expressing their joy and thanks for being given the opportunity to become a doctor or tractor operator in the socialist paradise. And then there is the bodyguard himself, a one-time interrogator who is now a retired music teacher. A man who wouldn't hurt a fly; who was a patriot, who protected his master by making sure that Bolshoi Ballet was secure. An official just doing his job, directing a team of informers, mostly women, planted in the audience, armed with handguns, acting as his eyes and ears. No discussion of why such extreme measures had to be taken. It was just business as usual in the Soviet Union. Yes, Joseph Stalin was human.**

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## **Year One (2009)**

**Oliver Platt's greatest movie., 7 July 2009  
10 stars**

**This is Oliver Platt's greatest movie. Mr. Platt has never been funnier than in this movie. In fact, he carries the movie and should have been given top billing. Mr. Platt was so funny that it elevated the performances of all the other players, especially Michael Cera's whose scenes with Mr. Platt have to be among the funniest in years. The plot is pure schmaltz and the acting right out of the Mel Brooks school of comedy. Jack Black was absolutely wonderful as the lead player and does a great job in each and every scene. This zany movie is definitely worth the price of admission. The movie features goofy dialogue, great comedy acting, a fast paced plot and a happy ending. In other words, it offers the audience a great entertainment package.**

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### **You Don't Mess with the Zohan (2008)**

**Three cheers for the Zohan!, 3 June 2009  
10 stars**

**ne of the funniest, if not THE funniest movie produced by Hollywood in years. Adam Sandler is at his very best as an Israeli Jew who goes from military hero to hairdresser. Most intriguing about this movie is its premise. The Zohan is a superhero, but not just any hero, he is a Jewish superhero, with superhuman powers that heretofore were reserved for the likes of Superman, etc, but now are embodied in a Jewish man who, on top of that, is also a hairdresser and enjoys kibitzing. There are references to the current situation in the Mideast but they are secondary to the story of the Zohan who can out-bat the Batman and out-schmooze the funniest stand up comics. This movie takes the whole superhero genre in a new and very humorous direction. Three cheers for the Zohan!**

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### **Yours, Mine and Ours (2005)**

**A cinematic travesty, 12 June 2010  
1 star**

**Who created this movie and why? These questions are raised by this movie. In an attempt to be funny, the creators of this movie decided to resurrect a Lucille Ball- Henry Fonda movie that in its day was funny but almost thirty years later just doesn't do it. Although ostensibly a comedy, the movie does not inspire any laughs. One winces and cringes as the parents do everything they can to make fools of themselves. The slapstick is unfunny, the children are nasty and the parents are fools, especially the father played by Dennis Quaid. Put a bunch of kids under one roof and the results can be chaotic but not necessarily funny. If this movie contains any message it is this: love without discipline is bad for children. One must wonder who would have thought this movie would sell. Everything about this movie is cheesy. Even by commercial standards this movie is an artistic travesty, an assault on the audience's intelligence and does not even deserve inclusion in DVD land, the place where all flops eventually wind up.**

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### Zodiac (2007/I)

Intriguing Who-done-it?, 10 March 2007

10 stars

What a surprisingly good movie. Yes, what could have been just another insipid who-done-it is a well-acted, intense movie about actual events. The movie is long, but avoids becoming overly convoluted or meandering. This movie is based on events that effected not only California but grabbed the attention of the entire nation as law enforcement struggled to solve a series of crimes that may or may not have been solved. That we don't know whether these crimes were ever actually solved is what makes this movie most intriguing. The movie's producers offer their theory. After watching this movie, you may want to come up with a theory of your own.

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### Zombieland (2009)

Surprisingly good movie., 12 October 2009

8 stars

As much as I expected this movie to be pure junk, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that it is actually a good movie. This movie presents an offbeat story that is part science-fiction, part action and all comedy. Woody Harrelson gives a strong and amusing performance as a quirky character who is both a hero and buffoon and clearly dominates the story. The movie has lots of action, good continuity, and, unlike most Hollywood products today, is not overly long. The director wastes no footage as he put together what has to be one of the best edited movies maybe in decades. Gone are all the extraneous and superfluous filler that ruins most movies. Here the story is taut, simple, watchable and entertaining. The zombies are reduced to mere animated objects who can be abused and eliminated without a second thought and here lies the rub. For the ghouls that lay in wait for unsuspecting humans were once human themselves and what happened to them was not their fault but the result of something much larger and more profound. Yet the movie skirts the tragic dimensions of the catastrophe that has befallen the world and instead reduces the disaster to the level of a goofy comedy ... and it works. As long as the movie is accepted for what is is, parody, then it is entertaining. But if you are expecting a hand wringing moralistic tale of epic proportions then you may be disappointed, even while you laugh.

## Addendum

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### Summer Storm (1944)

Flawed but still entertaining., 14 December 2010  
7 stars

This movie is a stagy Hollywoodish interpretation of a story by Anton Chekhov. While the story itself is good, the problem is that Hollywood converts the story into melodramatic pulp. George Sanders was a great actor but here he is entirely miscast. Playing starstruck was not Mr. Sander's forte. Linda Darnell was beautiful and was also a great actress but casting her as a Russian Russian peasant woman, and a self-centered, illiterate one at that, was a bit of a stretch. Her manipulations were laughable. The idea of her character actually getting over George Sander's character tested the limits of plausibility. Some of the supporting cast were more believable, something however that cannot be said for Edward Everett Horton. One was hard pressed to ignore Mr. Horton's jocular Americanese inflection suggesting a character who might have been more at home at a baseball game anywhere in the United States. All this notwithstanding, it's still a good movie and worth watching because despite the aforementioned flaws, Mr. Sanders is dashing, Ms. Darnell is ravishing, Mr. Horton is amusing, the rest of the cast is wonderful and the movie overall is entertaining, which is the ultimate bottom line.

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### Black Swan (2010)

Superb, brilliant, phenomenal., 13 December 2010  
10 stars

This is the best movie this reviewer has seen in at least the past ten years and as an unabashed movie buff and movie reviewer, that covers a lot of movies. Natalie Portman's performance is stunning, amazing, phenomenal. If she does not win the Academy Award for Best Actress then that will be shocker. Every facet of her performance is perfect. She carries the movie. She is truly the star. As for Mila Kunis, her performance is absolutely worthy of award recognition. Known as a comic actress, in this movie her performance is masterful and chilling. What a wonderful, strong performance! Vincent Cassel once again proves that he is one of the greatest screen actors today. His performance can only be described in terms of superlatives. Barbara Hershey and Winona Ryder are also fully deserving of praise for their strong performances. But the best part of the movie is the direction, masterfully done by Darren Aronofsky. He manages

to put together a brilliant work of art, successfully combining all the elements needed to produce a movie that is superb. Great story, great acting, great cinematography, great script, in short a great movie.

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#### **Deutsche Wochenschau Nr. 681/40/1943 (1943)**

**Slick, well-packaged, blatant, shameless propaganda., 11 December 2010  
7 stars**

**One thing about the Nazis: they knew how to make war newsreels that could grab and keep an audience's attention. The Wochenschau was pure propaganda pulp. While the German armies are being defeated on all fronts, the Nazis just went on churning out newsreels showing how well things were going. One can only wonder how much of this pulp was believed by the German public. The rescue of Mussolini was impressive and his meeting with Hitler of some historical interest. Likewise, some of the footage of combat on the Eastern front was compelling. Yet the newsreel doesn't tell the whole story, how badly the Germans were losing, how their armies were being overpowered, how their defensive retreats were routs, how their government had placed an entire nation on the path to disaster. Stalingrad had already happened. It is one thing to slant the reporting of news for political purposes but the Nazis did it with a lack of finesse that is stunning. The footage at times is spectacular but it's presented out of context. The Russians are chided for their scorched earth policy but the newsreel does not explain the purpose of that policy. The Wehrmacht is shown marching - on foot, on horses - already a sign that the mechanized army, the army that specialized in blitzkrieg, was perhaps not so mechanized after all. All blatant propaganda, but well-packaged propaganda.**

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#### **The Tourist (2010)**

**Lots of fluff but entertaining., 11 December 2010  
8 stars**

**Of course, for obvious reasons, the top billed stars for this movie are Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie, and their performances are wonderful. Mr. Depp is suave and at times amusing and Ms. Jolie is, as always, absolutely ravishing. She is stunning. The movie contains repeated close-ups of her face. The movie is about her. Yet, the real star of this movie, the person who generates the energy to carry this movie through, is Steven Berkoff. Mr. Berkoff's performance alone is worth the price of admission.**

**This movie is a virtual lesson on how to play a villain. Whenever the movie is on the verge of dragging, Mr. Berkoff's energetic presence keeps the movie on track. Although the story is transparent and there is little to suggest anything other than fluff, still the movie is entertaining and sustains enough interest to keep an audience engaged. As a comic actor, Johnny Depp definitely excels and although teamed with Ms. Jolie he succeeds in maintaining a screen presence. As for Ms. Jolie, she is charming, beautiful, and a delight to watch.**

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### **The Next Three Days (2010)**

**Surprisingly good movie., 9 December 2010**

**8 stars**

**This is a surprisingly good movie, not the usual Hollywood formula potboiler. The movie has an interesting story, strong acting and excellent cinematography. Perhaps the plot is somewhat far-fetched but so what? It's a movie. The best part of this movie are not the stars but the supporting cast. Most impressive was the performance by Lennie James who definitely deserves formal recognition for his work in this movie. So strong is his performance that I this movie could easily be retitled "The Pursuit" without misleading the audience. Both Russell Crowe and Elizabeth Banks give strong performances and Brian Dennehy once again proves how great he is an actor. At times the story does stretch the boundaries of plausibility but never to the point that the story is rendered ridiculous. In this movie there are no bad guys. Rather it dramatizes a justice system that at times may not get it right and how frustration and indignation can lead one to do desperate things.**

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### **Faster (2010)**

**Miracles can happen., 4 December 2010**

**8 stars**

**Get off your high horses, all ye critics who panned this movie. You knoweth not what you judge. This movie is not pulp, is not trash, is not trite, is not shallow. Ye, as you wander through the landscape of the story, you will encounter may surprises: good acting, a compact, comprehensible story, lots of action, good cinematography and experience a renewal of one's faith in Hollywood. Ye, as you leave the theatre, you will be pleased with what you have encountered and happy that you decided to watch such**

a movie. That wonderful actor, Billy Bob Thornton, makes this movie happen as does the actor Dwayne Johnson formally known as The Rock. There are some who will doubt the veracity of this report, there are some who will dismiss it outright as being without credence. To them I say, "Withhold judgment ye of little faith until ye have witnessed the movie yourself." Yes, my friends, I HAVE witnessed this movie and have come away a believer - that Hollywood CAN transform an action movie into something decent and watchable, proving that even in this age of the potboiler miracles can happen.

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### **The Mayor of Hell (1933)**

**Compelling and timeless story., 28 November 2010  
9 stars**

Sometimes movies are made which showcase certain actors. This is one of those movies and the actor who is showcased is Douglas Dumbrille. What a great actor! He proves it beyond any doubt in this movie. He is the epitome of the sinister and corrupt official who will do anything to cover his tracks and protect his turf. What makes his performance so noteworthy is that he does not come off as a caricature. His character is entirely believable which is essential to make the entire movie work. Other noteworthy performances are by Frankie Darro and James Cagney who is the top billed star. The story is an indictment of a reformatory system that brutalizes its charges. The action is fast paced, the dialog snappy, the cinematography outstanding and theme of story, the quest for justice, both compelling and timeless. Although the production is stagy and at times melodramatic, the strength of the story combined with the outstanding acting makes this movie one that should be watched.

### **The Country Girl (1954)**

**Wonderful, inspirational movie., 28 November 2010  
10 stars**

Guilt. Blame. Anger. Despair. These are some of the themes of this movie. In what may be Bing Crosby's greatest performance, he plays a washed up actor who is given an opportunity to redeem himself yet seems to be wasting that opportunity ... and the director is trying to figure out why. The director believes in his actor but for some reason the actor is failing, for reasons that have nothing to do with lack of talent. What makes this movie so compelling is that the audience knows the problem but will the director ever find out and if he does, then what? Grace Kelly's performance is absolutely astonishing. For most of the movie she plays a frumpy, doughty,

sour-faced woman yet even here her beauty is apparent. Ms. Kelly was really beautiful ... and extremely talented too. After watching this movie it is easy to understand how a prince would have wanted her for his princess. This movie is so strong that even a powerhouse actor like William Holden can barely hold his own. He's great but it's Crosby and Kelly who dominate this wonderful and inspirational movie that everyone should watch.

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### **Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)**

**Incredibly powerful movie., 27 November 2010  
10 stars**

When you talk about an actor stealing the show, in this movie Maximilian Schell is that actor. Wow, he IS the movie. This is a case where the actor takes good material and creates something brilliant. The concept of a war crimes trial congers up scenes of outraged, indignant prosecutors who, with exaggerated self-righteousness, are loudly and vociferously denouncing the defendants who sit passively and take it. This movie, however, presents a different slant. Here it is the defense that is outraged, and with good reason. Did the defendants actually break any laws? After all, were they not respected judges? Is somebody to be found guilty for being a mere hack? And what right did the court have to try these judges anyway? Okay, the judges may have been Nazis, but was being a Nazi a crime? Indeed, was the trial itself a sham? Montgomery Clift and Judy Garland give powerful performances as victims of Nazi persecution, yet was their testimony sufficient to establish guilt, and of what? This is one of the most powerful movies Hollywood has ever produced. It explores themes that warrant close attention and pulls no punches in presenting issues that deal with such fundamental concepts as right-and-wrong, responsibility, culpability and expediency.

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### **Burlesque (2010)**

**Hollywood musical with lots of kick., 25 November 2010  
9 stars**

Cher is great in this movie. She should be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress. And the movie itself is wonderful. It's far-fetched, brassy, silly, wonderful. The musical numbers are incredible. Christine Aguilera is charming and wow, can she sing! Even the bad guy is wonderful. This is the type of movie that makes you feel like you don't want it to end. It offers nonstop music, melodramatics, silly scenes, and laughs.

Stanley Tucci is great as Cher's assistant, friend, and confidante. Burlesque is larger than life, it's pure escapism. The musical numbers fill the screen, the music is loud, snappy and upbeat. The movie has no lulls, is entertaining, has a simple storyline and likable characters. If anyone thinks that Cher is over the hill, watch this movie and think again, And if anyone thinks that Ms. Aguilera is not star material, watch this movie and think again. This movie is proof that the Hollywood musical is still alive and kicking.

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### **Fair Game (2010/I)**

If you are thinking about whistle blowing, watch this movie first,

20 November 2010

9 stars

When does someone become a whistle blower? At what point does a trusted employee go outside the chain of command to reveal wrongdoing? And is it worth the effort? These questions are even more pressing when they concern someone who is entrusted with keeping classified secrets, at all costs. This movie attempts to explore the gray area of duty versus ethics, and does an effective job. The main character is a government employee who is basically a spy, a mole, a government agent, someone who deliberately lies to maintain a cover, keeps secrets and then learns, to her chagrin, that the information she is obtaining is being ignored for reasons she cannot fathom but which bothers her and when she starts complaining a lot of bad things happen which put her life and her family's life in jeopardy. Now, this movie comes close to becoming pure political spin but skillfully avoids that trap. However, the message is clear: facts can be distorted for political purposes. This is nothing new, of course. The question is, what do you, as the information gatherer, do about it? Sean Penn turns in another strong performance as the whistle blower's husband who whistle blows too. His performance dominates the movie. The rest of the cast is excellent too.

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### **Unstoppable (2010)**

Nonstop excitement. Clear the tracks!, 20 November 2010

10 stars

From start to finish, this is one exciting movie. Nonstop action, tension, conflict and a plausible story combine to produce an excellent movie. And

that this movie came out of Hollywood makes it even more impressive. Instead of relying primarily on special effects, the director actually attempts to generate excitement through the story, and it works. There are no lulls, no trite dialog, none of the usual filler that is normally found in Hollywood potboilers. Rather, the movie takes a simple, straightforward story and presents it to the audience. No frills, nothing fancy, just the story. And it is a compelling story, one that anyone in the audience will immediately understand and appreciate. Instead of challenging the audience to try to figure out the theme of the story, the story is completely transparent which adds to the movie's strength. Hollywood tends to go overboard in disaster movies. Too many special effects, lots of cheesy acting and sloppy dialog. None of that is in this movie. Denzel Washington gives an excellent performance as the train engineer and the rest of the cast is equally impressive. If you like high quality movies, then this movie is for you.