

Phil's Movie Reviews

By Phillip W. Weiss

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This book contains movie reviews by Phillip W. Weiss from 2010 to 2012. Each review includes the date when the movie was first released and the date of the review.

The list of titles starts on page 101.

"The Office: Two Weeks (#5.19)" (2009)

Dark humor, 25 December 2012

This is a wonderful episode which reveals a lot about Michael's character. Steve Carell dominates the story and succeeds in conveying Michael's desperate attempt to maintain his dignity under challenging circumstances. The episode also dramatizes how tenuous and superficial are the interpersonal relationships at work, as the office staff reacts with indifference to Michael's imminent departure. Nobody supports him as he is being replaced, his loyalty and devotion to the office staff not reciprocated, his appeal for support rebuffed. Although the story has humour, it is dark humour. Michael is being replaced, he is being treated shabbily, yet he does not want to go out without a fight. To retaliate he wants to start his own company which has little chance of succeeding. But selling is his life, it is what he knows best, for Michael is a leader who has his workers' back because he is a worker himself. Such loyalty is a rare quality, which is why Michael is such an endearing character. He cares.

The Wings of Eagles (1957)

Interesting story but not one of John Wayne's better movies. 25 December 2012

As much I as tried to like this movie, I could not, not because of the subject of the the story nor because of how the movie was made, but because of John Wayne. Mr. Wayne was miscast for the role. His performance as a hot-headed naval aviator who battles adversity was unconvincing. Not that his performance is poor, he just did not seem right for the role and to me that proved to be the movie's undoing. Dan Dailey's performance is also stretches credulity, but one can make allowances for a supporting role. There is no doubt that Frank Wead had a dynamic life, but there was more to him than that. He seemed to be a complex person who was much more than an acting out swashbuckler as portrayed in the movie. He was trying to juggle his devotion to duty with the needs of his family, which proved to be insurmountable for him. John Wayne's attempt to portray such a person comes off as phony because Mr. Wayne plays characters who are bold and decisive, an image that Mr. Wayne cannot shake in this movie.

Fun with Dick and Jane (2005)

Serious themes, shallow movie. 24 December 2012

This movie is shallow. The story is shallow. The acting is shallow. As a parody, it is flat, and lacks the cutting edge that could have made it into a great movie. The story just does not lend itself to slapstick; the story is essentially one of tragedy and betrayal. These are not funny themes. Jim Carrey's gesticulations are out of

place in what is a grim story about people who are screwed over and then scapegoated. The desperation of the two protagonists is shunted aside in favor of a silliness which belies the seriousness of their plight. These people are victims yet it is difficult to feel empathy for them because they're part of the system too. It was just their turn to be pushed over the cliff, and if anybody thinks that is funny, then this movie is for you.

The Out-of-Towners (1999)

Banality reigns supreme in this tepid retreat. 19 December 2012

Goldie Hawn is a wonderful comedy actress; Steve Martin is a wonderful comedy actor; Neil Simon is a wonderful comedy writer; and New York City is a wonderful place to use as a setting for a movie. Yet, this movie is a clunker; it's as flat as a pancake, and an overcooked one at that. Although certain scenes do provoke a laugh, in general this movie simply is not funny. The story is a pure Hollywood comedy potboiler, that is, a formula movie and a poor retreat of the 1970 original, which itself wasn't the funniest movie either, but that's for another review. The idea of everything going wrong during a trip is nothing new, but if properly treated it can produce laughs. But in this movie the things that go wrong are so absurd and contrived that the laughs are lost. What happens to the Clarks would not and could not happen to anyone else; hence the movie becomes irrelevant to the audience and loses its meaning as a satire or parody. John Cleese provides some humor as the hotel manager but his presence is limited and in no way comes close to rescuing this movie from its essential banality.

The Great Ziegfeld (1936)

A tribute to the life of a theatrical legend. 11 December 2012

Although this movie is dated and in some respects is even campy, nevertheless it is still a good movie. True, the movie is about a theatrical impresario who became hugely famous and successful by showcasing women, yet this showman still is honored for his contributions to American theater, contributions which are depicted in this biopic of his life and career. Yet the movie is more than about one man. It's about an entire era when vaudeville was supreme and the stage, and not the screen, was the centerpiece of entertainment. People went to theaters for entertainment and Florenz Ziegfeld made sure that the public got their money's worth. This movie shows how Mr. Ziegfeld showcased the biggest and most popular entertainers in America at the time and how he used the stage to present extravaganzas of unprecedented size. The movie captures what it must have been like to be at one of his shows, and also reveals a lot about the man himself, someone who dedicated his life to bringing

quality entertainment to the public. That a major motion picture was made about Mr. Ziegfeld is proof of his popularity and the esteem in which he was held. Mr. Ziegfeld made a lot of people stars and this movie is a fitting tribute to his his life.

Hitchcock (2012)

An interesting take on the career of a Hollywood legend. 8 December 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This movie is not a biopic about Alfred Hitchcock. In fact, Anthony Hopkin's performance as Mr, Hitchcock is almost hokey, that is, ALMOST because the movie is neither a comedy nor a parody of Mr. Hitchcock's career or life. Rather, the movie is about Mr. Hitchcock's frustrations with the women in his life and how that frustration shaped his creative vision for the movie Psycho and how it also affected him personally. The movie suggests that Mr. Hitchcock could be overbearing when it came the way he treated his leading ladies, but only because he admired them and wanted them to like him. He did not like to be ignored by women. He wanted to make Vera Miles a star and felt rejected when she became a mother instead. He also became upset when his wife, Anna Reveille, began collaborating with another man on a novel. Any hint that she might not be fully focused on him would cause him to feel insecure, and it was this feeling of insecurity that drove Hitchcock to the point of distraction and even made him physically ill. In short, the movie is about a creative artist with strong dependency needs who struggles with his feelings by hiding them behind a pompous facade, but whose feelings eventually surface anyway. Helen Mirren's performance as Anna is wonderful. Her performance saves this movie from becoming a cinematic joke. Scarlet Johansson and Jennifer Biel are, of course, stunningly beautiful and wonderful in their respective roles as Janet Leigh and Vera Miles, who both co-starred in Psycho. But it's Ms. Mirren's performance that holds this film together. Without her strong performance the audience would be left with Anthony Hopkins bullying his way through the story, just another pushy director trying to finish a project, with little dramatic effect. The movie is about the man, not his project.

The Jazz Singer (1980)

A cheesy remake of a cinema classic. 25 November 2012

The 1980 movie became a hit for Neil Diamond, largely due to his rendition of the songs "Love on the Rocks" and "America." As for Laurence Olivier's performance as a Jewish cantor in the 1980 movie, watch the movie and decide for yourself what you think of his performance. The 1980 movie also features Neil Diamond performing in black face, just like Jolson did fifty-three years earlier. Question: Have things really changed? Although the movie is rife with cheesy acting and dialog that makes one wonder if the script was perhaps improvised,

nevertheless in its own inimitable way it succeeds in telling a story about America, which is something. Now if the movie only had a decent screenplay to go along with movie's underlying theme, then maybe the movie could be taken more seriously. But such improvement will have to wait till the next remake.

Lincoln (2012)

Interesting attempt at capturing the essence of an American icon.
23 November 2012

The life and career of Abraham Lincoln has been treated cinematically so often that to make yet another movie about him suggests that the movie maker has something new to offer on the subject. But that is not the case in this movie. Instead of offering a biopic, the director chooses to limit the scope of the movie to Lincoln's political maneuvering during the Civil War, depicting Lincoln as a crafty politician who is willing to circumvent the rules to establish a personal legacy, a depiction which diminishes Lincoln's greatness. The fact is that Lincoln wanted to transcend partisan politics, not lead it. His career was more than about counting votes or pressuring politicians. For Abraham Lincoln was more than a great president, he was a great man. Working under the most oppressive of conditions, and with the odds of success stacked way against him, he successfully led the nation through its most harrowing time. To portray such a larger-than-life person in a movie without diminishing the legend is a tricky proposition, and in this respect the movie fails because by diminishing Lincoln it diminishes the strength of his story as a drama. The drama of Lincoln's career lies in the very fact of his larger-than-life persona. It is true that Lincoln was a politician, but he was a lot more than that. He had uncanny personal qualities that set him apart from those around him and made him singularly unique. That a man born in the South, with almost no formal education, who started out as a laborer, who had a history of losing elections, had a difficult marriage, lost three of his children, and was despised by a large segment of the population was able to muster the energy and will to lead the effort to preserve the union and abolish slavery is amazing, but also is empirically inexplicable and thus defies dramatic interpretation. In this case, the facts need no embellishing; they can speak for themselves.

Man with a Movie Camera (1929)

Innovative, brilliant, 12 November 2012

(Spoiler alert)

Dziga Vertov himself discusses the impression others had of *Man with a Movie Camera*. Some said it "was an experiment in visual music, a visual concert. Others saw the film in terms of a higher mathematics of montage. Still others

declared that it was not 'life as it is,' but the life the way they do not see it, etc." *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) is set in Odessa, Soviet Union. Vertov dispenses with all the theatrical props - actors, script, staging - in favor of montage to tell a story. The montage is created through robust editing and a mixing of various cinematic techniques - slow motion, fast motion, superimposed shots, close ups, panoramic shots, stop action, rapid cross cutting - which showcase people and capture the rhythm of life, a rhythm that is found in movement. In a way, *Man* is about movement. It is movement that gives life its dynamic quality, driven by an energy which is the source of productivity and therefore of value, consistent with Marxist concept of labor power. Yet, the movie is no mere polemic. Rather, it is a celebration of life as told through an entirely visual technique. In short, Vertov's movie, *Man with a Movie Camera*, is brilliant.

Cloud Atlas (2012)

Magnificent performances abound in a unique cinematic event.
10 November 2012

This is a remarkable movie that is completely actor driven. This movie showcases the talents of all the principal performers. Each one plays multiple roles, some cross-racial, others cross-gender. Their performances are uniformly great. This has to be Tom Hanks' best movie in years, and the same goes for Halle Berry. The story itself is unique and complex, which is both good and not so good. Good because it tries to show the interconnectedness of human beings that transcends time; not so good because in trying to tell such a story, it seems to bite off more than it can chew, meaning that the story after awhile becomes a little mushy. Nevertheless, that's a minor drawback that does not in any way detract from the magnificent performances of the actors throughout the film. To me, a story should have a tight structure; in this movie the producers have opted for a broader approach, which though impressive never quite achieves the level of spectacular. The reason for that is not because of the story itself but because of the structure of the film which is rife with parallel editing which does not quite succeed in keeping the story on track. Hence the storyline unravels. But with Tom Hanks and Halle Berry each doing six rolls, one still leaves the theatre with a feeling that this movie is a unique cinematic event.

People on Sunday (1930)

A beautiful movie, 8 November 2012

I am certain that if I had seen this movie in the United States in 1929, when the movie was first released, I would have moved to Berlin. I would have packed my bags, said good bye to my relatives and acquaintances and hopped the first ship heading to Germany. This movie not only showcases Berlin, but showcases a cast that is equally charming ... and talented. This movie is proof that acting is

an art, and with proper direction just about anyone who wants to can become an actor. And that's the way it should be because acting is about being, and being has to do with feeling, and if you have the feeling, then the acting comes naturally ... if you want to do it. The story is simple ... five people spending time together in Berlin. This movie makes me feel like going back to Berlin now.

Body and Soul (1925)

A great movie, 27 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This movie is one of the great movies produced during the silent screen era. First, it features a great performance by Paul Robeson who plays a duo role as a con man posing as a preacher and his straight laced twin brother. Second, the movie provides a story in which African Americans are portrayed as complex characters, devoid of the stereotypical depictions typical of the movies of that time. In some respects this movie is a precursor to the 1960 movie Elmer Gantry, especially as it relates to the depiction of the corrupt clergy/con man and how appeals to religion is used to rip off a hapless and clueless public. Further, the story is complex, with a lot of interesting characters, and is well acted. All in all, it is a first class cinematic event.

Seven Psychopaths (2012)

Psychopaths can be charming too. 27 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This is a clever story about a psychopathic Hollywood movie actor who manipulates a bunch of other people, who also are psychopaths, in order to act out his most violent fantasies. The only person who realizes what this actor is up to is a Hollywood writer who accidentally gets caught up in the web that is being spun by the actor. As the story proceeds, the psychopathology of all the characters becomes increasingly apparent, with the actor being the maestro who provokes the others to act. What the actor wants is to go out in a blaze of gun fire. What is never discussed is why the actor is so intent on dying. He is portrayed by Sam Rockwell whose performance is astounding. One soon gets the sense that his character is completely devoid of consciousness and simply wants to meet his needs without the slightest concern for the consequences. To him, acting out is fun. The writer, played with much affect by Colin Farrell, is appalled but can do nothing to stop the actor except to observe and comment on the actor's outrageous behavior. Mr. Rockwell's performance is even more chilling in that he is also engagingly friendly, that is, he is not inherently mean spirited, just bent on acting out. His lack of malice is what makes the story even more interesting. But this comes as no surprise because it's a story about psychopaths, and psychopaths can be charming people too.

Daddy's Gone A-Hunting (1969)

A tragic story. 16 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This movie could have been made today; it withstands the test of time. It's about a man who wants to take revenge on a woman who aborted their child. The movie is also about the hypocrisy of the woman who is living a lie, trying to conceal a past which includes illicit sex, pregnancy, and abortion, the latter so that she could get end the relationship with the guy who wants the baby and wants to marry her. After she dumps him she marries a local up and coming politician and gets pregnant and this time gives birth. The movie is about how the first guy cleverly re-injects himself into her life through her husband and then plots to get her to kill her own baby which to him is perfectly logical because if she could kill his baby, then why not her husband's? Of course, problems ensue as the tension between the guy and the woman becomes obvious and soon she has to confess her past to her husband and the husband is loving and supportive and it's just a matter of time before the guy gets his just deserts, which is quick and violent. The movie's premise works because the guy does have cause to be angry and the story is set before *Roe v. Wade*, when getting an abortion was (and still is) a serious matter, not only morally but legally, and when the right of a woman to control her reproductive options was not yet fully established as a matter of law. Hence she really had no one to turn to with which to discuss her issues, especially the police, since abortion was a criminal act. As for the guy, he has no one to turn to for support either, knowing what his ex-girl friend had done. This movie dramatizes why the decision to have an an abortion has to be treated entirely as a medical matter. The alternative, to treat it as a criminal matter, just creates more problems, especially in the area of conflict resolution. Carol White gives a powerful performance as the woman and Scott Hyland's performance is compelling as the guy whose mind becomes twisted by righteous indignation, with tragic consequences.

Argo (2012)

It's not a documentary, 16 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This is a good movie which probably would have been an even better movie if the story had been based on actual facts. The operation to smuggle out the six Americans was primarily a Canadian, not American, action and the lead hero was the Canadian ambassador who protected the Americans and then arranged for them to leave the country. This is not to say that the United States had no role, because it did, but contrary to the movie, it was the Canadians who took the lead. Also, the fact that the American official sent to escort the

Americans was Hispanic is not even mentioned, which would have added another dimension to the story. The movie also demonizes the Iranians who are portrayed as little more than uncontrollable rabble, when in fact, what happened in 1979 was the culmination of a long series of grievances harbored by many Iranians against the United States. This does not mean that the Iranians should be excused for what they did when they stormed the embassy, which was a blatant violation of international law governing the protection of embassies, and for which the Iranian government must be held to account, but their actions must be examined within a larger historical and political context, something which the movie, to its credit alludes to, but does not incorporate more fully into the story. Ben Affleck gives an excellent performance as the CIA person and the story moves forward at a brisk pace with a lot of tension and excitement; it's a good movie. But it's not a documentary.

Looper (2012)

One of the better movies of the sci-fi genre. 7 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This is a great sci-fi movie. It's about an assassin, called a looper, who is hired to kill people sent to the past from the future. If this seems confusing, it is, and that's intentional. The problem is: what happens when the victim sent back is the assassin? That means killing yourself, or, as it's put in the movie, "closing the loop." Nice euphemism, right? Anyway, this one particular assassin is set to kill his next victim when he notices that the victim is himself, just older. Well, needless to say, but say it I will, mayhem breaks loose, because in the world of the loopers, if you don't do your job, then you have to be eliminated. (Eliminated: that's another euphemism.) You may be wondering: why have loopers? The answer to that question is because this story is set in the not so far distant future, after some kind of major upheaval, leaving humanity wrecked and presenting a perfect opportunity for organized crime to flourish. In the future time travel is discovered, but it's illegal, which means, of course, that only criminals use it. But in the future, when the syndicate eliminates someone, they cannot dispose of the body, hence, they transport the victim to the past for processing. Okay, now that we got that muddled explanation out of the way, here's what happens in the movie: the looper is now searching for his older self because his older self wants to murder a child who, in the future, will be the head of the crime syndicate who gets the older looper-self's wife murdered. That's right: it's a vendetta. Now, the younger looper-self learns that the child, a boy, lives on a farm with a woman who is the sister of the boy's mother. Now, the boy's mother was killed after the boy unleashed telekinetic forces that smashed everything in its path. Oh, before I forget, I need to mention that after the cataclysmic events that messes up the world, about ten percent of the population comes down with a mutation that gives them telekinetic powers which nobody knows how to use. Okay, now back to the looper and the boy. The looper finds the boy and they form an emotional bond.

Finally, to bring this synopsis to an end, the older-looper-self arrives at the farm, and is trying to kill the boy, who has just unleashed a humongous telekinetic blast, but instead kills the sister-mother, and so the looper kills himself. The reason why the looper kills himself is because he realizes that by sacrificing his life, he will save the life of the mother and that in turn will change the course of history because instead of the boy growing up bitter and unloved, and becoming the head of the criminal syndicate in the future, he will have a mother to care for him. Thus, the looper becomes a martyr and a hero. This movie is saturated with violence because the story is violent. Bruce Willis is fabulous as the older-looper-self. He carries this movie; it's probably his best role and performance in years. The story itself is intriguing and clever, and the movie does an excellent job of telling a story without an over-reliance on special effects, which are kept to a minimum.

The High and the Mighty (1954)

Flying cannot be taken for granted. 4 October 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This is a great movie. A passenger plane embarks on a routine flight from Hawaii to San Francisco, and then suddenly one of the engines blows up and the plane is leaking fuel. Soon it becomes apparent to the crew that they may not have enough fuel to reach land and that they may have to ditch the plane in the ocean which would mean certain death for all aboard because they are flying at night and the ocean waters are rough. Soon the passengers are frankly informed of the situation and of the possibility that the plane may have to ditch in the ocean, and now realizing that they all may die, they begin to openly discuss their own mortality. As a result, the passengers learn about their co-passengers and more about themselves. The ones who at first seem the strongest are soon shown to be the most fragile. The pilot loses his nerve and starts panicking and it is only because of the co-pilot, who is able to control his fear, that the plane continues flying and is not ditched in the ocean. Finally, the plane lands safely in San Francisco where the crew is met by the owner of the airline who tells the pilot and co-pilot that later they'll talk. End of movie. The movie contains an all-star cast including John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Robert Stack, Lorraine Day, Jan Sterling, Sidney Blackmer, John Howard and Carl Switzer (that's right, the same actor who played Alfalfa in the Our Gang series). Jan Sterling's performance was particularly powerful. This movie is wonderful.

"The Big Bang Theory" (2007)

A complex show. 29 September 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This show centers around four men, Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj, who are socially inept yet want to be accepted. Sheldon, Leonard and Raj have doctorates, and Howard is in the process of earning his doctorate. All four became a group after Leonard moved into Sheldon's apartment; Raj and Howard are Leonard's friends. Sheldon is the dominant member of the group. This is the case because Sheldon is the only one who has his own apartment. Raj lives with his sister and Howard with his mother. Hence, they meet at Sheldon's apartment where Leonard lives. Sheldon uses the fact that they are meeting at his apartment to maintain control over the group. i.e., where they can sit, who can stay, what they can watch on television, what foods they can eat, what games they can play, etc. The other three tolerate this because they have no other choice except to leave, and they have no place else to go. When things get really stressful for Sheldon, such as when one of the members of the group start complaining about something Sheldon did or said, Sheldon relies on biting sarcasm couched in hyper-intellectual language to force the complainant back into his place. It's a form of intellectual muscle-flexing meant to intimidate. These interactions are a source of much of the show's humor. Often, Sheldon's intellectualism becomes so extreme that it becomes incomprehensible and soon degenerates into gibberish. Sheldon also has disdain for the others wanting to meet women, but as one follows the series it becomes apparent that he's interested in women too. However, his obsessive compulsiveness has distorted his social skills, thus he cannot relax enough to establish an emotional bond and comes off as being distant and aloof when in fact he is actually caring. Without Sheldon there's be no show, at least not in its present form. The other three characters need Sheldon and Sheldon needs them. That all four are functioning at a similar intellectual level facilitates the verbal give-and-take that goes on within the group. Put Sheldon in with another group, he is immediately written off as a crank. But with Leonard, Raj, and Howard, Sheldon has an audience, albeit a captive one. What makes the show succeed is the way it catches the intensity of the interactions between the four as each is vying to show up the others. Although they've formed a group, they're not really friends. They are more like travelers stuck on the same ship who by mere circumstance are stuck with other. The closest thing to a friendship on the show is that between Sheldon and Leonard. Leonard is the only one that Sheldon respects, and when Leonard is upset, Sheldon, in his own distorted way, will try to help. Of the four, Leonard is the most substantive character. While Raj and Howard are buffoons who provide comic relief, Leonard is more serious and more emotionally developed. Hence, Leonard is able to form relationships with women, such as with Penny, the girl next door, and with Raj's sister, and is able to maintain his emotional equilibrium when the others are acting out. When Leonard is sad it is for a good reason, and when he is happy it is for a good reason too. Thus, he serves as the straight man for the other three, which makes him, in a way, the most entertaining and satisfying character of the four.

The War of the Roses (1989)

**Move over George and Martha - Barbara and Oliver have arrived.
28 September 2012**

(Spoiler alert)

This movie is about a married couple, Oliver and Barbara Rose, who discover that their marriage has been based on lies: for Barbara, that she never loved her husband, and for Oliver, that his wife loves him. For twenty years or so the situation in the Rose household is in a state of equilibrium. As a result, both protagonists can live their lives in a state of blissful denial - Barbara the dutiful wife and mother and Oliver the patriarchal bread winner and head of household. Things seem to be going well for them and their marriage. Then one day things suddenly and abruptly change. During a dinner for Oliver's business partners at the Rose's home, a dinner, of course, prepared by Barbara, Oliver inadvertently humiliates Barbara which sets off a chain reaction of events that lead to tragic consequences, tragic because both of them are essentially good persons who don't deserve what's going to happen to them. Now feeling resentment, Barbara now gets in touch with her deeper feeling of inadequacy as a human being, the cause of which she attributes not to herself but to her overbearing husband, and as a result she now hates him - and tells him that, straight to his face in the most unambiguous terms, including punching him hard on the face. Although slugged by his wife, Oliver still doesn't fully know what's hitting him. He does know that Barbara is upset but can't make heads or tails of it or take her seriously because, after all, she's his wife and, of course, she loves him. Soon it is impossible for the two of them to continue living together without denigrating each other. In an effort to eject Oliver from her life she starts her own business, which Oliver takes as a personal affront and a direct challenge to his role as the breadwinner, while Oliver, now angry and still perplexed, retaliates by belittling and humiliating Barbara in front of her customers. Tensions escalate after Barbara tells Oliver that she wants a divorce and is willing to waive alimony but wants to keep the house, and demands that he leave, based on the claim that the house was her's because she was the one who had done all the work to fix it up. Going against his lawyer's advice, the same lawyer (played by Danny DeVito in one of the great performances of his career) who had first advised Oliver that he had a legal right to stay in the house, advice which the lawyer later deeply regrets having given as it inflamed the situation and hurt his client, Oliver refuses to move out of the house and soon both are plotting on ways to force the other to leave. The fighting immediately turns violent with Barbara trying to run over Oliver with her ATV and repeatedly throwing heavy objects at Oliver's head and Oliver staggering around the house threatening to hit her with a large crow bar. Barbara is driven by her utter hatred for Oliver and Oliver by the hope that if he prevails then Barbara will come back to him. Both are now totally miserable. The movie ends on a tragic note, as both die, enemies to the bitter end. Kathleen Turner and Michael Douglas play the protagonists. Mr. Douglas' performance is outstanding but this is Kathleen Turner's movie. Her performance has to rank as one of the greatest in cinema history.

This movie is also an indictment of the legal profession as both Barbara and Oliver retain lawyers who, if anything, incite their clients thereby making matters worse. The lawyers are directly complicit in the disastrous events that ensue as both Barbara and Oliver believe that they have the law on their side.

End of Watch (2012)

Excellent movie. 26 September 2012

This is an excellent movie. It has everything a movie fan needs: an exciting story, strong acting, snappy dialogue, and great cinematography. The semi-documentary format creates a feeling of authenticity which makes the movie even more intense. The main characters are two police officers assigned to a high-crime area in Los Angeles. Both officers are likable. The portrayal of the gang members is also impressive. The movie is replete with scenes of graphic violence, but these scenes are relevant to the plot. There is a lot of light banter which belies the seriousness of the plot, which deals with the questions relating to the role of the police in today's society. What makes this movie work is how it succeeds in making the audience feel empathy for the two police officers not as police officers but as people, so that if they come in harm's way the audience will care. Patrolling a high crime area is a challenging and dangerous assignment; what it means to the people who actually do that kind of work is what this movie is about.

The Master (2012)

Excellent performances in a profound movie, 25 September 2012

(Spoiler alert)

This movie features wonderful acting in a complex story which is entirely plausible. Basically, the movie is about a disturbed drifter named Freddie, played by Joaquin Phoenix, a veteran of combat while serving in the Navy during World War Two, who by sheer chance is brought under the guidance and protection of a charismatic charlatan named Lancaster Dodd, played by Philip Seymour Hoffman, who is promoting a pseudo-religion that purports to offer a way to cure people of their personal problems and thereby achieve happiness. The cinematography is excellent. The movie also has scenes of graphic nudity which, in this case, are relevant to the story, and which further reveal the nature of Freddie's mind. Freddie is a disturbed individual who is socially dysfunctional. His impulsiveness and anger cause him to repeatedly act out and get into trouble. He tries to deal with his behavioral issues by self-medicating through ingestion of unrefined alcohol, which is poison. During their first meeting, Dodd immediately realizes that Freddie is seriously disturbed and decides to take the ex-Navy man under his care and make him his poster boy for his new religion in order to show his

followers that even a case like Freddie can be "cured." How Lancaster Dodd subsequently tries and repeatedly fails to "cure" Freddie and in the process places the credibility of his entire organization and his personal reputation at risk is what this movie is about. Dodd's wife and his other closest followers tell Dodd that Freddie cannot be cured because Freddie does not want help and is an alcoholic, but Dodd refuses to listen because if he gives up then he will have to admit that his religion is a fraud and that he is a failure and a scam artist. Finally, Dodd's failure is attributed to Freddie's unwillingness to accept help and his alcoholism and he is banished from the program; once again Freddie is adrift in a world, in worse shape than he was before he met Dodd. The chemistry between Mr. Phoenix and Mr. Hoffman is intense; both artists should be nominated for awards. The cinematography is fantastic; the 65 mm format works. The female members of the cast, particularly Laura Dern, are wonderful. Ms. Dern should be given recognition for her performance. This is a great movie which dramatizes the harm that can be done when phonies have a chance to exploit needy and troubled persons who are at risk.

The Big Heat (1953)

A classic movie. 15 September 2012

It is difficult to decide where to begin praising this movie. Should we start with the story, which is terrific? Or with the acting, which was great? Or with the continuity, which never let up and took the audience straight to the finish? Or with the cinematography, which conveyed the feeling of tension and drama? Or with the music, which perfectly caught the somber mood of the story? This movie is an example of what a movie is like when all the elements that go into making a movie come together. Gloria Graham's performance is stunning. Glenn Ford conveys an intensity that is remarkable. But the actor who propels this movie to the level of greatness is Lee Marvin. Mr. Marvin's performance has to rank as one of the most powerful and compelling in the history of cinema. His performance is memorial and sets a standard of excellence that may be equaled but not likely to be surpassed. One other point: Although this movie was made in 1953, it withstands the test of time, meaning that the story is as relevant today as it was in 1953, thus this movie is a classic.

One other point: This movie may arguably be the finest example of expressionist cinema ever produced by an American movie company.

Bus Stop (1956)

MM at her best. 14 September 2012

This movie departs significantly from the original William Inge script. The original play is a part drama/part satire on the nature of relationships and there

are six principal characters: the chanteuse, the cowboy, the owner of the bus stop, the bus driver, the waitress and the older male customer. Plus the entire play is set in a diner. Joshua Logan takes this play and transforms it into a wide-screen extravaganza showcasing the looks and talents of Marilyn Monroe. If anyone has any doubts about Ms. Monroe's ability to act, this movie should dispel those doubts. She dominates the movie and is in almost every scene. Don Murray and Arthur O'Connell also give strong performances, but it's Ms. Monroe's movie all the way.

Experiment in Terror (1962)

This is Ross Martin's movie. 14 September 2012

This is a solid movie with a strong story. The real star of this movie is Ross Martin whose portrayal of a psychopathic killer is chilling. The story itself is tightly put together and moves forward steadily and relentlessly to its conclusion. Glenn Ford gives another outstanding performance, this time as the investigator assigned to the case. The black and white cinematography adds to the eerie and somber mood of the story. Lee Remick and Stephanie Powers are excellent as the two sisters who are the targets of the bad guy's machinations, but this Ross Martin's movie. He is the star. His presence makes this movie succeed because without him the movie would have lost much of its dramatic impact. His character permeates throughout the movie and if not properly performed, the entire movie fails. In this case, that pitfall is avoided.

Lawless (2012)

Kudos for a wonderful movie. 14 September 2012

This is an intense movie and it succeeds in grabbing and holding the audience's attention. Now, the movie claims to be based on true events, but so what? Whether or not the story is fabricated, it's a great movie. The actors perform with an intensity that is worthy of recognition. Tom Hardy is absolutely brilliant as the head of the clan that refused to knuckle under to corruption. And Shia La Boeuf gives a performance that is a surprising departure from his usual roles and does a great job. The story itself is fast paced, never loses its continuity, and succeeds in keeping the audience's attention throughout. But the biggest star in this movie is Guy Pearce. His performance dominates the movie. Also, his resemblance to Dan Duryea is uncanny, not only in appearance but in acting style, which is saying a lot because Dan Duryea was a great actor. Of course, special mention must be made for the lovely leading ladies in this movie, Jessica Chastain and Mia Wasikowska, who are as talented as they are beautiful. Kudos for all for making such a wonderful movie.

Diner (1982)

Nostalgia but without the fanfare. 9 September 2012

This movie provides a glimpse into the difference between true friendship and mutual association. In this movie all the principle know each other, talk with each other, even spend a lot of time with each other, but they are not friends. That is, although there is an appearance of camaraderie, they really don't care about each other. Although the movie lacks a conventional plot, it still tells a story about people who play off each other with dramatic results. Unlike, let's say, the principle group of friends in *Deer Hunter*, in which the group is held tightly together by bonds of religion ethnicity and cultural heritage, the glue holding together the group in diner is much weaker and less definable, and may not even exist. All they do is talk, laugh, and complain, and it does not take much to split the group apart. Perhaps the point of the movie is to dramatize the tenuousness of relationships and not to bank on seeking support from those you hang out with because they may not be there for you. Now, the cast is universally excellent with Mickey Rourke delivering the strongest performance. His character is the one that comes closest to being a real friend, yet even he is involved with stuff that sets him apart from the others. Ellen Barkin also gives a strong performance as the woman who is a symbol of everything the guys talk about regarding women. This is a good movie that provides dramatic treatment of group dynamics in a fluid social context.

The Expendables 2 (2012)

Stallone is back. 8 September 2012

This is a solid action movie. It has lots of action, a good story, good acting and some snappy dialog. Sylvester Stallone plays the lead role with a combination of power and warmth and the rest of the cast is excellent too. The rapport between Mr. Stallone and Jason Statham is excellent; they make an effective action team. It was surprising to find Jean-Claude Van Dam playing out of character, in this case, a despicable villain, but his performance is excellent. The presence of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis and Chuck Norris also helps to make this movie a good entertaining experience. But ultimately, the reason why this movie succeeds is because instead of relying exclusively on flashy special effects and intense action sequences, the movie tells a story without which the movie would just be a lot of noise.

The Dark Knight Rises (2012)

Very good movie. 8 September 2012

To my utter surprise, this is a good movie. Despite the usual dose of special effects and a story that tests the boundaries of plausibility, this movie

succeeds as cinematic entertainment. The reason for this is the cast. The movie is well acted. Christian Bale plays Batman with an intensity that transforms the character from a two-dimensional comic book figure into a complex human being, with strengths and weaknesses. Ann Hathaway is stunning as the Bat Woman. Not only is she beautiful, she invests her character with feelings that make her endearing without being corny or sappy. Gary Oldham gives what may be the best rendition of Commissioner Gordon. Tom Hardy is outstanding as the bad guy and Batman's foil. Watching this movie, one can actually begin to care about the Batman. Soon the contrivances in the story recede into the background as one wonders whether the Batman will survive.

The Asphalt Jungle (1950)

Sensational movie. 25 August 2012

This movie is sensational. It is an outstanding example of expressionist cinema which captures perfectly the mood of foreboding and anger associated with modern urban society. Everyone is damaged; and everyone is trying to survive in the grim world where one's life isn't worth much. Every character is flawed and nobody's wishes come true. Nobody can be trusted and the double-cross is the rule, and something to be expected. The women are damaged, the men are angry and manipulative. The big shot is a wimp and the heavy a sentimentalist years for better days, which are gone forever. Nobody shows any love because there is none to show. Sterling Hayden is terrific as the guy who takes no guff from anyone and Jean Hagen is surprisingly effective as his girl with a past. But the strongest performance is by Sam Jaffe (that's right, the same actor who plays the benign and whimsical Dr. Zorba in Ben Casey) as a conniving and manipulative ex-con.

Gilda (1946)

Rita Hayworth at her best. 25 August 2012

When one talks about "hot," then one must be referring to Rita Hayworth's performance in this movie. She is HOT! This entire movie revolves around her and her character. Even Glenn Ford cannot match Ms. Hayworth's presence on the screen. As a leading lady, she is the total package. And in addition, she can act. Nothing about this movie is corny, hokey or dated. The dialogue is snappy, the plot engrossing and the cinematography catches the mood of the story. The chemistry between Ms. Hayworth and Glenn Ford is intense and immediately apparent. The supporting cast is wonderful and all deliver outstanding performances, especially George Macready whose performance should have earned him accolades. Yet, the success of this movie boils down to the presence of Rita Hayworth. The final scenes showing her in the Jean Louis dress are sensational. This is a great movie and is certainly well worth watching.

Ninotchka (1939)

Great Garbo as comedienne. 19 August 2012

If anyone believes that Greta Garbo could not do comedy, then watch this movie. Not only does Ms. Garbo do comedy, she makes people laugh. In fact, her performance is at times hilarious. This movie, which is a satire of the Soviet system, is brilliant. Besides being funny, the chemistry between Ms. Garbo and her co-star Melvyn Douglas is great. He and Ms. Garbo make a great comedy team. And the story itself is wonderful. Using the Soviet Union as the source of jokes is risky but the movie deals with the subject in an entertaining manner. Ms. Garbo is beautiful, witty, poignant and charming. The rest of the cast is also superb, and combined with excellent cinematography and a strong script, they combine to produce an excellent movie.

Picnic (1955)

Corny and hokey. 19 August 2012

This movie is an example of what can happen when the storyline of a play is changed to conform to a movie format. What is a tight wrapped theatrical production morphs into something almost unrecognizable from the original on the screen. This movie can be best summed up in one word: hokey. True, the movie was made in 1955, but still, by that time Hollywood was already treating the subject of sex in a more candid manner. This movie takes a great play with a lot of intense interactions and transforms it into an overblown mess with a lot of stacy overacting. Despite the title of the play, the story is not about a picnic, yet the movie makes a picnic a central feature of the story, which diverts the audience's attention from what is going on between the principal characters, who get lost in the crowd. If any movie did not need extras, this is the one. Yet for some reason, this movie has an army of extras playing picnickers. William Holden's performance is good but not especially strong or overpowering and there is little chemistry between him and Kim Novak. Much more intense and better acted are the performances by Rosalind Russell and Arthur O'Connell, both in supportive roles. The movie should have been about them.

Humoresque (1946)

Joan Crawford at her best. 19 August 2012

This is a great movie and for two reasons. First, Joan Crawford. This movie contains what has to be the best performance of her career. Not only does Ms. Crawford dominate the entire movie, her acting is superb, and she never looked better. There is great chemistry between her and her co-star, John Garfield, whose performance is also outstanding. Yet this is Ms. Crawford's

movie; no other actress could have played her role more effectively. Second, the music. In this movie the music not only sets the mood but is an integral part of the story. Without the music the story would be dull and stale, and for good reason, the story is about music and musicians, which in itself is a novel idea. Oscar Levant is also wonderful as the pianist with the sardonic wit. The movie also features great cinematography, including impressive close ups of Ms. Crawford and Mr. Garfield as well as some outstanding montage of New York City. This movie is well worth watching.

Camille (1936)

Strong story and great acting. 2 August 2012

This is a strong movie featuring outstanding performances by the entire cast. Robert Taylor performance is particularly noteworthy as well as is Henry Daniell's. Greta Garbo of course is wonderful. But this is Robert Taylor's movie. His performance is compelling, evocative, and powerful. He dominates the movie. And Henry Daniell is the perfect foil for Mr. Taylor as both men vie for the affections of a certain beautiful woman. The dialogue is snappy and the cinematography impressive. But those are secondary to the story which is dramatic without being becoming sentimental. The interaction between Garbo and Taylor and Daniell is intense and makes this movie one of the better works of drama.

The Children's Hour (1961)

Good screen adaptation of the Lillian Hellman play. 27 July 2012

This movie is a good but not great screen adaptation of the Lillian Hellman play. The movie does a good job with sticking with the story. The problem is the cast. The performances by Audrey Hepburn and James Garner are so stogy that it almost undoes the movie. The movie is saved by the powerful and compelling performances by Karen Balkin as Mary the student who starts the rumor and Shirley MacLaine as the teacher who is one of the victims. The tension between these two characters keeps the story from going stale. The movie itself is filmed almost as a stage play, which in this case works, since the story is character-driven. James Garner is completely upstaged by the female cast, and the scene in which he confronts Mary, which is supposed to be climactic, is weak. Now, one could dismiss this story as being contrived, but it isn't. Guilt by innuendo is nothing new, and this movie dramatizes the catastrophic consequences of such vicious behavior.

Murder, My Sweet (1944)

Dated. 27 July 2012

This is a good movie but it's dated. This is the kind of movie that has turned into an antique, meaning that when it was new it was a gem but with the passage of time it has lost its luster. Now, that does not mean that the movie is not worth watching. It has a wonderful cast and excellent cinematography, but still, the movie is essentially dull and hokey. This has nothing to do with the actors. Rather, it a question of changing tastes. What passed for an exciting crime drama in the 1940s would seem stodgy today. Maybe one should not make such generalizations, but to remake this movie today would require a massive re-write to bring it in conformity with the tastes of today's audience, and unless someone today is willing to accept this movie on its own 1940s terms, it will not excite; rather it will bore, and maybe even cure you of insomnia.

The Little Foxes (1941)

If you like great movies, then this movie is for you. 27 July 2012

If you like great movies, then this movie is for you. This movie successfully combines all the facets of movie-making, direction, cast, plot, cinematography, sets, and costumes, to produce one of the great movies. Bette Davis is superb as a ruthless woman who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. The other cast members are outstanding too, especially Herbert Marshall who plays Ms. Davis' husband. Although Ms. Davis got top billing, Mr. Marshall is really the star. But the strongest feature of the movie is the story itself, which is based on the play of the name by Lillian Hellman. This movie succeeds in capturing and portraying the nest of deceit that is the Hubbard family. This movie offers an excellent portrayals of the dysfunctional family driven by sibling rivalry of the most craven variety. The movie contains great drama as the dynamics of the inter-family relationships are revealed. It's a wonderful movie and one which is worth watching.

Sudden Fear (1952)

Joan Crawford at her best. 17 July 2012

If anyone has any doubt about Joan Crawford's greatness as an actor, then watch this movie. Her performance is sensational as the playwright who accidentally finds out that she is being set up. The story is compelling and conveys the sense of foreboding and suspense which grabs and keeps the audience's attention. Jack Palance gives a strong and convincing performance as a conman who marries Ms. Crawford. He is suave, urbane and sinister. Yet this movie is a Joan Crawford showcase. She is the center of the story and she succeeds in making this movie a most effective work of cinematic art. The cinematography is outstanding; it captures and conveys the sense of terror as the audience is taken on an emotional roller coaster ride toward a final, exciting conclusion.

Chaplin (1992)

Superficial biopic. 17 July 2012

First, let's get this point out of the way: Robert Downy Jr. is a great actor and proves it in this movie. His portrayal of Charlie Chaplin is brilliant. However, the same cannot be said for the rest of the movie. This movie is little more than a glossy, superficial review of the life of one of the most amazing and complex figures in entertainment history. The movie fails to convey the intense drama associated with the controversy surrounding the many momentous events of Mr. Chaplin's life. His creativity, his divorces, his politics, his sexual proclivities (which alone could be the basis for a feature film), and his relationship with his family are mentioned but never more fully developed, which makes the movie seem shallow. Mr. Chaplin's two first two marriages were personal disasters, yet the movie glosses over them. These were sensational events which almost destroyed Chaplin's career. To put it another way, the movie offers various tidbits about Chaplin the person, but does not develop them further, which weakens the movie's dramatic impact. That Hollywood chose to make a movie about Charlie Chaplin is commendable, but if you want to find out more about Chaplin, you would do better by watching his movies or reading a bio.

The Charge of the Light Brigade (1936)

It's a work of fiction, not a documentary, 17 July 2012

It's a movie, not a documentary. If one keeps this in mind, then this movie is entertaining (except, of course, for the horses). Nevertheless, the story has its flaws. The story mixes historical events with fiction, with good dramatic results. But the manner in which a critical military order is altered is a bit far fetched, even for a movie. And Olivia de Havilland dumping Errol Flynn in favor of Patric Knowles simply does not wash. Flynn's character is too heroic and selfless for him to be treated in such a shabby manner. The massacre scene is compelling and generates a feeling of outrage. Yet, what is not explained is why the British decided to end their financial assistance to the Khan, which is a hostile act, and one which almost guaranteed that there would be a conflict. The movie does a good job in showcasing the bravado of the British cavalry, but not their military or political judgment, which in the movie is highly questionable. The British had a score to settle with the Khan, but what were they doing in central Asia in the first place? This is a broader political question that the movie does not address, but then again, why should it? It's a photo-play, not a docudrama, and as a photo-play this movie is excellent.

The Hustler (1961)

More than just a sports movie. 15 July 2012

This is more than a sports movie. It is a movie about the human condition. The movie is crammed with metaphors, all of which add up to one thing: it is easy to become depraved. What starts out as a desire to win causes one to spiral downward into an abyss of moral decay which erodes one's priorities and leads to tragic consequences. Eddie Felson wants to win, but at what price? How much is he willing to hobnob with the sharks, shysters and gangsters who don't care a spit for him? For Eddie is symbol of an economic system that puts winning at any price before everything, and if anyone gets hurt along the way, then too bad for them, until of course it's too late and the damage is done. And Minnesota Fats is a symbol of what Eddie can become if he goes that route. And the pool hall itself is a symbol of a system in which people are being hustled, lured by the promise of a quick win. For Eddie, winning and losing is a matter of life and death, but for everyone else it's business as usual. Nobody seems to care about Eddie, and he becomes so craven that he rejects the only person who actually does care about him, all so he can play a game of pool and win some money and show to the world that he is the greatest - except that nobody cares. And that is the point of the movie. As Eddie leaves, life goes on, as if he was never there. He ruffles the feathers of the powers that be and it's duly noted; there will be other Eddies, and as for Eddie himself, he just another player, and a good one too, who arrives, has his moment of glory, and then disappears, with many others waiting in the wings to take his place.

Anna Christie (1931)

A Greta Garbo masterpiece. 14 July 2012

This movie is an intriguing remake of the 1930 movie, using the same lead actress, Greta Garbo, and the same sets, but with a different director, a different supporting cast, a different writer, and a different language - German - and this version is far superior. This movie stays true to the actual play and is able to convey the intensity of the story. And this happens because there is no ambiguity over Anna Christie's profession, and this is key to the entire plot. Candidly showing Anna for what she is intensifies the subsequent interactions between her and the other characters, thus strengthening the movie. Also, the actors who play Chris and Matt perform their roles well, and in a far less stagy style. That the movie is in German also lends it a more realistic quality in that all the key characters are Europeans. For this movie is not only about a woman confronting personal issues, it's also about immigrants dealing with separation from their own home lands. One further point: in this movie Greta Garbo is absolutely beautiful and proves her strength and versatility as an actress and artist.

Anna Christie (1930)

Greta Garbo rocks! 14 July 2012

This movie is a toned-down adaptation of the play by Eugene O'Neill. The main problem with the movie is the portrayal of Anna Christie. In the play, Anna Christie is a whore. She is explicitly described as being as such. This point is crucial to the story. Yet, when Greta Garbo enters the movie, her attire is anything but garish. She simply does not look like a hard-bitten street-walker. As for Greta Garbo, she is absolutely beautiful. She is the star of the movie. She is exquisite and her performance is superb. Marie Dressler's performance is wonderful too. As far the male actors, their acting is stagy and hammy. This movie is definitely dominated by the female performers and it is because of them that this movie is watchable. Nevertheless, by toning down the dialogue, the movie loses the dramatic power of the play, and although the movie is good, if it had stayed true to the original story, it could have been great.

Watch on the Rhine (1943)

Excellent adaptation of a great play. 14 July 2012

This a great movie. The passage of time has not lessened its dramatic impact. Although set during World War Two, this movie, which is an excellent adaptation of the Lillian Hellman play, deal with themes which are relevant today and would resonate with a contemporary audience. Paul Lukas's performance is tremendous; his Academy Award is well-deserved. As for Bette Davis, she successfully tackles a role that was not a typical one for her. Here she is cast in a supporting role, yet she still stars, so good is her performance. The other members of the cast are also excellent. Special mention must go to George Coulouris and Irene Watson, both of whom have key roles in the drama. This movie conveys the feeling of determination and commitment to the struggle against Nazism, yet avoids becoming a polemic, which is why the movie is so strong as a drama. For anyone who likes strong stories and excellent acting, this movie is for you.

Lost in Yonkers (1993)

Excellent screen adaptation of a great play. 14 July 2012

This movie is an excellent screen adaptation of a great play. Instead of being hokey or sentimental, the story provides a candid portrayal of a family in crisis, as each family member is forced to deal with issues that have long repressed. Essentially, the story centers around the relationship between an overbearing mother, performed magnificently by Irene Worth, and her confused daughter, played by Mercedes Ruehl. Ms. Ruehl's performance is a tour-de-force.

She completely dominates this movie. The climactic scene between the mother and daughter is both poignant and powerful, and raises this movie to the level of great cinema and drama. Richard Dreyfuss also gives a strong performance as the brother with the bravado but also with a heart. This movie should be a must-watch for anyone who likes screen adaptations of plays and for people in general who like strong drama.

Objective, Burma! (1945)

Well-crafted movie. 13 July 2012

This movie is well crafted and features one of Errol Flynn's better performances. His performance is low-key yet strong and convincing. The cinematography is excellent and the movie has lots of action and a strong story, in terms of plot and character development. However, the movie has certain problems. First, the battle for Burma was a British, not an American, operation. Second, Errol Flynn's character, Captain Nelson, although a brave and heroic soldier and the epitome of a battlefield leader, makes a major tactical blunder which the movie tries, yet fails, to adequately explain. Third, the Japanese enemy are stereotypically portrayed. Now, regarding point number one. In the movie, the operation is conceived, organized and executed by American soldiers, which is a contrivance. The Americans fought primarily in the Pacific; the British primarily in Asia. Regarding point number two. After it becomes apparent that Captain Nelson and his troops cannot be extracted and will have to march thirty miles to an alternative location, through enemy held territory, he decides to split his forces, which was a huge mistake, as the story itself later shows. Never divide your forces. Regarding point number three. The portrayal of the Japanese soldiers is shallow, which does nothing to strengthen the story. The fact is that both the Japanese and the Allies were fighting over a country that was not even theirs; what were they doing there? Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, it's still an excellent movie which is worth watching. After all, it's not a documentary.

Brighton Beach Memoirs (1986)

Any resemblance between this story and the actual Brighton Beach is purely coincidental. 11 July 2012

A strong story about a family in crisis is transformed into a tepid parody of what is supposed to be a Jewish family. The movie has several problems. First, the casting. There is no way that Blythe Danner can pass herself off as a Jewish-Brooklyn mother. She is completely miscast. Second, the Eugene Jerome character has to be one of the most obnoxiously unfunny adolescents in the history of cinema. Not only is he nasty, he is a pervert too, as the movie shows. Third, the staging of the story fails to convey the family's desperate financial straits. That is, the family does not seem as poor as the story suggests. Fourth,

the interpersonal issues, which are the strong points of the story, are resolved in a way obviously meant to ensure that the movie has an upbeat ending. The conflict between the two sisters is intense and quite dramatic, yet its resolution is pure schmaltz as their mutual anger inexplicably evaporates. But perhaps the worst feature of the movie is the treatment of Eugene's brother who is the most complex of all the characters. His issues alone could have been the basis of a great movie. Instead, he is relegated to being a straight man for the unfunny Eugene. That the brother, who is a troubled young man, returns to a home housing the likes of Eugene Jerome is proof of movie company can take a perfectly good story and turn it into pulp.

"The Lone Ranger: Enter the Lone Ranger (#1.1)" (1949)

What a great movie! 10 July 2012

This episode explains the origins of the Lone Ranger and the basis for the series. Without this episode, the entire series makes little sense. The Lone Ranger is more than just a crime fighter. He is a symbol, a living metaphor, for a set of values that place him on a higher plane. Moreover, the story is told in a straightforward and unambiguous manner, making it eminently easy to watch and enjoy. The acting is great and Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels are perfect for the parts. An important component is the musical track which is beautiful and powerful and perfectly compliments the story. What is surprising is that although this is the opening episode of a television series, this episode is actually a full-length movie with a strong story, a wide array of characters and sets, and impressive cinematography. This is not a cheaply made production. Also notable in the cast is Glenn Strange who plays the Ranger's main antagonist. This opening episode of the Lone Ranger saga is a great example of the western movie genre and is something that is definitely worth watching.

Detour (1945)

Good movie. 30 June 2012

Although a moderately priced production, this is a strong, well-crafted movie which features powerful acting, especially by Tom Neal and Ann Savage. There are several great scenes between the two of them around which the entire story revolves. As soon as Ms. Savage enters the movie, the action is nonstop; she takes over. One doesn't know what she will do next. This is a classic film-noir. The story is well-defined and strong and contains a lot of snappy dialogue. Moreover, the story quickly engages the audience's interest as the main protagonist explains his plight. There is definite chemistry between Ms. Savage and Mr. Neal as their characters struggle to establish an understanding and connect with each other.

The Last Mimzy (2007)

A wonderful movie. 30 June 2012

This movie is beautiful and endearing. The movie stars two young children and both give strong and convincing performances. Also, the special effects are played down in favor of telling the story, which heightens the drama as the story unfolds. The story is original and deals with several intriguing themes. That two children become the agents through which momentous events occur gives the story an aura of innocence which makes it an even more compelling work of art. Also interesting is the role played by simple-looking toys in the movie. This movie shows that toys need not be complex or glitzy to stimulate a child's imagination, or to facilitate communication through the portal of time. The most innocent-looking objects may be the things through which great things occur.

Flamingo Road (1949)

Before Boss Hogg there was Boss Semple. 30 June 2012

This is one of Joan Crawford's better movies because it is so entertaining. This movie has it all: drama, snappy dialogue, memorial characters. good guys and bad guys, excellent film noir cinematography, fluid continuity, and a wonderful ending. Most commanding is Sydney Greenstreet. He carries this movie; his performance is strong and surprisingly dynamic. Before Boss Hogg there was Boss Semple and in this movie the Boss is in charge until he gets his come-uppance. Joan Crawford gives a wonderful performance as the carnival worker who gets caught up in political corruption. Her scenes with Mr. Greenstreet are the highlights of the movie. The movie treats a number of compelling themes in a straightforward manner and without becoming melodramatic.

Dark Victory (1939)

Bette Davis is superb. 23 June 2012

This is a great movie because it avoids sentimentality and because of the performance by Bette Davis in what has to be one of the best roles of her career. Ms. Davis completely dominates the movie and because of her the movie avoids becoming hokey or corny. Her performance is superb and she carries the movie. The story itself is strong and compelling and deals candidly with many sensitive themes. The plot is highly dramatic but avoids becoming melodramatic as Ms. Davis' character, Judith, struggles to come to terms with serious issues relating to life and death. The movie is filmed in a film-noir style that predates the emergence of that genre by several years. George Brent and Geraldine Fitzgerald are also give wonderful performances in supporting roles, and they are supportive roles because this film has one star and that star is Bette Davis.

Rock of Ages (2012)

Tom Cruise's incredible performance saves this movie. 21 June 2012

Despite inane dialogue and an insipid plot, this movie is good entertainment for one reason: the incredible performance by Tom Cruise as Stacie Jaxx. Mr. Cruise carries this movie and makes this movie happen. His performance is dynamic and completely outside of his usual kind of character. The movie is worth watching for Tom Cruise's performance alone. Tom Cruise should have been given top billing. He is the star of the show; it's his movie. He dominates every scene he is in. With the exception of Top Gun, this is probably Tom Cruise's best movie. As for the movie itself, it has a lot of glitz with little substance. Russell Brand and Alec Baldwin are ridiculous in this movie and the production is stagy, with poor acting. But that doesn't stop Tom Cruise from showing the world his versatility as an actor and that he's still one of the great actors in cinema today.

Prometheus (2012/I)

Immensely important cinematic work of art. 12 June 2012

As much as I wanted to dismiss this movie as just some more sfx fluff, I cannot because it would not be true. This is an excellent movie which has a strong story and an excellent cast that does a great job in portraying their respective characters. This movie succeeds in keeping the audience's attention and raises some interesting questions regarding the origins of humanity. Although science fiction, the movie's story is plausible. Other planets exist in the universe and if we ever visit one of those planets, who knows what will be found? The introduction of some dangerous and bizarre life forms adds immeasurably to the story's strength, but the the best part of the movie is the performance by Michael Fassbender who plays a sinister but fascinating robot. His performance is exceptional. There is nonstop action and excitement as humans grapple with all kinds of dangers as they attempt to expand the frontiers of knowledge. The brilliance of this movie is equaled only by the immensity of the production itself. This movie is a monumental effort which cleverly combines all facets of movie-making into one supreme work of art that attempts to go way beyond the commonplace and humdrum and into areas that not only stimul8 the senses but challenge the intellect. Science fiction need not be just a bunch of flashy special effects and scary creatures. This movie injects the element of science into the story; it's more than just an updated rehash of Godzilla or Rodan. The chaos in the movie is more than just some haphazard acting-out by enraged extraterrestrials. Instead, the movie is suggesting something much deeper, more profound and infinitely more sublime. It is reaching for answers to questions that have puzzled humanity since the dawn of time. From whence did we come and to what are we going? The chemistry between the actors becomes apparent in scene after scene as fear and passion combine to produce some of the most

intense dramatic scenes in the history of the sci-fi genre. The female leads are beautiful; the male leads appropriately manly and the alien creatures delightfully scary. This is a prequel to a movie that was made thirty years ago, yet there is no need to have watched the original to appreciate this contemporary story. No effort is spared to give the audience the thrills and chills that are the mark of gr8 movie-making. Hollywood deserves accolades for having produced such a wonderful movie. Charlene Theron once again proves that she is one of the premier actresses in cinema today, and Guy Pearce's rendition of an elderly man is absolutely fabulous; it's even better than Brad Pitt's rendition in Benjamin Button. 1 can only marvel at all the talent displayed in this movie; everything suggests creativity at a level that is breathtaking. One can respond with amazement at the incredible vistas of another part of the universe light years away from earth depicted in this movie. Who are the precursors of the humans? Watch this movie to find out the answer.

The Lion in Winter (1968)

Theatrical period piece; a showcase for Hepburn and O'Toole., 11 June 2012

(Spoiler alert)

What's with Henry II? He has his wife holed up in a prison, is openly contemptuous of his sons, does not honor treaties, has a mistress who is demanding to get married, and exercises his power with an impulsiveness that suggests serious mental problems. Everyone is vying for power and wants Henry out of the way. The problem with the movie is that it asks the audience to accept the premise that the king has cause for concern, when in fact his relatives are so emotionally dependent, divided, and incompetent that they cannot possibly pose a threat to him. In fact the movie suggests that the king's children are so befuddled that they wouldn't know what to do with the crown if it was given to them by the king himself. And as for his wife, she is already played out and as the movie itself shows, is willing to do anything Henry wants. Now if the king was facing an insurrection perpetrated from inside his family, then there's a story, but that is not case in this movie. The king is totally dominant and his position is untenable. This movie is entertaining because it provides an excellent venue for Katherine Hepburn and Peter O'Toole to showcase their talents, which they do successfully, thus making the movie watchable. But to suggest that Henry II should fear for his power is a stretch and in this case, the stretch goes too far. Nevertheless, the movie does succeed as a period piece, albeit with a contrived story. As a period piece that depicts scenes from the middle ages, this movie is probably unsurpassed; however, one must not forget that this movie is a commercial product and work of fiction which takes all kinds of liberties with historical fact, and for good reason: the movie is not a documentary but a drama. This does not render the movie any less credible as a work of art. Rather, all it means is that literary people took a certain story and reworked it for dramatic effect, and did so effectively. Can an audience accept the fact that a husband

actually locked up his wife? Or that the the potential heirs to the throne are portrayed as sniveling nitwits? Or that the king himself rummaged around his castle with a silly grin or scowl on his face? After watching this movie, one can reasonably wonder how someone as hysterical as Henry II wound up being a king or could have kept his power, since it would not have been especially difficult to goad him into making all kinds of mistakes, and even kings were not invulnerable. But this is why the movie is so good: it's fiction based on actual historical personages whose actual lives simply do not conform to Hollywood's idea of a good story. Henry II was not a clod; Eleanor of Acquitane was not such a dainty lady, and their children were people who were destined for power. So enjoy the movie for what it's worth and then afterward read a history book and learn what actually happened.

Becket (1964)

Entertaining but contrived story. 11 June 2012

(Spoiler alert)

Wait a minute! Becket is a Saxon? Isn't that stretching literary license a bit far? It is hard to believe that modern Britain can trace its roots in part to a tribe of Vikings who first forced their way into France and then conquered England, which indicated that if any group deserves dramatic treatment, it's the Normans. They went all over Europe and Mideast, and they were force to be reckoned with. So to make Becket a Saxon seems such a come down, especially when it's not true, and even a drama should not take such license. This movie would have worked well as a drama if Becket had been portrayed as a Norman, which would have made the bond between him and Henry more plausible. That the Norman king would have a Saxon as his closest confidante seems a bit too much to accept, and in fact, it did not happen.

Nevertheless, this is an entertaining and well-acted movie. Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton are excellent in the principal roles. However, although despite its trappings as a credible historical account of a political conflict with sexual overtones, the movie is pure fiction with a story line that is hokey and contrived. The conflict that is the central theme of the plot, loyalty versus integrity, is unconvincing. A nobleman murders a priest and Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, demands justice and when none is forthcoming, excommunicates the offender. What's the problem? Becket was doing his job, but the king, who is also Becket's patron and best friend and expects Becket to act the role of a stooge, since it is the king who had Becket installed as Archbishop, objects. Of course, there was probably a lot more going on between Becket and Henry, which the movie omits. The audience is asked to accept the premise that the king is so insecure that he cannot tolerate even the slightest action that can be construed, or misconstrued, as a challenge to his power. Now, if the Becket had tried to raise an army and start a civil war, then the king wanting to protect himself and his

office would be understandable, but no such challenge happens, nor ever did happen. Becket confines his actions to that of an ecclesiastic nature which was well within the scope of his authority. That the king, who is a profligate, refuses to go along with Becket is unsurprising, and that politics ruins what was otherwise a wonderful friendship is regrettable, but what else is new? If Becket was as obnoxious as Henry, then the movie may have produced some fireworks. Instead, the movie presents Becket as being so passive that he cannot possibly pose a threat to anyone, and as proof of his abject vulnerability even flees England for his life. Such an action does not suggest a man who is a threat nor does it make for high drama, or any level of drama. The movie insinuates that perhaps Henry and Becket had a homosexual relationship, but even this is treated in a half-baked manner which further dampens the movie's dramatic impact. Probably the strongest scene is the one in which Henry's wife, Eleanor, who is portrayed as a whining, self-indulgent shrill, gives Henry a public tongue lashing, which he deserved, being obsessed with a man who, to the rest of the court, is a nobody. Richard Burton gives a strong and dignified portrayal of Becket, in stark contrast to Peter O'Toole's hysterical and over-the-top performance which makes the king come off as a buffoon. His fixation on Becket seems hollow and without substance, more so since Becket himself is an emotional neuter who is most comfortable when he is alone, and with the likes of Henry and the king's pouting wife around, who could blame him?

"Two and a Half Men: The Price of Healthy Gums Is Eternal Vigilance (#2.6)" (2004)

Two silly men. 2 June 2012

The chemistry between Jon Cryer and Charlie Sheen is never better than in this episode. What a great comedy duo. They are wonderful together. The episode also has a strong plot. What happens when somebody reveals a secret that will impact on somebody else's life? Although Charlie is usually the straight man, in this episode the roles are reversed with amusing results. The issue itself is relatively trifling but the emotional consequences are enormous. And when the mother is brought into the picture, the results are hilarious as the situation turns into a farce, with both brothers trying to cope with all kinds of feelings resulting from a childhood prank. The episode generates lots of laughs as the both brothers go through all kinds of emotional changes which reveal their essential vulnerability and goodness. These are two silly yet good men, and that is why this was such a successful show.

"Two and a Half Men: Is There a Mrs. Waffles? (#5.8)" (2007)

Charlie Harper at his best. 2 June 2012

This was a very amusing episode. Not only did it contain snappy dialog, it also features Charlie Sheen demonstrating his musical talent. The writers for this

episode were wonderfully creative. The idea of a womanizer like Charlie actually performing before children works in this episode. True, the show is a sitcom and as such the story is a lot of fluff, yet this episode manages to take the essential plot to a higher and much more amusing level. The children love Charlie; his cynicism is revealed to be a defensive barrier hiding an essentially good person, someone who will be there for you and actually care. Okay, the songs a bit off-color and perhaps not totally appropriate for young children, but the kids love it! And they think Charlie is great and if they think he's great, then why should anyone disagree?

The Dictator (2012)

Amusing, but at a price. 28 May 2012

Despite the raunchy humor and the shallowness of the story, this is a funny movie. It produces a lot of laughs and some scenes are even hilarious. The problem is that the story stereotypes an entire ethnic group, which some could find offensive. Ethnic humor can be cruel and divisive, and when the laughter is at the expense of a certain group, can cease to be entertaining. It is apparent that the movie producer has certain biases which quickly become obvious through the principal character whose ethnic and cultural affiliation is unmistakable. When comedy is used to mock an entire group, the results can be hollow. Once again, this movie is funny and it does make the audience laugh. But be warned: the movie could offend some, and for those who are offended, the movie may not be funny.

Ivanhoe (1952)

A wonderful movie, 27 May 2012

An excellent movie, well-acted, a great story, and fantastic cinematography. George Sanders and Guy Rolfe steal the show as the two bad guys who want to shake down an entire kingdom, and are stopped by one man. Elizabeth Taylor and Joan Fontaine are beautiful and give outstanding performances. There was a time when Hollywood could produce epics without the use of special effects and this movie is a classic proof of that. The fight scenes are especially impressive, both close quarter and wide angle. In addition, the dialog is snappy, with no words wasted, as the action plays out. This movie also provides a glimpse of the plight of the Jews in the middle ages and to the friction between the Saxons and Normans. Far from being a two-dimensional action movie, Ivanhoe tells a compelling story about England in the middle ages and of the people who lived at the time.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1956)

Read the book. 26 May 2012

This is a movie that has all the trappings of an epic, but isn't. But it is still a credible rendition of the Victor Hugo classic, with Gina Lollobrigida giving a strong performance as Esmeralda. The weak part of the movie is Anthony Quinn's performance as Quasimodo. Mr. Quinn's portrayal is not believable. Quasimodo is supposed to generate feelings of pathos; that does not happen in this movie. As a result, the plot becomes flat. The intensity of the relationship between Quasimodo and Esmeralda is lacking. Between Mr. Quinn's mumbling of his lines, and the treatment of the poet Gringoire as a buffoon, the movie teeters on the brink of cinematic collapse. Yet, it is saved by staying faithful to the original story and by good performances by some of the supporting cast, as well as by the essential power of the original story. The story of the hunchback and the gypsy girl is classic; read the book.

Men in Black 3 (2012)

This is Josh Brolin's movie. 26 May 2012

When a movie has a shallow plot, comic-book characters, overblown special effects, and lead actors who, due to the sheer passage of time, no longer seem right for their roles, something has to do be done to make the movie watchable, and this the movie accomplishes in the person of Josh Brolin. Mr. Brolin's performance saves this movie from a quick exit to DVD-land. He brings an intensity to the role that galvanizes the movie. The plot itself is so contrived as to render it ludicrous; its lack of substance is apparent throughout. Hence, the movie depends on strong performances which, with the exception of Mr. Brolin's, it does not provide. Reprising roles from the past can be tricky, and in the case of Will Smith, it does not work. He is a wonderful actor but not in this movie; his role is no longer the right one for him. This is Josh Brolin's movie.

Factotum (2005)

A movie about artistic integrity. 16 May 2012

Matt Dillon is a great actor and he proves it in this movie. He plays an alcoholic writer who refuses to give up his dream, showing a strength and an iron-will that belies his drinking and marginal existence. Mr. Dillon's performance carries the movie and keep sit interesting. Mr. Dillon makes the character, and through the character the story, interesting. He is traveling through life, not asking for much, except to be able to write, which is a lonely existence. Nobody understands him; the women in his life, including his mother, most of all. No one perceives his brilliance and it's driving him to drink, and occasionally to act out. He crashes, he boozes, he mopes, but he writes. He takes only the most marginal, menial jobs, because he has a higher calling, which nobody knows about except him, and if he told anybody else, they wouldn't understand anyway.

Un Chien Andalou (1929)

An interesting example of the avant-garde genre. 5 May 2012

This is a strange movie and for good reason: it's an attempt to probe into the irrationality of the mind. Here a conventional story is replaced by a distorted depiction of humanity, as the director employs all kinds of techniques convey a sense of confusion, as a man and woman act out their sexual thoughts. The movie is loaded with all kinds of symbolism, some rather overt and definitely not appropriate for an immature audience. All kinds of strange things are shown in this movie, which have inner meaning, the substance of which can only be inferred. One thing, however, is certain: the movie does not hold back in trying to raise the audience's awareness that reality is relative to one's perceptions, so that man's frustration may be as weighty as being tied to two pianos and a dead horse. The movie is an example of the avant-garde school and an attempt to expand the horizons of cinema to include controversial subjects.

Entr'acte (1924)

Excellent example of the French avant-garde, 5 May 2012

This is an avant-garde movie and as such it's theme and plot are unclear, which is as intended because the movie is ore about special effects than about telling an actual story. This movie directs the audiences' attention to such everyday occurrences as movement, personal interactions, dancing, and running. People are part of some kind of funeral procession, but what catches the attention is the various actions that take place as the procession proceeds. Mourning is replaced by an almost frenetic need to stay active, and the movie shows this through the use of some innovative techniques, including slow-motion, use of montage, and multiple superimposed exposures, all of which convey the sense that something intense is happening. This movie is an excellent example of the French avant-garde genre which had a major influenced on cinematic styles in Europe and the United States.

Pandora's Box (1929)

A great movie., 5 May 2012

This is a great movie, not only as an example of cinematic expressionism but as a story. The movie is well-acted, movies along at a brisk pace, has a well-organized story, and has a female lead who is pretty and endearing. She can't help being who she is, and if she gets into trouble it's really not her fault. Louise Brooks is beautiful as the lovely lady Lulu, who is everyone's friend. Of course men are going to love her because she is so lovable. And the rest of the cast is wonderful too. The movie touches on all kinds of themes that would ring true for

a contemporary audience, including marital fidelity, jealousy, bisexuality, domestic violence, and class conflict, and does this all within the framework of a coherent story. Although this is a silent movie, it still manages to keep the audience's attention. This movie is proof that a compelling story can be told without sound, and that silent movies, as a genre, are worthy of respect.

The Avengers (2012)

Perhaps the best movie in the action sci-fi genre. 5 May 2012

For pure entertainment, this movie cannot be surpassed. Not only does the movie entertain, it does it well. The movie is not only well-acted, it has a great story with snappy dialog, impeccably delivered by an all-star cast. The special effects are phenomenal and the movie succeeds in keeping and maintaining the audience's interest and attention. Even the bad guys are wonderful. This movie is probably the best sci-fi action movie in years, perhaps in all of cinematic history. It combines all of the best features of the sci-fi genre plus a generous inclusion of amusing one-liners which lets the audience know that this movie is supposed to be fun to watch. Here, the director succeeds in transforming a comic-book story into a something substantive and enjoyable. For these reason, this movie is worth watching.

The Three Stooges (2012)

One of the most hilarious movies ever made. 21 April 2012

This is one of the funniest, most hilarious movies ever made. The three actors playing the the Stooges in this movie are better than the originals. This movie provides nonstop laughter. Not only are the Stooges hilarious, the entire cast is hilarious too. The movie is funny because it stays true to the Three Stooges formula for laughs: rapid witty dialog, patently ridiculous story, exceptionally funny foils, and, of course, the choreographed slapstick which is executed with a finesse and skill which is amazing. Larry David is funny; the scenes with Moe as a reality-show star are over-the-top hilarious. This movie produces laughs from start to finish and is proof that when it wants to, Hollywood can produce a real comedy. like it did when the real Stooges were stars.

Do the Right Thing (1989)

A cinema masterpiece. 21 April 2012

This is one of the great movies. Besides having an incredibly impressive ensemble cast, the movie also has a strong and compelling plot. Danny Aiello's performance is stupendous. He carries the movie. His character is the catalyst for

the entire story. Ozzie Davis too delivers a tremendously evocative performance as does the rest of the cast. But what makes this movie so special is the way it presents a story about racial conflict in a straight forward manner without any value judgments. That is, the director, Spike Lee, sets forth the story and leaves it to the audience to decide what the story is actually about. The title of the movie spells out the movie's theme as the characters are forced to come to terms with their true feelings, and to decide what is right for them. The movie is about people in crisis, and it is a movie that is well worth watching.

The Hurricane (1999)

A man stuck in an unfeeling bureaucratic machine. 12 April 2012

What a disappointing movie. Who really cares about what happened to Rubin Carter? Who knows whether he was innocent or guilty? The movie suggest that his arrest and conviction was unfair, and maybe it was. But how does that translate into something dramatic? The criminal justice system is not perfect, and miscarriages of justice happen. Now, do these miscarriages of justice make for good drama? The answer is no, because of the highly bureaucratic nature of the criminal justice system which reduces even the most explosive situations down to case files and case numbers, which perhaps is the way it is supposed to be. Mr. Carter's case was initiated, processed, and finalized, and while he was going through the process, many other defendants were going through the same process too. For each defendant the process is dramatic because their life is being affected, but for everyone else, it's just a case. If Mr. Carter was in fact wrongly accused and convicted, then that is a tragedy, but one the depth of which cannot be conveyed in a movie. The injustice is smothered by the sheer weight of the paperwork which highlights the essential indifference of an unfeeling bureaucracy which reduces its subjects to case numbers and treats them accordingly.

The Hunger Games (2012)

This is a very good movie. 3 April 2012

As shocking as this may seem, this is actually a very good movie. What seems to be a contrived, half-backed plot set in some futuristic, post-apocalyptic world, is actually a substantive story. The lead actress gives a wonderful performance as a courageous teenager who is determined to survive without becoming depraved. This movie in some ways parallels the Running Man with Arnold Schwarzenegger, except here the characters are more nuanced and the heroine much more vulnerable, making her surviving that much more impressive and dramatically compelling. The supporting cast is excellent too and includes a composite of characters that are both amusing and repellent. The audience is kept engaged as the plot movies full speed ahead, taking the audience for a ride.

Manhattan (1979)

Perhaps Woody Allen's best movie. 3 April 2012

Woody Allen is associated with self-deprecating humor, usually linked with his Jewish identity. However, in this movie he moves away from those themes and instead offers a plot that is not only humorous but deals with themes that can resonate with any audience. The story shows what how people can make a lot of half-baked decisions when their thinking is muddled. These decisions can cause a lot of damage and destroy friendships. For instance, Allen lauds the island of Manhattan while at the same time including scene after scene of a city that is grimy, dark, foreboding, and unfriendly, evidence of the kind of conflictual perceptions that mark the thinking of all of the characters. Filming the movie in black and white adds to the sense of emotional disconnection; there is simply nothing beautiful or charming about the city. The panoramic vistas are impressive but cold and foreboding, yet this is the venue where all the characters function. This movie contains what is probably Diane Keaton's greatest performance. She is clearly the star of the movie. If anyone has any doubt as to her talent as an actress, this movie will dispel those doubts. In this movie, Woody Allen is attempting to make a statement about the human condition and succeeds. This movie shows that people can hurt one another without meaning to do so and that the quest for personal happiness is a difficult road.

Seeking Justice (2011)

Nicholas Cage's best movie in years. 20 March 2012

This is Nicholas Cage's best movie in years. He is in top form. The story itself is taut, crisp, engaging and original. In fact, there is little about which this movie can be criticized. The story moves forward at a brisk pace. The story includes all kinds of interesting characters, all driven by a plot that grab's the audience's attention. January Jones' performance is absolutely outstanding and Guy Pearce's performance is chilling. The movie poses certain ethical questions adding to its dramatic power. But it is Nicholas Cage who carries this movie. He gives a commanding performance as a man who is forced to make difficult choices. If you like movies with strong stories, lots of action, and great acting, then this movie is for you.

The Saphead (1920)

A quaint antique from a bygone era. 14 March 2012

If there is any humor in this movie, it is carefully concealed. Buster Keaton gives an energetic performance in what is otherwise a dubious attempt at self-effacing humor. Now, under certain circumstances self-effacing humor can be effective but not in this movie. The story is contrived, and Mr. Keaton's character

is so shallow that one must wonder why anyone would pay him any attention at all. Irving Cummings and William Crane carry this movie. They give strong dramatic performances. Mr. Keaton's attempt at humor through deadpan is out of place in this movie. It simply is not funny. It does not generate laughs. Nor is his character particularly lovable. His character, Bertie, is spoiled and shallow. His love interest with the female lead is strained and entirely implausible. The plot is predictable. The movie does have some effective moments, such as when the Crane and Cummings characters confront each other and the frantic scenes of trading on the floor of the stock market, but otherwise the movie's value lies mostly in the its status as a quaint antique of movie making from a bygone era.

Wanderlust (2012)

Before you go to a nudist colony, watch this movie first. 10 March 2012

Sometimes things have a strange way of working out. Like when your life seems to be sliding down hill and then all of a sudden things start going your way, all because of some chance encounter, or was it chance? That is the theme of this movie. The movie contains some very amusing scenes, and Jennifer Aniston once again proves that she is one of the best comic actresses in Hollywood today. Her performance in this movie is endearing; she is thoroughly likable and carries the movie. The plot is shallow with no surprises, but so what? It is a comedy and it is entertaining. The movie is a satire on family, materialism, work, and the whole back-to-earth movement. Some scenes are hilarious. Paul Rudd gives another strong performance as Ms. Aniston's harried husband. The movie contains some full frontal nudity but it's not gratuitous and actually adds to the humor.

The House on 92nd Street (1945)

Hooray for the FBI! 10 March 2012

(Spoiler alert)

Stereotyping abounds in this interesting account of the uncovering of a German spy ring based right in the middle of New York City. All the Germans are sinister and talk with clipped German accents while the G-men are All-American types who can do no wrong. The FBI informant is also German, but since he is a good guy, he's All-American too. Lloyd Nolan is perfect in the role of the FBI agent in charge of the investigation. The movie is interesting and entertaining; the problem with the story, however, is the ending. Signe Hasso is great in this movie but what happens to her is dramatically unsatisfying. Rule One: In general, a beautiful actress should never die in a movie. No matter how bad she is, a beautiful woman must be allowed to live, even in disgrace, but if she has to die,

she should die in circumstances in which her character is remembered with reverence. That aside, the movie provides some interesting glimpses of New York City from the 1940s which show that despite the passage of time, fundamentally the ambiance of the city has not changed. But it's good to know that the FBI was on the job protecting the American people from subversives, and remains so to this day.

Overboard (1987)

A wonderful and delightful movie. 4 March 2012

Overboard is a wonderful and delightful movie. Every aspect of this story is entertaining. Goldie Hawn, Kurt Russell and Edward Herrmann turn in great performances. But what bolsters this movie is the story about how a vain, selfish and spoiled woman undergoes a major transformation and in the process emerges as truly beautiful, not only physically but spiritually as well. The movie also has its share of amusing scenes, and in many respects it is a farce, but it's a lot more than that - it is statement about home, family, devotion and love. The movie shows the spiritual emptiness of conspicuous materialism and the shallowness associated with unfettered consumption. This is not to say that the movie is anti-wealth because it isn't. Rather, it is an amusing foray into the quirks of relationships and how people with seemingly nothing in common can form strong personal bonds.

The Birth of a Nation (1915)

Epic movie with glaring flaws. 2 March 2012

This movie is actually two separate movies under one title, the first dealing with the Civil War itself and the second with Reconstruction. Also, the movie's title is misleading. The title should have been A Nation Reborn or A Nation Torn Asunder. Part 1 is vastly superior to part 2. Unlike part 2, part 1 of *Birth of a Nation* is powerful and compelling work of cinema. This movie lays out a coherent and plausible story involving two families who serve as metaphors for the North and South. Moreover, this movie effectively portrays the carnage and chaos of war (e.g., the sacking of Piedmont and the Cameron home; the intense battle scenes; the burning of Atlanta) and the loss suffered by the families in what is a senseless struggle (e.g., Mrs. Cameron losing two sons) as well as the graphic and historically accurate depiction of the assassination of President Lincoln and the subsequent political consequences in terms of North-South relations. Also impressive was the acting of Lillian Gish, who plays Elsie Stoneman, and Josephine Crowell, who play Mrs. Cameron. Both give performances that epitomize what women were going through on the home fronts. There is nothing in this part of the movie that is corny or contrived. However, the movie goes off on a tangent in Part 2. The plot becomes contrived, highly melodramatic, and overtly racist, relying heavily on caricature to portray certain

characters in a negative way. Blacks are portrayed in an openly offensive manner and the plot becomes muddled as the movie attempts to rewrite history. Nevertheless it still contains impressive elements: 1. Two outstanding actresses in principal roles: Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh. 2. Several spectacular exterior chase scenes. 3. Elaborate sets. 4. The story proceeds at a brisk pace, i.e., it's not boring. 5. There is an intermixing of close-up shots, wide-angle shots, and iris shots which depict the story from different perspectives. 6. The music is emotionally evocative (although at times unduly repetitive). 7. Extensive use of extras, especially in complex exterior shots. 8. Generally excellent acting (although at times stagy). 9. The cast includes African-Americans as extras (in a time when Jim Crowism was legal). It should also be noted that this movie was highly profitable, meaning that it is a product that resonated with the public and that was ranked number 44 on the AFI's list of the 100 best American movies (although it was subsequently removed from the list), meaning that the film industry itself had judged this movie to be worthy of positive recognition. However, primarily because of part 2, the movie in total ultimately fails as a work a drama. The slanted and myopic treatment of the causes of the Civil War shown in part 1 and coupled with the hysterical portrayal of Reconstruction in part 2, makes the movie's story untenable and thereby undermines its strength as a drama. At best, this movie is an impressive antique of early movie making; at worst, a shameless attempt at historical revision and an appeal to racism.

One other point. *The Birth of a Nation* is an epic. If one buys into the movie's fundamental premise, that the Civil War was an unnecessary sectional conflict instigated by abolitionists and Northern politicians whose actions lacked political legitimacy and were therefore illegal, then the plot, including the depiction of the Ku Klux Klan and the overtly racist scenes, makes sense. Some aspects of the movie are excellent, e.g, Lillian Gish and Josephine Crowell's strong, commanding performances; the depictions of the battle scenes and the burning of Atlanta; Mrs. Cameron pleading for her son's life; Colonel Cameron's return home, and President Lincoln's assassination are especially compelling. One may disagree with the movie's political premise but it would be a difficult to summarily dismiss this movie as unworthy of serious consideration as a work of cinema.

Safe House (2012)

Nonstop action. 20 February 2012

This is a surprisingly good movie. It has a substantive story, excellent cinematography, and great acting. The movie succeeds in grabbing and keeping the audience's attention. The action is nonstop. This movie contains one of Denzel Washington's better performances. And Ryan Reynolds' performance is wonderful too. However, what makes this movie so good is the story itself. It more than just about good guys and bad guys. It deals with broader themes. There are violent scenes but they are not gratuitous; they fit into the story. Also, the movie has great continuity. The story unfolds at the fast pace, which befits

the nature of the movie. Nowhere does this movie lag. The Denzel Washington - Ryan Reynolds combo works well. They make a great duo. Hopefully Hollywood will make more movies like this. Of course, this is just wishful thinking, but who knows? Anything is possible.

Contraband (2012)

Implausible story. 15 February 2012

If you like movies where every principal character is a bad guy, then this movie will definitely be for you. Plausibility is thrown to the wind as the creators of this movie have a field day showing what happens when bad guys are in conflict with even badder guys. The problem with the story is that the "good" guy is really a bad guy who is trying to pass himself off as a good guy, which is so phony that even the other characters in the story don't believe it, and if they don't believe it, then don't expect the audience to believe it either. Mark Wahlberg is a wonderful actor and he proves it again in this movie. But he can't overcome his character's incomprehensible behavior. It's one thing for one brother to want to help out another brother - that is altruistic. However, it's something else entirely when the same brother does exactly the same thing that got the other brother into trouble. Nevertheless, there is some good acting and Kate Beckinsdale is as usual beautiful and probably played the most believable role.

Haywire (2011)

Does this movie have a story? 15 February 2012

Something went haywire with *Haywire*. The lead actress was good, and very athletic, and the cinematography was good too, but the problem was with the story. There was at most a rudimentary facsimile of a story. The movie had the look of a potboiler, right off the assembly-line. For stunt doubles, this movie must have been a bonanza. But alas, a movie is more than just a collection of stunts. It has to have a viable story or the movie becomes stale and this movie proves that point. When a movie loads up the celluloid with action, it's usually a sign that the movie is lacking in other departments. If you like watching a lovely lad running around, getting into skirmishes and occasionally speaking, then this is the movie for you. Otherwise, wait for the movie to go to DVD land.

The Grey (2011)

Who are the real victims? 3 February 2012

If you are a wolf, you probably will not appreciate this movie. Man's best friend is his dog; man's worst enemy is the dog's first cousin, the wolf, that is, if

you are stuck in the middle of wolf country. This movie strongly suggests that wolves, and maybe all animals in general, have a sense ownership. Now, whether wolves actually have such thoughts can be argued, but if they don't then this movie must be placed in the horror-film genre, but if they do, then this movie is a great drama, for both wolves and humans. After all, what would YOU do if someone trespassed on your territory? Wouldn't you feel somewhat irritated or even threatened? In this movie, the wolves move about in military-like precision and manage not only to out-brutalize but outwit their hapless human intruders. One can feel empathy for the humans, who, after all, did not ask to be placed smack in the middle of wolf country, but one can also understand the wolves' point of view too. Why should the wolves be demonized then? They live away from humans, inhabiting some of the most inhospitable territory on the planet, yet they are still beset by humans, even in their remote corner of the planet, and not just by any humans, but by some of the less-classy elements of humanity, including a man who is a professional wolf-killer AND is suicidal too. Well, here the tables are turned, and the wolves are now in charge. What happens next is what this movie is about.

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)

Plausible story. 28 January 2012

This is a classic movie because it deals with themes that transcend time and are applicable to the human condition. This movie is about the imperfections of people and how these imperfections can create huge problems. It is also about what can happen when people engage in brinkmanship, using weapons of mass destruction as leverage. Things can spiral out of control quickly and irreversibly. Some characterize this movie as a so-called black comedy. But there is nothing funny about the story, unless one feels that mocking people in varying degrees of regressive personal self-destruction is amusing. This movie shows what happens when people entrusted with safeguarding the nation really don't know what they are doing and the act in bad faith to try to cover their failures. This is most apparent in the role played by George C. Scott whose performance is brilliant. He captures the essence of a senior general who is little more than a dilettante in a uniform and has nothing to offer to resolve the crisis, of which he is partly to blame, and knows it. This movie is effective precisely because its story is so plausible, and no amount of diligence can guarantee that something awful and catastrophic can be prevented. The human factor simply defies that kind of control.

Red Tails (2012)

A surprisingly mediocre movie. 28 January 2012

This movie is proof that special effects alone cannot carry a movie. Although the special effects are impressive, the story itself is paper mache which, given the subject of the movie, is surprising and perplexing. The story of the Tuskegee airmen is legendary and offers more than enough material on which to create a movie of epic proportions. But this is not that epic. While doing a good job on presenting the plot, that is, black airmen trying to make a contribution to the war effort in a segregated military influenced by Jim Crowism, the movie fails to develop this story into something remotely resembling drama. Instead, the story maintains a level of superficiality that is actually astounding. The Tuskegee airmen were not about grand standing nor were they about getting over on anyone or harboring grudges or engaging in petty squabbles. They had a job to do, they did, and did it well and in the process overcame racism. That is their story and any movie that tries to portray them as a bunch of grand-standing airmen does their story a disservice.

The Iron Lady (2011)

Maybe Ms. Thatcher should have played the title role herself. 18 January 2012

Is this movie about Margaret Thatcher or is it about a caricature of Margaret Thatcher? This is not one of the better biopics, presuming it is a biopic. This movie has so many flaws that it would take up the entire allotment of space to discuss them all in detail, so instead here is a list: 1. Lack of a coherent plot. 2. Incredibly poor acting. This movie may be Meryl Streep's worst performance in a movie in that her portrayal of Ms. Thatcher comes off like a caricature. 3. Lack of continuity. There are repeated flashbacks which completely interrupt the flow of the story. 4. Glossing over of major events in British history. 5. Make up problems: it is obvious that Meryl Streep is under all that make up. 6. Superficial treatment of Thatcher's marriage; the same applies to her entire career. The movie does pick up steam when portraying Thatcher's leadership in the Falklands War, but loses momentum when it suddenly reverts to Thatcher in the present. The movie probably would have been better if it had concentrated on one facet of Thatcher's career instead of trying to go all over the place, and as a result glossing over everything. Also, it may have been better to have Meryl Streep play Thatcher without the make up. Ms. Streep is a beautiful woman; why bury all that beauty that under layers of make up? If the producers wanted the role played by an actress who can look like Margaret Thatcher, then maybe they should have had Ms. Thatcher play the role herself. Anyway, the movie deserves an A for effort but flunks the test.

"Great Performances: Company: A Musical Comedy (#36.7)" (2007)

An incredible show. 17 January 2012

This is an incredible production of a great musical, with snappy songs and an interesting premise. The show has an unconventional plot as a man is trying to sort out all kinds of feelings which are projected onto a number of people who he knows. What the title *Company* implies is a matter of subjective interpretation, but what is evident is the sheer talent of the performers who not only sing and dance and have dialogue, but play musical instruments too. It's a rare show that gives actors the opportunity to showcase such an array of talent. If you are expecting a conventional kind of story, this production may not be for you. But if you watch the show with an open mind, you will be in for a pleasant surprise as the music and story work their magic. Raul Esparza and the rest of the cast are wonderful. Their performances are superb. Congratulations to Stephen Sondheim for his terrific lyrics. This is a video that is well worth watching.

War Horse (2011)

Horses fought too. 17 January 2012

I was expecting this movie to be just another extravagant sentimental potboiler. Wow, was I surprised. This is a great movie. The title says the movie is about a horse, but it's really about a lot more than that. The horse plays a central role but the humans figure in the story too, in a big way. The cinematography is outstanding; it really conveys the bleak, gory nature of war. The movie alludes to the Battle of the Somme which is one of the costliest battles in history in terms of the sheer number of lives lost. At times the movie does lapse into sentimentality but in general the story proceeds at a fast pace (pun intended). The performances of the horses in this movie are impressive. They are stars in their own right. If the movie accomplishes nothing else, it shows that war is hard on animals too, and like the humans, they are victims too; there was never a horse that wanted to go to war. That any horses survived at all in the war is amazing. Anyway, this movie is well worth watching.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (2007)

Even Stephen Sondheim's music cannot salvage this movie. 13 January 2012

Sometimes you have to rely on your gut feelings when deciding whether or not to do something and fortunately that I did in 2007 when something inside me said: "Don't see this movie." Wow, was my gut feeling right! Recently I watched this movie on DVD, which I checked out from a public library. This may be the worst musical ever produced by Hollywood. The story is grotesque, the acting stacy and the musical numbers forgettable. Making a musical about a mass murderer is stretching literary license a bit far. Stephen Sondheim's lyrics are

clever, but even his music cannot save the story. Johnny Depp plays a role that is completely out of character for him; he is not an opera singer and his role required an actor who could belt out tunes; Ms. Bonham Carter's performance is laughable; and Alan Rickman is about as chilling a character as Charlie Chaplin. What this movie needed was Judge Dredd, not Judge Turpin. What's next on the agenda? A musical about Jeffrey Dahmer or John Wayne Gacy?

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (2011)

The story has some plausibility problems. 9 January 2012

This is a muddled story set in a time that is now history. What was relevant in 1973 is no longer the case today. If one does understand the historical context in which the story is set, this movie will fail. Also, the protagonist, played by Gary Oldham, is not the most engaging of characters and it is unclear as to why any government agency would want to request his services. It is one thing for a story to include all kinds of twists and turns, but not to the point that it becomes confusing. A who-done-it format need not be confusing. Also, the premise of the story is not plausible. At the highest government level a mole will stick out like the proverbial sore thumb. It's one thing to have a spy operating in some office; such a spy can maintain their cover for years. It's another thing, however, to maintain one's cover at the ministerial because at that level everybody knows everybody too well and anonymity is impossible. It would be like an assistance secretary of defense in the U. S. being a secret double agent. No way. In any event, Gary Oldham gives a strong performance as a cynical operative and John Hurt is excellent as the frustrated and angry spy master.

Yanks (1979)

Credible story. 9 January 2012

This is a good movie with a great ending. Parts of the story are a bit contrived, but in general the story brings out the dramatic aspects of the interactions between the American soldiers and the local British population during World War Two. Relationships are bound to develop. The question is: do the people involved in these relationships really care about each other or are they using each other to satisfy their own needs? The subplot involving the William Devane and Vanessa Redgrave characters works well. Here both characters understand the nature of their involvement and so there won't be surprises when it ends; the other main subplot involving the Richard Gere and Lisa Eichhorn characters is also quite dramatic. That American soldiers got involved with British women is a fact. How both groups dealt with the emotional impact of these relationships is what this movie is about and in this respect the movie does a credible job.

Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol (2011)

Shallow sfx movie. 30 December 2011

This movie is not junk. It even has some engaging moments. The problem is the story - it has about as much substance as mush. This story is so simplistic and cartoon-like that it can't be taken seriously and since the movie is not a comedy, that is a problem. An action-thriller does not need to be shallow. Also, the story lacks plausibility. Now, the acting is good and Tom Cruise gives a credible performance, but he doesn't carry the movie. The other actors have to pitch in and they dominate the movie. When Tom Cruise is dangling 2,000 feet in the air and the audience is snickering, that means the movie has a problem because that scene is not meant to instill laughter, and besides the audience already knows that his character will live, so what's the point? Also, the story's plot is ridiculous, especially how it vilifies the Russians, which is really ridiculous, especially given the current international political environment. The movie has a lot of action scenes and moves at a brisk pace, but that's all the is, and that just isn't enough to make the movie worth watching.

Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows (2011)

Since when is Mr. Holmes a cartoon character? 27 December 2011

Sometimes one watches a movie and weeps because the story is so strong and compelling that it evokes a cathartic experience. And then there are movies that cause the eyelids to grow heavy and the mind to wander off to slumber land. This movie is in the latter category. Sherlock Holmes is not a cartoon character, yet this movie not only transforms Mr. Holmes into a cartoon character, he is a cross between Daffy Duck and James Bond. Not surprisingly, the movie provokes some unintended (or maybe intended) laughter, but with a ridiculous story that brings new meaning to the word contrived, there is little that can save this movie from DVD land where it belongs. Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law give it a try, but their efforts are for naught. Sometimes the current is just too strong. The story is simply too implausible and the special effects too gratuitous. Okay, tastes change and maybe the producers are playing to a certain audience. But one thing that does not change is quality, and in this respect the movie could have been better.

Black Fox: The True Story of Adolf Hitler (1962)

Hitler as a black fox? 10 December 2011

Good try but the format does not work. Comparing Hitler to classical allegory is like comparing apples and oranges. The Hitler story does not need to be compared with anything because it is incomparable. Hitler's story speaks for

itself. Comparing him or his career with fictional characters is superfluous, and does injustice the latter. No character in fiction can duplicate Adolf Hitler. Hitler's story is so unique that further metaphorical embellishments serve as mere distractions. And when depicting Hitler's entourage, comparisons with fiction become ludicrous. Hitler was an orator but one need not compare him to a bellow or a megaphone, though such comparisons could be amusing. Hitler as a black fox? No way. Hitler was Hitler; leave the fox alone.

The Descendants (2011)

Too much George Clooney, not enough dramatic power. 2 December 2011

Enough close ups of George Clooney! It seems like half of the movie involves close ups of George Clooney. George Clooney is pensive. George Clooney is annoyed. George Clooney is smiling. George Clooney is confused. George Clooney is angry. It is obvious from the opening of this movie - narrated by George Clooney - that this story will revolve around George Clooney. And what makes it worse, his character owns lots of land, and of course the question is, what's George Clooney going to do with the land. Now, there is good cinematography, but the movie lacks dramatic power, primarily because one of the protagonists is in a vegetative state, and this movie proves that it is hard to argue with a someone in a vegetative state. This movie contains some of the more annoying child actors. But no matter how annoying they act, they cannot upstage George Clooney. The director who directed Sideways scores a huge miss with this movie. Not that the movie is bad, it isn't, it's just that it tells a story ... and that's it. Everybody lives happily ever after. The movie deals with some serious themes - such as end of life issues, marital infidelity, familial discord, some ethical issues - but never quite delivers. George Clooney's character has every right to feel enraged but the best he can do is pout. Robert Forster was good. In fact, he should have played the George Clooney role. As for George Clooney, stop hogging the scenes and please ease up on all the close ups.

The Spanish Prisoner (1997)

Steve Martin in a different kind of role. 28 November 2011

Sometimes actors get type casted. One of those actors is Steve Martin. Known for his starring roles in comedies, in this movie he plays a completely different kind of part and plays it well, which is surprising as the movie is a crime drama. The movie itself is great. It has a clever plot, interesting characters, an engaging style, and strong finale. The bad guys are wonderful and their hapless victim, worthy of empathy. The movie is about greed, and false appearances. The bad guys seem good and the good guy is, well, we don't know; the audience is

kept guessing. The entire cast is excellent. After watching this movie, one can leave feeling that they have been entertained and also shown what can happen when you let your guard down and trust others just because of the way they look. Yes, appearances can be deceiving and this movie shows how.

My Week with Marilyn (2011)

Astonishing performance by Michelle Williams. 24 November 2011

Marilyn Monroe was a cultural phenomenon who emerged from complete obscurity to become the most famous actress in the history of Hollywood. Almost fifty years after her death, the mere mention of her name is enough to cause lively discussion. More than being beautiful, she was talented, and insecure. All these facets of Marilyn Monroe are brought out in this movie which captures her essence. This movie makes the audience feel that they know Marilyn Monroe, her moodiness, her childlike persona, and her vulnerabilities, and much of what this movie shows about Marilyn can be attributed to the astounding and astonishing performance of Michelle Williams as Marilyn Monroe. Ms. Williams' performance is absolutely sensational and the efficacy of her performance can be confirmed by comparing the Marilyn in the movie to the movie clips of the real Marilyn. It is obvious that Ms. Williams studied her part. It would be not unreasonable to presume that having played the role, Michelle Williams might be the greatest expert on the life of the Hollywood legend. This movie is so thoroughly dominated by Michelle Williams that the presence of the rest of cast, including some huge stars, are relegated to supporting roles, even Kenneth Branagh who plays Sir Laurence Olivier, which is the way it should be since this movie is about Ms. Monroe. This is Michelle Williams' movie and she makes the most of it. She does the role justice. If any awards are to go to this movie, they must go to Michelle Williams, not only because of the skill with which she plays the role, but also because of the way she honors the memory of the late, tragic figure. Ms. Williams' performance is not a mere impersonation, it is an artistic interpretation and a unique creation. For Marilyn Monroe is a tragic figure. She was a dazzling star who lit up the night and then fizzed out. Yet, while watching this movie, one can put aside that aspect of her life and focus on what it must have been like to be around a natural born talent, the Hollywood legend, and the people's star known as Marilyn Monroe.

Now, if this movie seems contrived or hokey, as some may claim, that is because Marilyn Monroe was so unique that any dramatization of her life is bound to come off as pure fabrication or just plain stacy. But that was Marilyn Monroe's life and one must remember that although she was insecure, she was not bashful and was able to bond with the working people of whom she was one. Look who she married: a merchant seaman, a baseball player and a writer. She was comfortable being with working class people; she definitely was not a snob or a prima donna. It is entirely plausible that she would have felt intimidated by Mr. Olivier, who was royalty. Not being a trained actress, MM had to rely on her talent, and like all

geniuses, sometimes it affected her behavior and got her into trouble. But she was inherently a wonderful person and gifted performer who made people laugh, and for that alone she is worth remembering. And if anyone feels that Michele Williams' performance was less than stellar, then perhaps they were watching another movie, or confused Ms. Williams with another actress or maybe had other things on their mind.

The Last Temptation of Christ (1988)

Probably the best movie of the Jesus Christ genre, 12 November 2011

This is probably the best movie of the Jesus Christ genre, the reason being that it uses contemporary language to tell the story. According to the Bible, Jesus Christ was both human and divine. This raises a question that the movie poses: How did Jesus the man deal with the divinity within him? As a man, Jesus is racked with fears and doubts. This movie shows how Jesus dealt with those emotions to fulfill his mission. As a human he is vulnerable to temptations, and the success of his mission, and whether mankind will receive salvation, depends on whether he succumbs to those temptations. It is easy to say that we know what happened with Jesus, but that is not the point of the movie. Rather, the point of the movie is that although divine, Jesus as a human had to struggle to fulfill his mission, the success of which was not guaranteed. This uncertainty is what grabs the audiences' attention and makes this a great movie.

J. Edgar (2011)

This is not a great movie. 12 November 2011

This is not one of Clint Eastwood's better movies. His attempt at making a major biopic about a major historical figure misses the target. The movie is too jumbled, its themes conflicting and the acting at times stogy. The movie's main problem is the portrayal of the title character, Mr. John Edgar Hoover. By the middle of the movie, the audience is left wondering whether this is about one of America's foremost crime fighters who broke rules in order to protect his turf or an expose on Mr. Hoover's sexuality, the latter of which is clumsily dealt with in the movie. Indeed, there is one scene involving Mr. Hoover and his associate, Clyde Tolson, that is so transparently Hollywood that it generates unintended laughter; by this point the movie loses the rest of its dramatic power and it's all downhill from there. The question of Mr. Hoover's sexual orientation simply is not enough to sustain the story and is really irrelevant to the larger question of Mr. Hoover's legacy as the crime fighter. Was J. Edgar Hoover a pompous fraud or was he a dedicated public servant who put the needs of his country ahead of his own personal needs? This movie fails to answer that question.

Tower Heist (2011)

Eddie Murphy's best movie in years. 12 November 2011

This movie is hilarious. Everyone in it is funny. This is Eddie Murphy's best performance in years, maybe decades. He still has it. Casey Affleck's deadpan performance confirms that he is one of the great movie comedians. But the two funniest players are Ben Stiller and Alan Alda. These two fellows carry the movie and are the stars of the show. The story itself is great. It's so goofy that it inevitably produces laughs, again and again. This movie is kind of like Oceans 11 except without the pretentiousness. Everything about this movie is geared to generate laughs. At first, the movie starts off as being serious, but as the plot unfold the movie becomes funny, and then hilarious. Alan Alda is the funniest bad guy in a movie in years. It is as if he again playing a selfish Hawkeye Pierce. The dialog is wonderful, with all the principle characters delivering funny lines. If you like comedy, this movie is for you.

American Splendor (2003)

Not a good movie. 7 November 2011

This movie has to rate as one of the poorer biopics. First, this is not one of Paul Giamatti's better performances. Maybe that has something to do with the material. Second, the movie is about the wrong guy. It should have been about Robert Crumb, the real driving force who created and marketed a new genre of comic book. Harvey Pekar was a fellow with issues; the movie suggests that he represented the "everyman," the "nobody," and that he caught the essence of the human condition by noting down the conversations of those around him. However, it was Mr. Crumb who brought Mr. Pekar's jottings life and without Mr. Crumb, Mr. Pekar's jottings would have remained what they were: doodling. The movie also provides an uncomplimentary portrayal of the operations in the Veterans Administration, portraying the employees as quirky, marginal bureaucrats who were completely alienated from their work and couldn't care less about the veterans. All in all, this was not a good movie.

Anonymous (2011/I)

Was Shakespeare a front? 31 October 2011

Was William Shakespeare a front for an aristocrat who did not want his name revealed as the author? This movie is about political intrigue and how theater gets caught up in a larger struggle for power. The movie offers an interesting and controversial portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I and a glimpse of life in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The printing press was becoming a political weapon and those who published could influence the public,

maybe to the point of rebellion. Hence, the need of the government to control what was being performed on stage. The stage served the same function of television does today. It was the medium of mass entertainment, which made the playwright a critical player in the politics of the time. Now, if Shakespeare was a front, then the question is: who wrote all these plays? Maybe it doesn't matter who actually wrote the plays but then again, maybe it does matter because by knowing the author, this may lead to new interpretations of the plays. Maybe these plays were political polemics produced under the guise of historical drama. Whatever the case, one thing is for certain: these plays made an impact on society that continues to reverberate to this day.

One other point. This movie is a work of fiction and so if it is loose with certain historical facts, so what? This movie is not a documentary. Rather, it is a fictional historical drama that revolves around a controversial and even shocking plot. Whether Shakespeare is the actual author of the works attributed to him is not the point. That is a matter for debate. What is the point is whether the movie works as a movie. The story is complex, yet the movie manages to engage the audience through strong acting and by presenting a story crammed with political intrigue. Who can say for certain what was going on in England 500 years ago? It is all a matter for speculation, based upon the available historical material, all of which is subject to interpretation. The idea of English writers bickering and fighting over the authorship of plays may seem trite and far fetched, but the conflict makes for good drama, even if it is pure fiction.

The Thing (2011/I)

This movie is the best of the three "Thing" movies, 27 October 2011

This is the third iteration of this movie and of the three, this movie is the best. First, the story is easy to follow; second, the acting is excellent; and third, it's not a special effects extravaganza. That is, the movie has a plot and tells a story. The movie's theme is: don't tamper with something until you know what you're tampering with. The movie shows what happens when unrestrained curiosity gets the best of science. By not knowing what they were dealing with, the entire planet put at risk. It is obvious that the thing is just that, a thing. The audience does not know what it is, but quickly learns that it wants to survive, and in doing so, kills its host. Unlike the previous editions of this movie, which rely heavily on sensationalist scenes, this movie focuses more on the underlying plot: what do you do with a new and controversial discovery? It's an ethical question. Do you hide it or share it? If you opt for the former, then what and will you lose trust? If you opt for the latter, with whom and will you lose control of your discovery? There was a similar dilemma in 2001 - A Space Odyssey regarding the discovery of the obelisk.

The Fast and the Furious (2001)

It's more than just an action movie. 24 October 2011

This is a great movie. Far from being superficial pulp, this movie has a complex plot. Vin Diesel's performance is tremendous; his screen presence is dominating. He succeeds in carrying the movie. Although the movie contains lots of glitz, it also tells a story that deals with themes such as loyalty and betrayal. The rest of the cast is excellent too, especially Jordana Brewster and Paul Walker. Michelle Rodriguez is as usual wonderful. It would be easy to dismiss this movie as being little more than a live action cartoon, but the movie really is full of surprises. It has several intensely dramatic scenes, some of the most incredible car chase scenes, and some deeply esoteric verbal exchanges fraught with emotion. Whether it's Vin Diesel pouting or Paul Walker being heroic, the results are same: nonstop action, intense dialog, and interesting characters, all of which together produce great entertainment. It's more than just about automobiles.

Signs (2002)

More than just a sci-fi movie. 23 October 2011

This may be Mel Gibson's best movie. The movie is ostensibly a sci-fi but actually it's a drama about faith, using the sci-fi motif for dramatic effect. The movie contains a compelling plot, wonderful acting, excellent cinematography, and a powerful theme. The movie immediately engages the audience and effectively sets forth the moral issues confronting the principal character. The movie has a great cast, but Mel Gibson is definitely in center stage, with all the action revolving around his character. Although the special effects may seem subdued by contemporary standards, they actually help to enhance the drama, especially relating to the depiction of the aliens. This movie could have easily a War of the Worlds remake, but the director deftly avoids that pitfall, leaving the audience to ponder larger, more esoteric questions that deal with the nature of existence.

On the Waterfront (1954)

Great acting. 11 October 2011

This is a great movie. It has everything: a great story; a great script; great cinematography; great direction; and least but not least, great acting, especially that of Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint, who is absolutely hot. The chemistry between Brando and Eva Marie is almost palpable. They generate so much heat that at times you think the movie will melt. And they do this through the sheer force and power of their acting. Oh my, what great, great acting. The movie catches the gritty and tenuous nature of life and presents in no uncertain terms a

story in which people have to make moral choices. Karl Malden is absolutely incredible as the heroic priest through which the moral conflict finds expression. Far from being corny or hokey or stagy or dated, the movie has a timeless quality which makes it a classic. Marlon Brando's performance is astonishing. His scene with Rod Steiger unsurpassed, and his fight with Lee J. Cobb, a work of art. If you like movies with great acting, dialog and story, then this movie is for you.

The Ides of March (2011)

Depravity and corruption in politics., 11 October 2011

This movie is about the depravity and corruption in politics, of how influence is sold for favors, all in order to win. Ryan Gosling gives a powerful performance as novice political staffer who learns the facts of life while on the campaign and then applies what he learns. The story itself is not only plausible but, if anything, understated. Given the series of well-known and at times infamous scandals that have shaken the public's confidence in the integrity of the democratic political process, this movie does not really present anything new. Rather, the movie presents a story that confirms what the public already knows, that politics and politicians are open to influence and make huge mistakes which can cost them the or political career. The question is: how effective is the damage control and can the mistakes be smoothed over and even turned to a candidate's advantage? To find out the answers to these questions, watch the movie.

Drive (2011/I)

Nonstop action. 11 October 2011

Ryan Gosling is the next Robert De Niro. When Hollywood decides to do a remake of Taxi Driver, it will be Ryan Gosling playing Travis Bickle. When Hollywood decides to do a remake of the Deer Hunter, it will be Ryan Gosling playing Michael. Ryan Gosling is absolutely fantastic as the driver. His performance not only carries the movie but is entertaining as well. There is nonstop action. The supporting cast is great, especially Albert Brooks who gives a surprisingly powerful performance in a role not typically associated with him. Yet, what makes this movie so good is Mr. Gosling. He brings the story to life. The story moves rapidly forward as the the plot develops and intensifies, grabbing the audience's attention and keeping the audience engaged. If you like action movies, then this movie is definitely for you.

Moneyball (2011)

Excellent inside glimpse of the operation of a major league baseball team.

3 October 2011

(Spoiler alert)

If you want gain a better understanding of the operation of a baseball club, this is the movie to watch. This movie dramatizes the role of the general manager, the key front office person who seldom is in the limelight but whose decisions effect the operation of an entire baseball organization. No baseball club will be successful without an effective general manager, but even if the GM. is effective, there is still no guarantee that this will produce a winning ball club because much of what the GM does depends on luck. In baseball, the g.m. is gambling on the players being able to play well, and often the gamble fails. The players get injured, they have emotional issues, attitude problems, labor-management conflicts, events outside of the GM's control that effect the players' performances. It happens all the time. The field manager may be in charge of the players on the field but it is the general manager who has overall responsibility for the team's performance.

This is an excellent movie about baseball, as told from the the vantage point of the general manager, a vantage point that is seldom, if ever, dramatized. Yet, there is probably no job in baseball that is more critical to the success of the team then the general manager's. The GM is the guy (or gal) who is charged with the responsibility for putting together the team. The GM signs the players and makes the trades. The field manager is much more visible but it is the GM who provides the players for the field manager to manage. This movie is about one GM who is unique among GMs since he was actually once a baseball player, albeit a marginal player, who worked his way up the front office ladder. Brad Pitt does an admirable job portraying the field manager. The movie, however, asks the audience to accept a premise that is unsustainable, namely, that the GM hit upon an idea for putting together a winning team according to some kind of mathematical formula based on percentages. This idea, playing the percentages, is as old as baseball itself. Actually, the GM is effective because he can relate to the more marginal, and less expensive, players and believes that if properly managed, these players can get on base just as often as the higher priced players. This idea, too, is as old as baseball itself. Also, the GM's "system" fails, that is, his team loses in the playoffs, which sort of takes the wind out the story's sails. Nevertheless, this movie provides an excellent inside glimpse of the operation of a major league baseball team and the challenges confronting the front office in putting together a competitive team.

"Hard Times" (1977)

Excellent adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel. 3 October 2011

The bleak, depressing atmosphere of a factory town in mid-nineteenth century England is caught and conveyed in this excellent adaptation of the Charles Dickens' novel. Episodes one and two capture the drabness of the town and the how the factory owner combines with the politicians to maintain control of the situation. Far from doing anything to try to ameliorate and improve the lot of the workers, the program shows how those who do not tow the line and demonstrate any independence of thought are ridiculed, ostracized and rejected. The most dramatic and sympathetic character is Stephen Blackpool, who struggles to maintain his integrity in a corrupt environment. Having lived in a poorhouse himself, Charles Dickens was uniquely qualified to write about the abuses inherent in an economic system that systematically sought to keep people in their place and stifle anything that even remotely resembled independence of thought. What is surprising is not that the factory town was inherently a nasty place, but that anyone would go out of their way to defend it.

12 Angry Men (1957)

The jury system is far from perfect. 3 October 2011

If there is any movie that more plainly dramatizes the need for a major revamping of the jury system, this movie is the one. This movie dramatizes in no uncertain terms the chaotic process associated with trying to determine guilt or innocence. Instead of being objectively impartial, the jurors are guided by their emotions and most of them openly admit that they really cannot determine the truth of the case. This movie completely underscores and confirms the need for a professional jury system. The present system is so messed up that now almost both prosecutors and defense attorneys will do almost just about anything to avoid a jury trial. They are the experts and they know that once a case goes to a jury, anything can happen. This movie is great because the story is completely plausible. Jurors are ready to fight each other; jurors who are angry, who really have no interest in deciding the case other than just to get it over with; jurors who are projecting their own emotions onto the defendant or prosecutors. In short, this movie most effectively and succinctly highlights the glaring imperfections in the system of justice that is structured in such a way as to almost guarantee that mistakes will be made, and that is because the jurors are laymen and are being asked to apply complex legal principles to cases that often hinge on circumstantial evidence. Although the cast includes major stars like Henry Fonda and Lee J. Cobb, it's really an ensemble cast. Ed Begley gives a fantastic monologue, ranting and raving, a really classic performance. After watching this movie, one can better understand why cases are plea bargained. It has nothing to do with ensuring justice; it's just a way to avoid having to go to trial - by jury.

Europa Europa (1990)

Good movie, 30 September 2011

Welcome to the world of the Holocaust according to Hollywood, or in this case, one of its proxies. The problem with this movie is not the story because Jews did manage to camouflage themselves during the war. In this case, it's the lead actor. There is no way that this character could have passed himself off as a German Nazi. Absolutely out of the question. Yet the movie asks the audience to accept this as a given. Not only does he look and act differently from his Hitler Youth and Wehrmacht associates, he is way too immature to have had the discipline necessary to maintain his cover. Just no way. Hence, the movie goes from one contrived scene to another, with the German Jewish boy outsmarting the Nazis who are clueless as to his real identity. That the boy does not have papers certifying his identity is glossed over. Yet this is a major omission which undermines the credibility of the story. If there was one country that made documentation into almost a fetish, it was Nazi Germany, and if someone lacked proper documentation, your next stop was the local Gestapo office and "protective detention" until your identity could be confirmed. And what was the Gestapo guarding against? That's right! Jews posing as "Aryan" Germans! Nevertheless, this is good movie containing candid scenes of how the Jews were being mistreated and how Nazi propaganda was effective in transforming young adolescents into anti-Semites. For this reason alone, the movie is worth watching.

My Private War (1990)

A candid glimpse of a major event in history. 27 September 2011

(Spoiler alert)

This movie is a candid expose of the German invasion of the Soviet Union as told by some of the soldiers who participated in the event. The film clips do not contain any material that offer news glimpses of the war on the Eastern Front. But what they do confirm is the utter brutality of the battle and of the brutalization that it caused. The soldiers themselves are smug, unapologetic and in way proud of their service. What is remarkable is that they knew that Germany could not win, yet they opted to continue fighting, even during the retreat. One claimed that morale within the ranks was high. Another soldier said that having been in the war afforded him an opportunity to see many countries. That these soldiers were part of an army that deliberately plundered and burned everything, especially as they were retreating, seems not to have bothered them in the least. One did concede that the Russians were in fact human, just like him. He had no idea what happened to the 90,000 Russian POWs that he filmed. The film clips show German soldiers cavorting with prostitutes, looting, burning houses, hanging civilians accused of anti-German activities, and women burying the dead in mass graves, something that the German soldiers would never do. The documentary is

presented in a straightforward style, with little spin or moralizing, leaving it to the audience to decide issues of right and wrong and of responsibility. A curious moment is a clip showing the parents visiting one of the soldiers while he was convalescing. The parents seemed to be nice people; the same cannot be said for the son. One can only wonder what went wrong. Then again, the same question can be applied to the entire German Third Reich.

Killer Elite (2011)

It's more than just about good versus bad. 25 September 2011

This movie is first-rate entertainment. It is one of the better action movies. Jason Statham and Clive Owen are great as operatives who try to out-fox each other, taking them all over the world. As for Robert DeNiro, he is, as usual, great. Although he's in a supporting role, his presence definitely adds to the movie's entertainment value. Yet the best feature of the movie is the story, which is clever, straightforward, and engages the audience. This movie has an unusual plot in that one is never certain who are the good guys and the bad guys. In fact, by the end of the movie, that question is still unanswered but by then it really doesn't matter because the story is more than just about good versus bad.

Meekgo and the Stickfighter (2006)

The strong, silent American western hero in South African cinema.
25 September 2011

What is notable about this movie is not the story, but the way the movie is filmed. This movie has the appearance of an American western and the main character, Kgoto, could have easily been played by Clint Eastwood as Angel Eyes. Also, the movie is short on dialog, and filmed in black-and-white, giving the movie a film noir quality. The metaphysical aspect of the story is subsumed by the sheer magnificence of the cinematography which is first-rate. It's too bad that this story was not further developed into a feature-length movie because it probably would have been great. The actors were wonderful and were able to project a wide range of emotions without uttering a word. The strong, silent American western hero lives in South African cinema.

Story of a Beautiful Country (2004)

A country in transition. 25 September 2011

This is an interesting, upbeat documentary that presents a cross-section of South African society several years after the end of apartheid. Especially interesting are the comments of the white South African and the married couple,

a black South African, and his South-African American wife who looks white but in fact isn't. These interviews give the impression of the country populated with wonderful people who have lots to say and live in a country that is worthy of respect. Apartheid is gone, a relic of the past. Today's South Africa has moved forward. Judging by the tone and quality of the interviews, South Africa is moving in the right direction.

"Married with Children: It's a Bundyful Life: Part 1 (#4.11)" (1989)

Al Bundy is a hero. 25 September 2011

This was a very funny episode. The episode successfully and effectively calls attention to the pretentiousness of all so-called family holidays and ritualized gift-giving in general. The episode is particularly clever because Al is completely aware of the utter emptiness and phoniness of the the gift-giving, and is made even funnier by the cluelessness of everyone else around him. Al understands that he is being used as a mark, lets everyone know that he knows he is being used as a mark, yet they still don't stop hitting him up for gifts. What is even more hilarious is how the other family members have no self-awareness regarding the stupidity of their behavior, stupidity that Al recognizes and has to deal with. The title of the show sums up his plight: he's "Married, with Children." What made the entire series so great is the character of Al Bundy. He's real. Al Bundy's are all over the place. They are the guys that put up with all the ingratitude and all the malarkey associated with trying to provide for a family, and stay. They are heroes. Al Bundy is a hero. This sitcom is more than just a comment on the hypocrisy of "family values" that are touted all the time, or the vapid sentimentality portrayed in so many love stories. It's about a guy, an everyman, who is out there struggling to make a living, in the tradition of Chester A. Riley and Ralph Kramden. We laugh when we watch them trying to do better, trying to be a success, and always failing. Yet, they are the guys that keep this country going.

Brute Force (1947)

1940s prison flick with some interesting moments. 24 September 2011

Although somewhat dated, the movie offers an interesting and often compelling glimpse of the attitude toward prisons in the 1940s. It was tough being a prisoner. Not only were the inmates jammed into small cells, they had to deal with sadistic and ambitious guards who made life difficult for those inside, especially if you didn't play ball with the powers in charge. Of course, there were those prisoners who refused to play ball and for them there was only one option - escape. But how? With all the snitches working for the guards, how was a prisoner supposed to keep an escape secret? That is the question this movie poses. There are some who may read into this movie a political message, but

remember, this is a Hollywood movie and first and foremost a commercial product. Hume Cronyn is great as a sinister and unscrupulous police captain. He carries the movie. The rest of the cast, including Burt Lancaster, ham it up as inmates who want to go from the inside to the outside. Charles Bickford is also excellent as one of the leaders of the inmates. An interesting feature of the movie is the repeated use of flashbacks explaining how the prisoners wound up in jail. Of course, in each case, a beautiful women was involved. Could Howard Duff be expected to let Yvonne De Carlo take the rap? Of course not!

The Barefoot Contessa (1954)

A wonderful movie. 23 September 2011

Wow! What a great movie! Tragic story, great acting, wonderful cinematography, pathos, drama, the movie has it all! Ava Gardner is absolutely stunning and her portrayal of the the title role is compelling. This movie is definitely one of Humphrey Bogart's better works, and Edmund O'Brien is brilliant; his performance was certainly worthy of an Academy Award. But there are two more outstanding performances: by Warren Stevens and Rossano Brazzi. Mr. Stevens' gives a chilling performance as an obnoxious Wall Streeter turned movie producer. Mr. Brazzi's performance is a scene stealer. His presence raises the movie to another artistic level, especially in the scene Ava Gardner and Marious Goring. All in all, this is a wonderful movie. It withstands the test of time; its theme is would resonate with today's audience.

"Law & Order: Special Victims Unit: Pure (#6.18)" (2005)

What a powerful story! 10 September 2011

If you're expecting Martin Short to give you laughs, you will be in for a big surprise. In this episode, Mr. Short plays a dramatic role and does a great job. He is sinister and nasty, and manages to carry the story. It's a wonderful thing to watch an actor do a different kind of role and do it well. The story itself is compelling and worthy of an actor of Mr. Short's caliber. When an hour-long episode seems to fly right by, it's a sure sign that it's a good one. The episode deals with many sensitive subjects and is intense. The other cast members are also excellent, especially Christopher Meloni whose performance as Detective Stabler is classic. The story picks up steam as the detective and the suspected killer, Short, engage in mind games in an attempt to assert control. What a powerful story!

"Law & Order: Special Victims Unit: Rage (#6.17)" (2005)

High-quality drama. 8 September 2011

(spoiler alert)

When you have an excellent script and excellent actors, the result can be magic, and in this episode there is magic. This had to be one of the most intense episodes in television history. It is obvious that the producers decided to ratchet up the drama, to present a story that is simple in format yet highly complex in terms of the human interaction. Mathew Modine and Christopher Meloni are incredible. Their performances are unmatched. They take a script and transform it into drama of the highest quality. This episode provides a study of the psychopathic mind. Rage and anger abound as the detective attempts to break down the elaborate defenses erected by the accused to avoid taking responsibility for his crimes. For it's not about whether Mr. Modine's character is guilty. Rather, it is about getting him to open up, to speak forthrightly about his crimes and to take responsibility for his criminal conduct. At the same time, the detective must maintain control or he will lose the contest of wills. This episode is proof that network television can produce high quality drama.

The Debt (2010/I)

An intense movie. 4 September 2011

(Spoiler alert)

The plot twist is obvious. Yet it's still an excellent movie because of the great acting and the theme of trying to bring a war criminal to justice. That the mission fails is not the point; it dramatizes to what lengths people are willing to go to do the right thing, even against all odds. A Nazi war criminal believes that he has avoided justice but is found out. He is tracked down and apprehended, but then the plan comes apart. It's a covert operation, so there is no back up. The Nazi escapes, but then is rediscovered years later. In the meantime, the agents concoct an elaborate cover up story, and if the truth is ever discovered, the results could be disastrous, since the mission has already been transformed into legend. This movie deals with the question of when does expediency trump the truth? For this reason, this is an intense movie which grabs and keeps the audience's attention and is worth watching.

The Deer Hunter (1978)

Epic movie. 3 September 2011

(Spoiler alert)

This movie is an epic. It is about the brutalizing effect of war, not only on the direct participants, but for those back home. Everyone is impacted; everything is changed. People are forced to deal with issues relating to loss, especially of innocence. There is nothing that prepares them for the consequences of what they experience, neither for the men who go and fight or for those at home who care for them. The movie is a study of contrast between two friends, one who survives and tells a story, the other, who succumbs to the trauma that distorts his mind. It is about a man who undergoes a transformation through fire. The movie avoids becoming melodramatic. It tells a story instead. Everyone in the movie is affected by the war. Many scenes are poignant. The movie avoids moralizing about the Vietnam War and instead lets the story speak for itself. The Russian roulette scenes are powerful and evocative. They are a metaphor for the uncertainty of life. Like with the Americans, the Vietnamese are shown as being brutalized too. Brutalization is the recurrent theme. Everywhere there is violence. Yet, one man rises about it - Michael. He had gone through hell and has survived without losing his mind or his dignity. The movie is long but maintains a quick pace. The movie is about perseverance, courage and hope. It is about home, family and community. It is about personal strength. It is about human vulnerability. It is about friendship. It is about returning to home and reuniting with people. It is about the United States. It is about the world.

Actually this movie is about what happens when people are forced to deal with change. The main character, Michael, is a tower of strength, but he doesn't know that, at first. He is just one of the guys, a worker, nobody special; he has his friends; people like him. He's a little distant emotionally but nothing that really interferes with his socializing. In short, there's nothing particularly remarkable about him. Then he goes to war and in war he is tested and his inner strength comes out and he is able to maintain his emotional balance while his friends cannot. He comes home, injured but intact. People know that he has changed - for the better. They now know that he is strong, not just physically, but psychologically. Robert DeNiro is brilliant in this movie. The entire movie revolves around his character and he does a great job, which made this movie into a great movie. In this movie, everyone is affected by change. Nobody is the same. Their complacency is shattered; they are left with uncertainty. Michael is struggling to keep himself together; he knows what happened to his pals. The character Linda is beautiful and she is strong. She plays a key role in the story. This is a great movie.

Duane Hopwood (2005)

This movie deals with many different themes. 2 September 2011

David Schwimmer is absolutely fabulous in the title role. He conveys the anger, fear and torment of a man whose life is going downhill, and know it, and can't stop it. All the props that keep him going are taken away until all he has left is himself, and the truth. And that is what this movie is about: confronting the

truth. Duane Hopwood is a metaphor for everyone. His life is changing and he doesn't like it and does everything he can to avoid having to deal with it. Frustration and anger leads to rage as Duane tries protect what is left of his self-respect. Duane's story is made even more poignant by the fact that he is essentially a good, decent person, which makes his decline that more intense and tragic. For this movie is about tragedy, and redemption. It is possible to reverse the downward spiral, but it takes a lot of strength, and for Duane Hopwood, his life is on the line.

"Star Trek: The Next Generation: Suspicions (#6.22)" (1993)

Gates McFadden is outstanding. 31 August 2011

Gates McFadden is showcased in this tremendously dramatic episode. Ms. McFadden's performance is outstanding. She absolutely carries the story and in the process demonstrates the depth and breath of her talent. In this episode, her character puts her reputation and life on the line to prove a point. Her character is brave, courageous, valiant, and successful. Ms. McFadden invests her character with a dignity and determination that is admirable and worthy of note. The story itself is plausible as the good doctor investigates what seems to be the results of a tragic experiment that has failed. Yet, acting on her suspicions, and without the support of the captain who wants to put the matter to rest, she investigates further and uncovers the truth which vindicates the work of a discredited colleague and exposes a nefarious plot to steal a scientific discover for aggressive purposes. This episode is wonderful and Gates McFadden is great.

Don't Be Afraid of the Dark (2010)

You can never tell what may be lurking right underneath your bed.
30 August 2011

What a marvelous movie. This movie is not so much scary as it is engaging. The movie opens with a scene that is unnecessarily gruesome but then quickly settles down and tells a story that is greatly suspenseful and completely engaging. The story centers on a contest between a young girl and a group of small, furtive humanoid creatures who are both malevolent and fascinating. Unlike most scare movies, this movie does not overwhelm the audience with special effects. In this movie, it is whispering that sets the mood. The creatures are cunning for they must rely on stealth to conceal their purpose, and for a child, that can be most fascinating. Baillie Madison is magnificent as the young girl. She is the star of the movie. Her performance is outstanding. As for the creatures, they are dangerous and up to no good, but they have their story too and maybe that could be the basis for a sequel. In any event, after watching this movie, you may think twice before turning out the lights to go to sleep because you can never tell what may be lurking right underneath your bed.

Our Idiot Brother (2011)

This movie is solid entertainment., 28 August 2011

What a wonderful movie. Paul Rudd is terrific. He is truly the star. His performance is outstanding. The idiot is not Paul's character, Ned. He is a good-natured person who is willing to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. Rather, the idiots are his three pretentious sisters who treat Ned like a child, misinterpreting his honesty for immaturity. Ned maintains his integrity, which is in sharp contrast to the phoniness that he encounters in others. Misunderstandings occur as Ned forces his sisters to confront their own lies. Ned is perceived as the family problem when in fact he is the solution, except no one knows it, at first. Several scenes are amusing as Ned's good nature and candid outlook produces some awkward situations. This movie succeeds because it tells a story, does so with humor, and keeps the audience engaged.

"Star Trek: The Next Generation: Lessons (#6.19)" (1993)

Excellent episode. 25 August 2011

(Spoiler alert)

Captain Picard demonstrates poor judgment and personal weakness as he permits himself to be influenced by an attractive and assertive female science officer. The captain's effectiveness as a commander starts to erode as he permits his personal feelings to cloud his decision making. The problem is not the female officer, it is the captain, who should have known better than to allow himself to become personally involved with a subordinate. And to make matters worse, in a discussion with his chief adviser, the captain questions whether he is violating rules of ethical conduct but is told that his conduct is understandable and therefore appropriate. After all, the captain has feelings too. This episode shows what happens when people mix business with pleasure. The results can be embarrassing, frustrating and devastating. Excellent episode.

30 Minutes or Less (2011)

This movie has problems. 23 August 2011

What are the problems with this movie? That it purports to be a comedy yet there is nothing funny about the story? That the lead actor is not a comedian? That the story's theme is morbid? That nobody in the story is actually funny? These rhetorical questions sum up the problems with this movie. Mixing comedy with action can work, if done correctly. This movie does not do that correctly. As a result, this movie is a hybrid, combining the worst features of both genres, except for a chase scene which was exciting and attention grabbing. There is

nothing wrong with an action movie that has a certain levity. That can be entertaining. But sometimes it doesn't work and when it doesn't work, then the results are bad. Jesse Eisenberg is a wonderful actor. He should be cast in other pics more appropriate for his talent.

From a Whisper (2009)

Evocative movie. 21 August 2011

This is a tremendously evocative movie performed by an outstanding cast. The movie deals with a number of themes - political violence, fanaticism, family dynamics, and religion - in a story that grabs and keeps the audience's attention. What is more, this movie does not rely on flashy special effects to pad the story. Rather, the story is presented in a straight forward manner. What happened in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1998 is a matter of record. It was a disaster of immense proportions, with consequences that reverberate to this day. This story explores the human dimension of the disaster, without casting blame or scapegoating any one group. In this world grievances abound; every country has its gripes and war or threat of war is always present. The question is: what is the best way to resolve these conflicts? This movie suggests that violence is not the way.

The Importance of Being Elegant (2004) (TV)

Candid glimpse of African émigrés. 21 August 2011

This movie provides a candid and evocative glimpse of life for African émigrés in Europe, and the marginal existence they live. The group of men try to make the best of it, but it's a hard road for a variety of reasons. The star of this documentary is a Congolese singer who has created a something of a cult following and is a a source of inspiration for the other fellows who try to emulate him. But no matter what they do, they still can't break into the mainstream. But one thing is for certain: they can't go back home. They made the move and in Europe they will stay. Some need their papers; some need money; some need work, but they all believe in dressing well and not letting their circumstances get them down. For the point of this movie is that they want to make a contribution, if they are given the chance. They are artists, musicians, singers, all talented, all with something to offer, all seeking a better life.

Friends with Benefits (2011)

Tepid story. 18 August 2011

It is a shame that such a wonderfully talented actress as Mila Kunis is so shabbily and tastelessly showcased in such a tepid and empty cinematic product.

Hollywood can do better than that! And this is the case after her spectacular performance in *The Black Swan*. Showing Ms. Kunis prancing around in her undies is really sad. She is a wonderful actress and comedian, not a sex object. And the story itself is pure fluff meant to showcase the male lead, which is really ludicrous. How can Mila Kunis be so grievously miscast? Ms. Kunis is a powerful actress, who has a dominating screen presence, yet she plays second fiddle to the male lead who showcases his body. The story itself is sheer sentimentality covered by a veneer of trash-talking language meant to create an impression of being chic and cool, which is totally out of sync with the characters themselves who are so shallow that their coolness is a sham. Toward the end of movie Ms. Kunis is finally allowed to display some of her dramatic skills, but it is too little too late as the the damage has been done and the movie comes to a quick and improbable end. The problem with showcasing a male lead in this movie is that the audience is asked to accept the premise that the male actor is more attractive than the female lead and therefore deserves more attention, but in this movie, that definitely does not work. Just as in *Pretty Woman*, this movie should have showcased the female lead and without making her act like a tramp. Mila Kunis is talented and beautiful; let her be the star.

Crazy, Stupid, Love. (2011)

Not funny. 18 August 2011

Crazy, stupid, love? The middle word aptly describes this ridiculous movie. Steve Carell and the other cast members are completely unfunny in this movie that purportedly is a comedy. The story is dreary and implausible. Steve Carell's character is so unbelievable that no amount of literary license can make it plausible. When Steve Carell throws himself out of a moving car, that sets the tone for this movie. Not only is this movie not funny, the story is warped. It asks the audience to accept certain premises that are not are not only untenable but destroy whatever humor the story may contain. As a study of domestic dysfunctionality, the movie does better job, but frankly that is not supposed to be the theme of the story. There is nothing funny about a man ejecting himself from a car after he learns that his wife wants a divorce and that his life has been turned upside down. That's tragic. If someone is expecting an amusing movie, prepare to be disappointed. The same can be said if you are expecting high drama. In fact, it might be best of you wait until the movie goes to DVD land.

"Star Trek: The Next Generation: Chain of Command: Part 2 (#6.11)" (1992)

Excellent episode, with certain caveats. 14 August 2011

(Spoiler alert)

As drama, this episode of *Star Trek* approaches a level of excellence that is rarely even remotely achieved in a television series. It is apparent that the producers of this show actually made the effort to produce something that was worthy of the term drama. Now, the problem with this episode is that it does not further develop the Jellico-Riker conflict, which revealed a lot about Commander Riker. Coddled by Captain Picard, Riker reveals a nastier side of his personality when placed under the supervision of another captain who wants results, fast, and has no time or interest in trying to elicit cooperation. Riker's fundamental failings are revealed when he has to be relieved of his duties, for cause, rendering himself useless and sabotaging the captain's efforts to prepare the ship for possible war. Captain Jellico did nothing to warrant Riker's antagonism. Riker was argumentative, surly, resistant to supervision, and failed to discharge his duties, proving that he was not fit for higher command. As for Captain Picard, he is tortured by an alien who is trying to extract information. Here, Picard's moral position is not completely tenable. First, he was captured after having infiltrated an alien space ship while negotiations were in progress; a hostile act. Second, it was the Federation that was acting aggressively, not the the aliens, thus, Picard could not claim the moral high ground. Also, the alien is not a human and therefore may have a completely different set of values governing his conduct. Nevertheless, this episode deserves praise for its attempt to examine a number of questions relating to personal conduct and integrity and as such is worth watching.

U-Carmen eKhayelitsha (2005)

One of the greatest movie musicals ever produced. 7 August 2011

This movie may be one of the greatest musicals ever produced in cinematic history. Every facet of this movie is superb: the acting, the story, the music, the dancing, the singing, everything. Not only does this movie faithfully tell the story of Carmen, it does so in Xhosa, making the production even more impressive, appealing and effective. The lead players's performances are worthy of the highest accolades, especially the of Pauline Malefane who plays Carmen and Andile Tshoni who plays her lover, Jongi. Their astounding, stunning, stupendous performances carry the movie. Ms. Malefane is one of the great lead actresses and an incredible singer. Further, the movie itself is packed with action and drama, all of which is set in a South African township which adds immeasurably to the movie's strength. Why this movie is not better known in the United States is puzzling. There is no question that this movie would resonate with an American audience. After all, the story of Carmen is timeless and tragic, and this movie successfully captures the essence of the story, providing a version that is unsurpassed.

Saint Louis Blues (2009)

A wonderful movie. 7 August 2011

The music is outstanding, almost nonstop, superimposed on a story that is contemporary and straight forward. This movie is proof that elaborate sets and locations are not necessary to produce a high quality cinematic movie. What makes this movie so great are the actors whose performances are uniformly excellent. Their singing and dancing is topnotch and matches anything produced by Hollywood. The story is a like a mini-road movie set in Senegal. The ensemble cast do a wonderful job and is proof that quality of the entertainment is not necessarily a function of the size of the budget. After watching this movie one will be impressed with the dancing and singing skills of the actors and the depth of their performances which cover a wide gamut of emotions. What a wonderful movie.

Cowboys & Aliens (2011)

Combines two genres with mixed results. 5 August 2011

When two genres are combined on one movie, in this case the western and sci-fi genres the results can be mushy. This movie combines these two genres with mixed results. First, once again Harrison Ford proves that he is a great actor. His presence in the movie practically guarantees that the movie will be at least watchable, regardless of the story. How, regarding the story itself, it is clever and keeps the audience's interest. Daniel Craig gives a strong performance and the Olivia Wilde is stunning in the female lead. The one aspect of the movie that brings this movie down are the aliens themselves. Their portrayal as being little more than hysterical brutes is completely inconsistent with the sophistication of their technology, which suggests a level of social and intellectual development much more complex than that portrayed. There is no reason why the aliens should be portrayed as monsters. Just because they are marauders and thieves does not mean that they are necessarily brutish or ugly. Nevertheless, the movie is watchable, primarily because of Harrison Ford whose presence saves this movie from being jettisoned into space, and to DVD land.

Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)

Simple treatment of complex themes. 5 August 2011

A comic book character should be treated as such. To do more may be asking too much from the character which could render the character unrecognizable. This movie, however, succeeds in maintaining the character's identity. The problem is the shallowness of the story, the utter lack of anything that even remotely resembles emotional depth and the simplistic treatment of

subjects as complex as the corruption of science and of war itself. Just because a character is out of a comic book does not mean that character should be treated as a caricature. This movie is set during a time of great and momentous change. That does not mean the movie is poorly crafted, rather it means that there is a paucity of content as the director opted to dazzle the audience with special effects to keep the audience's attention. Now of course the movie tells a story, but in doing so sends a message suggesting that the U. S. needed superheroes to the war, which is not true. The war was won by regular people who performed heroically, no matter their body type. Nevertheless, the movie is upbeat, the acting is good, the bad guy is sufficiently sinister and for those reasons the movie is worth watching. Just remember: it's fiction; not history.

Girl Crazy (1943)

This movie entertains. 24 July 2011

This is an upbeat, entertaining movie which showcases the talents of Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney and the rest of the cast. Mickey Rooney's performance is incredible. He sings, he dances, he acts, he is funny, he is serious, he does it all. Judy Garland was never better. She really could act - and dance too. The dance sequences are great. The story is transparent but so what? It's a musical and it delivers the goods. And of course, the music itself is great. This movie is in its own way a tribute to the music of George Gershwin. Where would this movie be without George Gershwin? The ubiquitous presence of Gershwin defines this movie. Sometimes a movie is character-driven, sometimes story-driven. This movie is music-driven, and it is driven quite well. There are some who may dismiss this movie as mere fluff, a Hollywood potboiler, a retreading of an old formula, but that would ignore the outstanding Gershwin music, the snappy dialog, the great acting and the wonderful cast. The fact is that this movie is entertaining and does the job, which is to entertain.

Rhapsody in Blue (1945)

The music speaks for itself. 24 July 2011

George Gershwin's music speaks for itself. No movie can ever completely capture the essence of Mr. Gershwin's career, but this movie represents a wonderful attempt. The real star of this movie, besides the music itself, is Oscar Levant. His performance is stunning; he carries the movie. The final scene is exquisite. Accolades are also in order for Joan Leslie. What a great actress and she proves it in this movie. This movie is about genius and creativity that brought joy to people. Who hasn't ever heard a Gershwin song? This movie is even more impressive in that it avoids becoming overly melodramatic and up scores not his untimely death but his incredible achievements. Under a less skillful director, this movie could have easily devolved into a tearjerker, but instead stays on course, tells the story and in the process allows the audience to appreciate what

Mr. Gershwin meant, not only to his family and friends, but to all of us. This movie is a fitting tribute to the life and achievements of a musical genius. Hollywood deserves praise for having made this movie and of putting together a production that does credit not only to George Gershwin's memory but to the importance of music to society.

An American in Paris (1951)

The story is surprisingly intense. 22 July 2011

The story is surprisingly intense and actually eclipses the dancing sequences which are impressive. As much as the movie's plot may seem hokey and contrived, it really isn't. The story is plausible; people can fall in love immediately and get swept up in their emotions. Gene Kelly gives a great performance as an expatriate American and Leslie Caron proves to be dynamic in her role. The final dance sequence is incredible, combining several different dance forms. What makes this movie even stronger is that the story is simple, the characters likable and the music outstanding. The dream sequence with Oscar Levant was brilliant. There is nothing wrong with an upbeat movie featuring wonderfully talented actors who actually entertain. They sing, they dance, there is music and a happy ending. What's wrong with that? Nothing. This movie deserved the honors it received. Street Car and A Place in the Sun were marvelous movies, but a quality musical will trump a bleak, black-and-white drama anytime, like it did in 1951. Who would an audience rather watch: Gene Kelly laughing and dancing with Leslie Caron to the music of George Gershwin or gloomy Montgomery Cliff plotting to kill a hapless Shelly Winters?

Bridesmaids (2011)

A goofy movie with a lot of goofs. 21 July 2011

The problem with this movie is that the lead roles went to the wrong actors. This movie should have starred Melissa McCarthy and Ben Falcone. They were incredibly funny! The other cast members were not. Every scene with Ms. McCarthy was hilarious, especially the bathroom scene which she stole. As for the story itself, the conflict between the two bridesmaids was completely contrived, seemed to be almost tragic and not particularly funny. The actors were not funny and indeed there were moments when Maya Rudolph seemed like she was going to cry. Now if Melissa McCarthy had played the main bridesmaid and Ben Falcone her boyfriend, then the movie would have been a farce and would have generated a lot more laughs, but so much for "what if." Anyway, the movie has a lot of raunchy humor which required raunchy actors, and with the exception of Ms. McCarthy and Mr. Falcone, the raunchy actors were not there.

Shoot the Messenger (2006)

Excellent movie. 17 July 2011

This is surprisingly strong and engaging movie. Usually when a commercial production delves into highly charged topics, such as race, the results can be less than pleasing. However, this movie is an exception. Utilizing an almost documentary-like format, the deals with issues such as racism, self-hate and emotional trauma. Skillfully directed by Ngozi Onwurah, this movie dramatizes what can happen when hatred is turned inward. The performances are excellent. But what makes this particularly effective is that it presents a story that is not contrived, that deals with real issues, and does so without relying on cinematic gimmicks like special effects or becoming preachy. The themes in this story resonates with the audience and for that reason alone this movie is worth watching. This movie deals squarely with the theme of self-hate: its etiology and manifestations. In this movie the dialog is candid,, unambiguous and strong. Characters are forced to call into question their own sense of worth, their own sense of identity and come to terms with who they are, and who they think they are. The main character is heroic, yet he is flawed hero, who experiences his own personal odyssey of self-discovery. What makes this movie so brilliant is the fundamental simplicity of the story. There is no complicated, convoluted plot, no pseudo-philosophical sophistry; what is portrayed is done so plainly and clearly. The world is a complicated place but that doesn't mean a movie has to be complicated. Profound themes do not need to be obscured by special effects or overly wordy scripts. This movie is proof of that.

Horrible Bosses (2011)

A laugh-producing machine. 13 July 2011

This movie is hilarious. Every scene is funny. Jennifer Aniston has never been better. She is not only a great actress, she is a great comedienne too. Charlie Day gives one of the funniest performances in a Hollywood movie in years. His phone scene with Ms. Aniston is hilarious, a take off on the Doris Day - Rock Hudson romantic comedies from the 1960s. Colin Farrell and Kevin Spacey give wonderful, strong performances. They are great actors and prove it in this movie. Playing heavies, they are perfect foils for the comics in this movie. The trio of Bateman, Sudeikis and Day is the best comedy combo since Chevy Chase, Steve Martin and Martin Short in Three Amigos. If this movie doesn't make you laugh, and laugh often, then either you're sleeping or you just don't like comedies. This movie is proof that when it wants to, Hollywood can make a comedy that actually produces laughs. The story is zany, goofy and upbeat. It's a farce, a romp, and a laugh-producing machine.

Bad Teacher (2011)

A wonderful Cameron Diaz movie. 13 July 2011

Cameron Diaz is great in this movie. She is beautiful and talented and funny and proves it in this movie. She is a marvelous actress. Justin Timberlake is impressive too, but this movie is clearly a Cameron Diaz vehicle, and for good reason: she is funny! Ms. Diaz should star in a upbeat TV sitcom. Her screen presence is so strong that she dominates every scene in the movie. Mr. Timberlake is one of the great straight men. His mere presence in a scene generates laughs. Jason Segel has funny moments too. The story is zany, goofy and upbeat. It's a farce, a romp, and a laugh-producing machine. If you like Cameron Diaz, you won't be disappointed and if you don't like her, watch the movie. She is wonderful.

Larry Crowne (2011)

A potentially great movie. 8 July 2011

This movie is fluff. It touches on serious themes but stops short from dealing with these themes forthrightly. Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts provide good performances but nothing special. The attempt to make light of serious topics just does not work. Mr. Hanks had an opportunity to make a really great movie dealing with serious subjects and instead produces a tepid, mediocre and superficial movie. There is absolutely nothing funny about a man losing his job and home. There is absolutely nothing about a jaded college instructor who abandons all ethical considerations. This is tragic and should have been treated as such. Instead, Mr. Hanks tries to play it safe by skirting these subjects without developing them further. That's too bad because the movie could have gone in that direction instead of pandering for cheap laughs. Larry Crowne is a tragic character and is a symbol of what has been happening to people across the United States. However, "what if" is not the same as "what is" with negative results.

The Terminal (2004)

Perhaps Tom Hanks' worst movie. 2 July 2011

This movie is incredibly bad. This could be Tom Hanks' worst movie. Everything aspect about the story was contrived. Tom Hanks' performance was contrived. The whole premise of the movie was contrived. The idea of anyone being stuck at an airport and then living there is completely implausible; no way could that happen. Literary license can stretch just so far and in this movie it went way beyond what the rubber band can bear. Every character in this movie was uninteresting, most uninteresting being the drub played by Tom Hanks. His

character has to be one of the dumbest Hollywood contrivances in cinematic history. The character is part stupid, part clueless, part hapless and completely unlikable. This movie should have been over the moment his application for a visa was denied. That itself would have been a red flag for airport personnel. That Tom Hanks' gives a sloppy performance can be forgiven. After all, he was working with substandard material. But that a production company actually felt this was a movie worth making is sad. People get stuck at airports all the time; it's one of the drawbacks of traveling. Planes are late, delays occur, bad weather, unanticipated events, but NO ONE ever actually lives in an airport, no matter how egregious the situation, except a man named Victor in a movie called The Terminal.

Transformers: Dark of the Moon (2011)

In this case, the format works. 30 June 2011

Amazingly, this is a good, robust movie. Despite the heavy reliance on special effects, the movie actually has a coherent story in which human characters figure prominently. Some of the dialog is snappy and the movie keeps the audience engaged. The principle characters are interesting and are not lost in all the noise and mayhem caused by the robots. The robots, both good and bad, are actually interesting, with humanoid features that make their behavior more plausible. One can almost feel sorry or elated when a robot is destroyed. John Malkovich and John Turturro are especially excellent and the rest of cast give energetic performances. One is almost rooting for the good guys to win. Heroism abounds as the robots and humans join together to fight for the survival of the planet. They form a united front which transcends the obvious chasm that separates human from machine. Leonard Nimoy's voice-over work is excellent. This movie is one of the better examples of the sci-fi, action, fantasy genre. In this case, the format works.

Super 8 (2011)

The movie has its drawbacks but is watchable. 23 June 2011

(Spoiler alert)

The movie has a rocky start but then the story picks up steam. The problem with the movie is the children's roles. Not only are they contrived caricatures of pre-adolescents, they are annoying caricatures, especially the one with the hardware in his mouth. Their presence almost destroys the movie. In fact, much of the story is contrived and a rehash of sci-fi formulas that were popular thirty years ago. Nevertheless, the movie does succeed in conveying a sense of suspense as, despite the movie's drawbacks, one wonders how the story will end. The acting is stilted, the dialog is at times ridiculous, the style of the movie pure

1970s, without it intending to be a parody, and the presence of the pre-adolescent caricatures embarrassing. Yet the movie survives to tell a story that is worthy of attention. This movie could have been better but then again it could have been a lot worse, so if it's not a classic at least it's not a joke. However, this movie deserves a rating of 8 out of 10 primarily because of closing credits into which are inserted two popular upbeat songs from the 1970s and an actual 8 mm film clip. It's just too bad that more of the movie was not so innovative.

The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill (2003)

Wonderful movie. 21 June 2011

What a wonderful movie. This movie is spiritually uplifting and inspirational. It chronicles selflessness and real, unconditional love for fellow creatures. The movie is not so much about the parrots; it is about the people whose lives the parrots changed. It is about how a man who is on the margins of society is saved by the mere presence of birds which give him a reason to live. The story is simple yet profound. Animals have feelings too and it is that quality which binds them and humans together. This concept is nothing new. However, this movie chronicles how what is often overlooked can be a source of great beauty.

After Innocence (2005)

The judicial system has its flaws. 20 June 2011

The problem with this movie is not the subject matter, which is compelling, or the way in which the movie is presented, which is straight forward. Rather, it fails to offer a suggestion for improving what is obviously a flawed judicial system. Miscarriages of justice occur. They occur throughout history. Books have been written on this subject; it has been dramatized and discussed, e.g., *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Judge Dredd*, indeed Jesus Christ himself was crucified although found by the chief magistrate to have done nothing wrong. The judicial system is imperfect and the machinery of justice has some loose nuts and bolts which effect its operation. Most of these wrongly convicted gentlemen whose cases are discussed were found guilty based upon the evidence presented at their trials. It was the admission of additional evidence years later, after the their trials were concluded, that caused their convictions to be later reversed. That this country has an appeal system that allows the admission of new evidence after a trial is adjourned and sentence pronounced is a sign that may be the system is in fact working properly, that even years later, a court is willing to give a case a second review.

Green Lantern (2011)

A sleeper. 20 June 2011

This movie is fluff. Even allowing for the comic-book format, the movie lacks substance. This movie is geared for the pre-teen audience. It offers a lot of cartoon-like special effects with lines spoken by cartoon-like characters. At no time does this movie approach the level of an adult story. Every scene is dominated by all kind of flashy lights and some absurd attempts at drama. This movie borrows the most embarrassing features of other comic-book based movies and combines them to produce this unsatisfactory product. Both Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively give good performances, but really have little material to fully demonstrate their acting skills. The problem with the movie is not the cast, it is the way the story is presented. It is apparent that the director had opted to sacrifice substance for flashiness, which is okay from a marketing vantage point but makes for a superficial interpretation of a comic book story which itself is not exactly Shakespeare. In short, if you decide to watch this movie, take along a companion to let you know what you missed while you were napping.

The Crucible (1996)

Where's the exorcist when you need one? 17 June 2011

(Spoiler alert)

The problem with this movie is not the subject matter but how the subject matter is treated. This movie takes a tragic event in American history, perhaps one of history's most egregious and infamous miscarriages of justice, and reduces it to a melodrama. Yet there is little in this event that lends itself to melodramatics; the tragedy is too all-encompassing and overwhelming. The melodramatics are added for literary purposes. The political motivation behind the trials is so obvious that the conduct of the judges become completely transparent. In this movie there was no way that the judges were going to leave Salem without convicting somebody of something, no matter how flimsy the evidence. If the judges had actually witnessed evidence of witchcraft, then their behavior would have been plausible, which brings us to the movie's fundamental flaw - that it fails to convey the depth of the community's belief in the existence of witches. In the movie, their belief comes off as a pretentious, that deep down nobody seriously really believed in the existence of witches. Moreover, the behavior of the girls was not nearly bizarre enough for anyone to reasonably believe that they were possessed. For instance, if people had witnessed the girls suspending themselves in midair or speaking dead languages or turning their heads 360 degrees like Regan did in *The Exorcist*, then they might have had cause to conclude that something was amiss. But to ask the audience to believe that anyone, especially the magistrates, would accept flighty, hysterical behavior as evidence of witchcraft borders is a hard sell. The scene in which the girls rush

out of the courthouse and into the ocean is laughable. The dialog between Daniel Day-Lewis and Wynona Ryder is forced and stodgy. There is absolutely no chemistry between them. Indeed, the John Proctor character is so vacillating that one must ask why the magistrates would want to waste their time with him in the first place. Also, the quality of the acting is uneven. Sometimes it is cheesy; other times it's strong. The same can be said for the level of drama; some scenes are intense, others flat. Yet, despite these drawbacks, the movie is worth watching because it is about a tragic event in American history that should be studied and discussed.

X-Men: First Class (2011)

Lively movie; weak story. 14 June 2011

How can one judge a movie that on its face is campy? Can a campy movie be judged on the same basis as let's say a non-campy movie? This movie is highly entertaining, yet tells a story that is so absurd that it's almost laughable, and the movie is not a comedy. The mutants are wonderful and their powers are impressive, but so what? The audience can relate to a character like, let's say, Superman, who has super powers but otherwise is no different from his human counterparts. X-men however are quite different which makes them a less lovable, far more weird, and potentially more menacing. One does not have to be concerned that Batman is going to to a number on Gotham City or that Spiderman is going to weave a huge web around his friends. Yet one is not sure about these X-men. Some are good and some are bad. It makes for a lively movie with lots of special effects and all kinds of story twists which grabs and keeps the audience's attention, yet leaves one wondering: why do these X-men exist in the first place? What is their mission?

Midnight in Paris (2011)

Whimsical trip through nostalgia-land. 14 June 2011

This movie is a whimsical fantasy that succeeds as a movie. The main character, admirably played by Owen Wilson, is on a quest for something that is a mirage, but to him is real. The movie deals with escapism and its pitfalls. Yes, it can be fun to let our imagination take us to all the beautiful places we crave to go to for happiness, but ultimately we're stuck in the present which sooner or later comes back to bite us. Nevertheless, the world of make believe can seem so real that once you're there, you never want to leave and that is the start of madness. This movie takes the audience to the brink of madness. The main character is so open to suggestion and so desperate to be appreciated and understood that he wants to flee present, which makes this movie so appealing. For who doesn't think about wanting to escape to a better place? Who doesn't daydream? The rest of the cast is excellent. As for the cinematography, the opening shots of Paris are superb. Rarely has an urban setting been more magnificently presented in a movie and for those who like Paris, this movie will be a delight to watch.

Black Robe (1991)

When cultures clash. 9 June 2011

(Spoiler alert)

***Black Robe* is a credible attempt to dramatize the clash of cultures in the early seventeenth century in what is today the region comprising northern New York State and Quebec, Canada.**

In this movie the principal characters: a Native chief, his wife and daughter, a French priest (the "Black Robe") and his companion, a young French man, are people caught up in a chain of events that highlight the similarities and differences, as well as the best and the worst features, of two cultural groups, one French and Catholic, the other Native American and non-Christian, as they take the first tentative steps in establishing contact. Remarkably, the two groups have much in common. Both have chiefs, both utilize similar rituals to strengthen group solidarity, both have warriors, both have priests, both have strong religious beliefs, both understood firearms, and both are inquisitive as to the nature of the other, including sexual, and are capable of interacting with each other on an intimate, including sexual level. Yet these similarities are far outweighed by their differences, such as in race, technological development, literacy, language and military power. For instance, in one scene, the French priest demonstrates writing to the Natives which the Natives find perplexing and disturbing. In another scene, the Natives are amused by a clock, which, though obviously important to the whites, to the Natives is little more than a silly noise-making contraption.

Some aspects of the story are contrived, such as the affair between the priest's traveling companion (who, of course, is young, tall, sensitive and handsome) and the chief's daughter (who, of course, is young, lithe, passionate and beautiful, with a lovely countenance and a slight streak of rebelliousness, enhancing her charm), the gratuitous depictions of acts of copulation and close-up shots of horrible combat wounds, and the inclusion of "bad," that is, unruly and sadistic Natives, complete with scowling faces and menacing, mocking laughs, all clearly added for dramatic effect. These additions are pure Hollywood.

Nevertheless, this movie succeeds as a work of art because of the presence of the main character, the "Black Robe." He is the bulwark of the story, the hub around which the movie revolves. This character is strong because he has moral integrity, that is, he is not a phony. He really cares about the Natives, as people and not just as targets for spiritual exploitation, and he knows that they are dying and wants to save them the only way he knows how; by bringing them salvation, unconditionally, through Christian faith, something which he really believes. The Natives sense that he cares about them, that he is not scheming to hurt them or steal from them, and are even comfortable enough with him to playfully poke fun at him, a sign of acceptance, and something they would not dare to do, or care to

do, with most other white people, who they detest because if the Natives had hated him, they would have let him die or have murdered him, without hesitation, but they did not. When he was lost, they found him; when he was left in the forest, they went back to fetch him. By the end of movie, his acceptance by the Natives is complete as they come to him for spiritual comfort to ease the pain of their suffering. For "Black Robe," his mission is fulfilled; for the Natives it marks the beginning of a process of assimilation into a new culture that will soon lead to their cultural and physical decline, and for many, their extinction.

Also, mention must be made of another principal character in this movie, Chomina, who fully grasps the predicament of his people and the implications of the white man's presence in what was once Native land. His character is symbolic of the best features of the Natives: strong, resolute, courageous, fair, honorable, fundamentally peaceful, uncorrupted, and above all humane, and his death represents the end of an era, which becomes even more apparent when his daughter decides to stay with her white boyfriend and not return to her people. Perhaps this interpretation of Chomina may seem a bit expansive, yet there were Native Americans who were known to embody these traits, so the character cannot be discounted as a mere cinematic contrivance.

That this movie contains interesting and noble characters is commendable, yet what makes this movie worth watching is the substantive nature of the story itself which candidly addresses themes relevant to today's post-9/11 world in which the clash of cultures, under the banner "war on terrorism," has taken on global proportions.

One other point: The clash of cultures depicted in this movie aptly dramatizes the process of cultural decline and regeneration that has occurred continuously throughout history. Everywhere in the world, cultures rise and fall and are replaced by other cultures. Languages that once flourished are now extinct; empires that once stretched across continents are long since gone. Understanding this makes the process more comprehensible but provides little solace for those experiencing the process, especially if it is their culture that is disappearing. One cannot help but be moved by the plight of the Native Americans as they realize that their way of life will be gone and that there is nothing they can do to stop it.

The movie tells a compelling story about people from two cultural groups struggling to get to know each other and form social bounds under difficult circumstances and for that reason alone this movie is worth watching.

Fellini's Roma (1972)

Nostalgic return to the past. 6 June 2011

In this movie Federico Fellini attempts to contrast the Rome of his youth with modern day Rome with mixed results. The Rome of his youth is gaudy,

earthy, raucous, but with a sense of community, while all that is lacking in the present day, yet Rome endures despite the changes. Fellini clearly yearns for the earlier time and provides a glimpse of a world and subculture that is now extinct. Oh, to go back to the days when neighborhoods existed, when people knew each other, when life was simpler and more fun. Yet the problem is that the movie lacks any real dramatic content. The movie is basically consists of anecdotal vignettes that show the ridiculous side of life, yet it's all based on caricatures that lack substance. As a result, the movie is dramatically flat. One can appreciate Fellini's attempt to recreate a happier bygone era but people are more than just caricatures and to portray people as such becomes a form of mockery which is ultimately unfair.

El Alamein - The Line of Fire (2002)

Interesting but flawed. 6 June 2011

The problem with this movie is not so much the movie itself, though the movie does not lack in technical glitches, but rather the historical context in which the story is set. The director tries to tell a story about Italian soldiers in World War Two, suggesting that they are hapless victims of incompetent commanders who basically had them fighting in a hopeless cause, period. This narrow theme produces a two-dimensional story that completely ignores the fundamental reason why the Italians were in the fighting in the first place: to achieve the strategic goals of Adolf Hitler. As a result, this movie is dramatically flat. The Italian soldiers are portrayed as self-sacrificing, suffering and heroic when in fact they were invaders who were brought all their problems on themselves. In an interesting twist, the British are portrayed as faceless automatons who mercilessly drive through the depleted Italian lines, as if it were the British who were the bad guys. That the Italian soldiers were capable of acts of courage on the battlefield is not the question. Rather, the question is why were they fighting in the first place, and any movie, especially a movie that is set in World War Two, that avoids dealing with that question is fundamentally flawed.

The Hangover Part II (2011)

Unfunny, awkward attempt at humor. 27 May 2011

There is probably nothing more dismal in the world of cinema than a comedy that is not funny. The director of this movie tries really hard to generate laughs but without success. This movie proves that goofiness does not necessarily produce laughs. The actors try their best to be funny but their efforts are for naught. Everything about this movie had problems: the poor script, the inane story, the cheesy acting, the transparent attempts to shock the audience, all of which producing a stultifying attempt to get the audience to laugh. Actually, the part of the movie that worked the best was the after the movie ends, with still

pics intermixed with the credits. Bradley Cooper is a strong actor but in this movie he is completely miscast. Mr. Cooper simply is not a slap-stick comic. The background of Bangkok, Thailand did nothing to uplift this movie. The seediness and squalor of the city is sad and calls to question whether the Asian continent is as prosperous as reported in the news.

Priest (2011)

A good movie. 20 May 2011

Let's get down to brass tacks: This is a good movie. Okay, there are some who might write off this movie as just another scary pseudo sci-fi flick but it's actually much more than that. The movie tells a story, is well acted, has well defined heroes and villains, has good special effects and is fast paced, with a beginning, a middle and an end. The movie does not ask much from the audience accept to sit back and enjoy the ride. Setting a movie in the future is always risky because the setting may be so ludicrous as to ruin the story. However, this is not the case in this movie. Here, mankind is at war and people under siege. Given this premise, the behavior of the characters and their interactions with one another becomes plausible and comprehensible, thus making for a good movie. The movie could have benefited from more character development, especially of the main character played by Paul Bethany, but still there is enough information to appreciate his character's role. This movie succeeds in grabbing and keeping the audience's attention and that alone is enough to recommend it.

Truman (1995) (TV)

Good biopic of Harry S. Truman. 20 May 2011

This is a good, competent biopic of one of the more colorful U. S. Presidents. The story of Harry S. Truman, from his humble beginnings, to how he became president, the decision to drop the atomic bomb, his election victory in 1948, and the firing of General MacArthur is legendary and the movie does justice to each one of these events. Perhaps the most compelling part of the movie deals with Mr. Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb, one of the most momentous and far reaching acts in history. What is amazing is how this awesome decision would up being made by one person, acting alone, taking complete responsibility. One must wonder why Congress was not more involved involved in this monumental decision to use a virtually untested weapon of unprecedented destructive power. Another interesting part of the movie involves Mr. Truman's 1948 campaign for President. The movie effectively shows how Mr. Truman dramatically won the election and laughed his way back to the White House. Gary Sinese gives a wonderful performance in the title role and Diana Scarwid gives a strong performance as Mr. Truman's wife, Bess. If one is interested in the career of Harry S. Truman, then watch this movie.

Lonely Are the Brave (1962)

One of Kirk Douglas's better movies. 20 May 2011

This movie contains a strong performance by Kirk Douglas as a modern day rebel. Although it's set in the west, the movie is not a conventional western. Rather, it is a metaphor on the relationship of the individual to an increasingly restrictive society. Unlike most of his other roles, in this movie Kirk Douglas plays an affable, easy going character who has to be his own person, even if it means being alone. For the movie to make any sense, this premise must be understood and accepted. The supporting cast is excellent, led by Walter Matthau and George Kennedy, both of whom play characters that neither normally did not play. The cinematography is excellent and really brings out the stark nature of the story and the musical score adds to the somber mood. The movie succeeds in telling a compelling story without becoming grim or stagy and is one of Kirk Douglas's better, yet far less popular projects. If you like movies with a social message, then this movie is for you and if you are Kirk Douglas fan, then you won't be disappointed.

African Cats (2011)

Technically brilliant; the narration is overdone. 14 May 2011

African cats are majestic, and one runs the risk of forgetting that when watching this documentary. Cheetahs, lions, and hyenas are lethal killing machines. That is their nature. The pictures speak for themselves; narration may not even be necessary. Watching a lion chase down a gazelle or a cheetah face down a lion requires no commentary. This is life or death. Here the narration becomes a distraction. The animals are not acting for the audience's amusement. They are doing what animals do to survive. Do lions have a sense of family? Who knows. But one thing is for certain: this documentary provides a spectacular glimpse of the brute strength and incredible agility of these creatures. Technically, this documentary is superb. But anthropomorphizing these animals for dramatic effect really trivializes what the documentary is showing. These animals are not cuddly playthings; they can and do kill, which is an aspect of their nature that cannot be played down.

Agora (2009)

An impressive movie. 11 May 2011

This powerful and compelling historical drama deals with lots of themes: freedom of thought, scientific discovery, religious intolerance, women's rights, and vigilantism, all of which centered around and incredible figure in history, a mathematician named Hypatia, played brilliantly by the beautiful Rachel Weisz.

Her performance is incredible; she carries the movie, completely dominates the story and brings to life a woman whose bravery is unmatched. The supporting cast is excellent too, and together they succeed in telling a story that is relevant to today's audience. As this movie shows, when religion gets mixed with politics the results are invariably catastrophic. But the movie offers more than just a glimpse into the past. It's about people caught up in a time of rapid social change and how outside forces can shape personal relationships. Hypatia is a symbol for courage, and the price that one may have to pay in defense of personal integrity.

An Ideal Husband (1999)

This movie is wonderful. 11 May 2011

This movie is one of the better romantic comedies. Julianna Moore steals the show as a beautiful but conniving woman who concocts an elaborate plot to snare a man, a confirmed bachelor, for marriage and in the process sets off a series of unanticipated but amusing events. Rupert Everett plays the target of Ms. Moore's intrigue; only one actor could have played the role better: George Sanders. What makes this movie even more entertaining is that the Moore/Everett characters mirror one another as each one tries to outdo the other's cynicism, with amusing results. All kinds of embarrassing moments occur as miscommunication leads to havoc which one hopes will be sorted out. The movie is based on a story by Oscar Wilde, which means that it will contain a lot of wit and biting commentary on the pomposity and decadence of the upper of the upper classes. This movie is wonderful.

Water for Elephants (2011)

Reese Witherspoon has never been lovelier. 10 May 2011

Reese Witherspoon has never been lovelier in this excellent 1930s period piece about life in the circus. This movie is first-class entertainment. The story is riveting; the acting is strong; the dialog is snappy and the cast outstanding. Robert Pattison proves that he a major star who can carry a movie. The director makes excellent use of the flashback in unfolding the story, in a manner similar to that used to great effect in Titanic, and one is soon engrossed in the lives of characters. Christoph Waltz again proves that he is magnificent actor. But it is Reese Witherspoon who is the real star of this movie. She is stunningly beautiful and her performance is magnificent. She is the epitome of cinematic perfection. And as for the other stars, the animals, their performances are outstanding too, which is a tribute to their trainers. Congratulations are in order for them. This movie is well worth watching.

The Parent Trap (1998)

Lindsay Lohan gives an impressive performance. 8 May 2011

This is a very good movie. Lindsay Lohan's performance is impressive. She is a very talented actress and shows it in this movie. To play a dual role is a difficult but she does it and does it well. While watching Ms. Lohan in this movie it is hard to believe that she is the same person who is now the subject of so much negative attention. As for the rest of the cast, they are also excellent, especially the two who play the butler and the housekeeper. They were warm and funny. Of course, it's so sad what happened to Natasha Richardson. She was such a beautiful, charming, wonderful actress, as she proved in this movie. Although Dennis Quaid got top billing, the movie does not center around his character. Rather, Lindsay Lohan carries this movie; she is the actual star. She is in just about every scene, playing two different roles. One thing about Lindsay Lohan: she is talented. Maybe one day she will return to the screen and again become a star.

Sweet Smell of Success (1957)

An surprising cinematic work. 6 May 2011

This is a movie about seedy characters doing seedy things in a seedy, ugly city, which is surprising given the cast. Burt Lancaster and Tony Curtis are known for their upbeat, heroic roles but not in this movie. Mr. Lancaster is sinister and Mr. Curtis his sycophant. The story itself is downbeat and the mood throughout is dismal, casting a pall that suggests a community that has lost its moral bearing. The acting is excellent although at times somewhat stagey. New York City itself is portrayed as being dark, grimy and grim. Barbara Nichol gives a strong performance as a prostitute who is victimized. The movie is worth watching but don't expect something cheery. But if you like movies that make a comment about the human condition, then this movie may fit the bill.

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (2008)

**Maybe the most powerful indictment of Nazism ever made by Hollywood.
6 May 2011**

Not only is this movie not revisionist history or a whitewashing of the Holocaust, this movie may be the most powerful and compelling indictment of Nazism ever made by Hollywood. The question is: Is the story plausible? The answer to that question is yes. Children did live in these concentration camps. Not many, but some, and inmates did interact with people outside. There were literally hundreds of concentration camps located throughout Nazi occupied Europe and given the number of camps and the huge number of people detained,

interacting was not only possible, it was inevitable. Maybe the movie stretches matters a bit regarding how the two boys meet, but the idea on which it is based is valid. Should the audience feel any sympathy for the Nazi family? Why not? Maybe not for the husband, the commandant of the camp, who is hardcore Nazi, but certainly for the wife and daughter who in a way are trapped in a warped situation not of their doing. This movie should be treated for what it is: a work of fiction that deals with certain themes that are universally applicable. These themes include friendship, culpability, loyalty, indeed the whole question of consciousness and morality. The wife's outrage is enough to show that she for one did not accept what was happening in the camps and did what she could to make her feelings known. Yet the most pathetic character is the commandant himself whose destructiveness and brutality is matched only by his stupidity which has tragic consequences for all.

Fast Five (2011)

Let us pay homage to all the automobiles that were sacrificed in the making of this movie, 4 May 2011

One thing about this movie becomes immediately apparent: its fixation on the automobile. This is a movie that goes through automobiles like a glutton consumes food. The wreckage and carnage is nonstop. This movie is a junkyard dealer's dream. This movie may set a record for the most automobiles demolished in one movie. In this movie, automobiles are crashed, smashed, dismantled, reassembled, assessed, analyzed, and discussed. In this movie, automobiles are more than just props, they are characters too who are sacrificed to achieve a greater good, which is to tell a story. When an automobile blows up one can almost imagine that poor hunk of metal grimacing in its final death throes, as the humans fight on. Almost all the action centers around automobiles, flashy automobiles, as well as their cousins, the armored cars, trucks, and vans. In this movie, if an object has an engine and wheels it is vulnerable to destruction by fire, blunt force or explosion, or a combination of all three. In this movie automobiles are put through their paces. This movie shows that when an automobile traveling at an extremely high speed makes contact with some other heavy object, the results can be spectacular, and in this movie it is proved time and time again. All this being the case, this has to be one of the best action movies made in a long time. The movie brings together all the elements need to produce a credible, entertaining product. The story is innovative and original; the acting is strong; and the cinematography, including special effects, is incredible. The good guys are really good and the bad guys are really bad. Jordana Brewster is beautiful as are all the female cast, but Vin Diesel and Dwayne Johnson have a screen presence which carries this movie. They are a great n entertainment team and bringing them together in one movie works brilliantly. The story moves forward relentlessly, each scene crammed with action. Also, this movie contains spectacular panoramic vistas of Rio de Janeiro and the music is snappy, as is the dialog. There is quarreling, fighting, friendship, teamwork, love, loyalty, and

betrayal. Dwyane Johnson is the new Arnold Schwarzenegger, except that Mr. Johnson is better. His screen presence is incredible. In addition, he can act! Congratulations to everyone involved in making this movie. It is a masterpiece. This movie is a must-watch for any action movie aficionados and for movie buffs in general consistent with the movie's PG-13 rating.

Der Unhold (1996)

John Malkovich gives a commanding performance. 2 May 2011

First, John Malkovich's performance is incredible. He is one of the greatest actors today and proves it in this movie.

How is it that someone can honestly believe that they are doing good when in fact all they are doing is harm? This is the theme of this movie. John Malkovich gives a commanding and chilling performance as a man who is frightening and engages in harmful behavior but has no insight as to the abominable nature of his conduct. The Malkovich character is utterly depraved yet his depravity is not driven by animus which makes it even harder to figure out. He wraps himself up in some kind of fantasy world but he is not psychotic, is essentially mild mannered and deferential to authority and does not seem intent on hurting anyone. Yet, everywhere he goes people get hurt because of him. He believes that he is doing good when he is doing bad, just like the Nazis did. They believed that they had a mission to accomplish and had no problem rationalizing and denying the destructiveness of their program. In fact, they vigorously defended their actions as being in the best interest of humanity. The Malkovich character thinks in much the same way and not surprising is equally warped.

Top Gun (1986)

One of the great movies. 30 April 2011

I saw this movie when it was first released in 1986 and again twenty-five years later and the movie is actually better the second time around. This is one of the great action movies. This movie features an ensemble cast that is fantastic and the story is pure entertainment. This is Tom Cruise's best movie by far; he carries it and makes it his own. Kelly McGillis is absolutely beautiful. She is a sweetheart, beautiful, intelligent and what a smile! The close-up shots of Ms. McGillis and Mr. Cruise fully capture the chemistry between them. They are actors, but chemistry cannot be faked and in this movie chemistry abounds. The script is wonderful, loaded with clever lines with double-meanings that are perfectly delivered by the cast. Val Kilmer is great in this movie. The action scenes have to be among the most spectacular ever filmed, and without special effects. The character of Maverick is heroic and flawed. He does goofy things but regardless he is a positive figure. Anthony Edwards is perfect as Maverick's navigator, friend

and confidant. The story moves forward at the brisk pace and keeps the audience engaged. This is a movie that is story driven and it works because the story is evocative and the acting superb. Tony Scott put together one of the great movies. It's hard to believe that twenty-five years have gone by since this movie was first released, but the fact that it is as watchable today as it was twenty-five years ago shows how good this movie really is and that is because it deals with themes that transcend time.

Hanna (2011)

Be careful about how you raise a child., 29 April 2011

This off-beat movie is entertaining because of one person, the young lady who plays the title role. Hanna is the hapless product of an experiment that goes awry, and as a result she has socialization issues, not unlike the so-called monster created by Dr. Victor Frankenstein, except in this case, the young lady is actually human and the tampering is sociological and psychological. Being programmed to be violent, Hanna is violent but her violence is neither wanton nor arbitrary. She is capable of forming friendships and will not harm anyone who is defenseless. And her attractive yet almost tomboyish appearance makes her even more appealing. Eric Bana's performance as the father is acceptably controlled and low key. However, Cate Blanchett's performance is incredible. She plays a combination angry mother-figure and merciless bureaucrat who is driven by personal and professional issues to capture the renegade father and daughter, both of whom have knowledge and skills that she wants, at any price. This movie is worth watching, if for no other reason as an dramatization of how child-rearing can effect one's development.

Hamlet (1990)

Outstanding rendition of the Shakespeare classic. 29 April 2011

This movie is for real and both Mel Gibson and Glenn Close give commanding performances in their respective roles. This movie is proof that when given quality material under excellent direction, talented actors will flourish. The rest of the cast is stellar too, but this movie squarely revolves around the two lead characters and if their performances fail, then the whole movie fails. In recent years, Mel Gibson's reputation has taken hits, but there can be no denying that he is a gifted actor and in this movie presents a novel, dynamic interpretation of Hamlet that brings new life to the character, transforming a brooding young man into a man of action who takes charge and pays the price, wherein lays the tragedy. For Hamlet is a tragedy. However, unlike previous renditions of the play, which focus on the murky and somber, this rendition is lit up, the characters are active, Gertrude is young and beautiful, all of which make the ending even more provocative and powerful. This movie should have been

nominated for an Academy Award in every major category; that it wasn't is perplexing. All in all, this movie represents another triumph for Franco Zeffirelli, once again who proves that Shakespeare can be produced for the screen, if you do it right.

The Conspirator (2010)

A miscarriage of justice with tragic results. 21 April 2011

First, before discussing the story itself, a word about Robin Wright Penn. Her performance is outstanding. After watching Ms. Penn, one cannot help but sympathize with the character. As for the story, Robert Redford tries to make the following points: that Mary Surratt was innocent and that she was treated unjustly, that is, was not given a fair trial. Mr. Redford partially succeeds in making his case. He fails to establish that Ms. Surratt was innocent. The government does in fact present strong evidence suggesting that she was part of a conspiracy to assassinate President Lincoln. Does that mean that she took an active part in the plot? No. But the evidence suggests that she knew that something was going on, literally under her roof, and that her son was involved. This then leads to the other point, whether Ms. Surratt was treated fairly and here Mr. Redford makes a much stronger case. Ms. Surratt was a civilian who was being tried before a military tribunal. She was denied the protection afforded to all citizens by the U. S. Constitution and was not tried by a jury of her peers. She was already judged guilty before the proceedings even begun, which made the court little more than a rubber stamp for higher executive authority. So the outcome of the case was in little doubt. She was going to be punished, regardless of extenuating or mitigating circumstances. In short, the court was guided not by justice, but by vindictiveness and thirst for revenge. It was not American jurisprudence at its best. Far from it. The issue is not so much that Ms. Surratt was so harshly mistreated, but that officials at the highest level of government let that happen, officials who knew better yet chose to vent their rage on this woman. To have executed Ms. Surratt was an outrageous miscarriage of justice, but she was connected to an event that shocked and angered an entire nation, and as such became a scapegoat.

Atlas Shrugged: Part I (2011)

A movie that tells a story well. 21 April 2011

This movie is a solid, faithful rendition of the Ayn Rand novel of the same name. The dialog is somewhat stilted but that is because the story itself is highly contrived. But that is the nature of the story and the director stays away from padding the movie with a lot of melodramatic filler, which would have rendered the movie laughable. This movie is story-driven. The actors are excellent. They're essentially two-dimensional figures with little depth who are animated props

which serve to promote a certain point of view, that is, Ayn Rand's view of the world. In a world that is beset by crisis, what would happen if the weak conspired to prevent the strong from being successful? Does society benefit from a situation in which failure is given an out? Ayn Rand's world is not friendly; it is a place where initiative is looked upon with suspicion and animosity, where success is viewed as a threat to the other players who must act to ensure that they survive too. The collective good takes precedent over the individual; as a result all are brought down. The movie explores these themes. Don't expect a happy movie, but don't expect a bad movie either. It tells a story, and tells it well.

Source Code (2011)

An intriguing movie but has its flaws. 15 April 2011

Beware of the movie that relies too much on flashbacks. Such movies usually lose their continuity as the audience is asked to re-watch scenes that have already been shown. A good movie is one in which the story moves forward. Flashbacks can actually assist in this process, but only to a point. And when the flashbacks further include material that are intended to mislead or confuse, like personality switches or the reworking of scenes already shown, the results can be a confusing mess, which is the case in this movie. This would like making a movie like, for instance, *Gone With The Wind*, but instead of opening the movie at the beginning with Scarlett entertaining her suitors and then proceeding from there, the movie opens with Rhett leaving Scarlett followed by a series of flashbacks revealing in bits and pieces what went wrong to try to keep the audience guessing. *GWTW* is not a sci-fi movie, yet the principal is the same. The movie offers an intriguing idea and tries to make a go of it, but it bogs down and it doesn't take much effort to connect the dots. By the third flashback it's obvious that the main character is being used for something and is not too happy about it.

Arthur (2011/I)

Is this the worst movie of 2011? 15 April 2011

What a dismal movie. Although passed off as a comedy, this movie is a tragedy, and in more ways than one. First, the main character is not funny. Rather, he is repulsive. Second, the movie dwells on morbid themes relating to substance abuse and death. Three, the movie's story is so downbeat as to cause one to reasonably ask: when will it end? Four, changes from the original movie utterly fail, making the original, which also had its problems, seem like a virtual classic. Fifth, although Helen Mirren's portrayal as Hobson rates an enthusiastic E for Effort, she is totally miscast. Six, the character of Arthur is so ridiculous as to reduce him to a caricature. Seven, the conflict between Arthur and the mother is contrived since Arthur's erratic behavior leaves the mother with little choice

except to be nasty, if for no other reason, to shield her money from someone who is seriously unstable. Eight, the Jennifer Garner character warrants serious consideration for the worst supporting character ever concocted by a Hollywood screenwriter. When a beautiful actress like Jennifer Garner is made to look and sound like a banshee, something has gone wrong. It's one thing to treat Arthur as a social misfit. But when the same standard is applied to a truly beautiful actress, then that proverbial line has been crossed. Nine, setting this movie in New York City just did not work. A city like New York is big enough to swallow up a lot of Arthurs. He can do a lot more damage, and be a lot more noticeable too, in a smaller city or town. Ten, Russell Brand is a talented, energetic actor who tries to bring some authenticity to the Arthur character, but he is miscast. The character is supposed to be a small, vulnerable snip of a man who projects vulnerability and is harmless. The same cannot be said Mr. Brand's Arthur, who literally towers over the other characters and projects himself as an intimidating figure.

Trust (2010/I)

One of the great movies. 3 April 2011

Elaborating on this movie is a challenge because it can easily be summarized in one word: great. This movie may be one of the best movies ever produced by Hollywood. The story is straightforward, the acting is stupendous and the themes addressed are timeless. Without revealing the details of the story, this movie is about change - sudden, painful, uninvited, without warning. It's about what happens when someone has to grow up, fast; when innocence is stripped away revealing the seamier side of humanity. It can be quite a shock. The movie also deals with the nature of crime, victimization, and rage. Indeed this movie is effective because it tells a story that everyone can understand and because what the movie dramatizes is actually out there. Yet, despite the disturbing nature of the story, its presentation is far from morbid. Instead, it suggests that people have the strength to survive overwhelming crisis and remain emotionally intact, which is why this movie deserves recognition and respect.

The Lincoln Lawyer (2011)

Well-worth watching, 25 March 2011

Matthew McConaughey has arrived. He carries this movie. His presence makes this movie happen. He is the spark that lights this movie's fire. He takes a good story and makes it excellent. He projects the intensity and savvy that makes his character interesting and unique. Mr. McConaughey's performance is energetic, engaging and entertaining. He manages to project street-smarts and style; he is smart but not slick; he's realistic but not cynical; he is sensitive but not mushy. Another surprise is Ryan Phillippe's excellent performance which

also adds considerably to the movie's entertainment value as his character spars with Mr. McConaughey's. Although the story itself is a variation of the detective-who-done-it genre, the effective manner in which the story unfolds coupled with the excellent acting makes this story well-worth watching.

Jane Eyre (2011)

Jane Eyre is great. 25 March 2011

This movie is exquisite. It is an example of how a dramatic movie should be made. Far from being corny or contrived, this movie is about integrity, courage, loyalty, and friendship. The movie is beautifully filmed and conveys the moodiness and foreboding associated with the story. The acting is great by all members of the cast. This movie tells a story and tells it well. It provides a glimpse of nineteenth century English society and how people looked and acted at that time. Yet the movie is more than a period piece; its themes are timeless. At no time does the story drag. Jane Eyre is heroic. She is the epitome of human goodness, not the kind that's candy-coated but the kind that is genuine. She transcends a harsh childhood to become a source of great strength for everyone around her. Unlike most Hollywood movies today, Jane Eyre is story-driven, and the story is strong. This movie is well worth watching and the title character is a role model for adolescents or young adults of all ages to emulate.

I Wake Up Screaming (1941)

Classic movie. 13 March 2011

Sometimes it's the acting that makes a movie good. Other times it could be the directing or the script and other times the music or cinematography. In this movie, all the elements of movie-making are brought together to produce a great movie. In this movie the film-noir technique is used to great effectiveness to bring out and compliment the essential coldness of the story. Also, the performances of Betty Grable and Carole Landis as sisters are incredible. First, they looked like sisters and second, they acted like sisters. Of course, it helps an actress's career if she's attractive, but she still has to be able to act and both of these ladies could act. Laird Cregar's performance was uncanny. He was the epitome of obsession. His performance carried the movie. Victor Mature was wonderful. He could act and in this movie displays an wide range of emotions. The story is itself is compact, concise, and coherent and moves along at a fast pace. This movie is a classic and warrants a lot more attention.

The Adjustment Bureau (2011)

A potentially good movie saved by excellent acting. 13 March 2011

There's a saying: keep it simple. That applies to movies too, especially Hollywood movies. This movie violates that principle, hence the movie stalls. The theme is great. How much free-will do people have? Are the directions of our lives shaped by forces beyond our control? These are deep questions and when Hollywood attempts to answer them, the results could be messy. It's challenging enough to tell a coherent story but when nebulous elements not fully explained are added to a story, then the audience is left trying to figure out what the movie is about. Matt Damon is as usual excellent as are the rest of the cast, especially John Slattery and Terence Stamp, and their performances save this movie from crossing the line into clunker land. But even their efforts cannot undo the damage caused by the story itself.

Hall Pass (2011)

Beware of the crude props. 5 March 2011

In the world of movies, one of the most endearing genres is that of the goofy comedy - provided it's funny. Unfortunately, this movie does not quite measure up, although it does make an effort. The problem is the story itself. The premise is not funny. Neither are the characters. The two main characters are not funny at all. Their wives are not funny either. The directors even inject some explicit sexual material in an attempt to prop up the movie and it's embarrassing. When one considers the great comedy teams, their characters were fundamentally innocent. Their movies didn't need crude sexual props. Hence, when such props are introduced, that means the movie is in trouble and although the directors try to present an entertaining product, ultimately the final product is such that it generates a feeling of relief when it's finally over.

The Family That Preys (2008)

It's worth watching. 5 March 2011

This is a good movie. The story is interesting and engaging, the acting is excellent, and the plots and subplots worthy of attention. There's lots of melodramatics as relatives clash, feelings are hurt, and friendships are tested. The main characters are upbeat, positive, and despite their flaws, likable. There's even a rich bad guy which can hardly fail to generate interest, The main player is Kathy Bates who once again gives a strong, commanding performance. The rest of the cast is equally effective, together telling a story that is provocative and entertaining. When family members clash, anything can happen, and this is the stuff from which drama emerges. Anger, laughter, betrayal, redemption, all this and more is shown in this movie. It's worth watching.

Big Mommas: Like Father, Like Son (2011)

Don't mess with Big Momma! 24 February 2011

Okay stuff shirts. It's time to unbutton that top button and relax and watch a funny movie. Although not brilliant, this movie does entertain. It offers good comic acting, a silly but amusing story, and manages not to take itself seriously. Martin Lawrence does a great job in drag. The rest of the cast is funny too, especially the actors who play the bad guys. But what is most important is that the movie entertains, is not pretentious, does not come off as being a hokey, pseudo-intellectual, touchy-feely concoction. Mr. Lawrence decided to make a movie that would put a smile on your face. He creates a movie that combines popular features of the comedy-genre - slapstick, goofy lines, site gags - to produce a funny movie. And what's the purpose of going to movie if not to be entertained? There are some who might dismiss this movie as unsophisticated, ill-conceived, and half-baked. Untrue! This is comedy and it's entertaining.

The Mechanic (2011)

Cheesy acting abounds. 17 February 2011

Being a hit-man has its challenges. Like murdering people for money and then not trying to think about it. After all, hit-man ARE human too and have feelings, just like the rest of us who work at more mundane jobs. The problem with this movie is that the story is so weak that not even the nonstop violence is enough to prop it up. Gratuitous scenes of violence are a telltale sign that a movie is in trouble and this movie is in deep trouble. Besides offering the thinnest of stories, the movie contains what has to be some of the cheesiest acting in recent cinematic history. The movie borders on being campy yet fails to attain that dubious status since it's really not goofy enough to be taken with a grain of salt. In short, the story is stale but without being laughable. The characters are two-dimensional, cartoon-like, and are devoid of anything that sparks even the slightest bit of interest. The violence is pervasive and explicit, but when the targets themselves are vicious, the violence fails to generate any sympathy. A hit-man plotting to assassinate another hit-man just does not make for a dramatic story.

The Eagle (2011)

With conquest comes responsibilities. 11 February 2011

When Hollywood attempts to depict an historical era, the results can be unintentionally laughable if not shamelessly simplistic. This movie manages, though not by much, to avoid these pitfalls, resulting in an engaging though not particularly surprising story. The movie's premise actually seems to borrow much

from another tried and true genre, the cowboy and Indian movie, also known as the western. Indeed, at times it almost seems that this movie IS a western, with the Romans being the cavalry and the Brits or Scots or Celts or whoever the natives are, being, well, Native Americans. Indeed, while watching this movie one cannot help but recall Custer's last stand, in which an entire army unit is destroyed. Debacles of that type just did not happen to the Romans. The movie also raises other questions relating to the clash of cultures and who exactly are the bad guys. The Romans may seem more civilized, but appearances can be deceiving. After all, they DID invade, so it's understandable that the natives would not be happy, just like the Natives in America were not happy either. What's the point of imperialism anyway? Is it worth the effort? This movie gives the audience cause to ask these questions and for this reason alone the movie is worth watching. It's not a great movie but at least it makes some points.

One aspect of the movie was somewhat disconcerting. The cause of all the fuss, the eagle, didn't seem impressive-looking enough to fight over. Frankly, and no disrespect intended, it looked like a cheap piece of shlock that could be found in any curio shop in anywhere in the world.

The Rite (2011)

Strong performance by Anthony Hopkins., 7 February 2011

After watching this movie, one can leave the theater feeling assured knowing that there are clergy specially trained to perform exorcisms. The question is: how is one to know if there is a need for exorcism? This movie tackles that question. A trembling hand, popping veins, rolled up eyes, troubling dreams, they are sure signs that it may be time to call the priest, but if you do call one, he better know what he's doing. A botched up exorcism is worse than no exorcism at all. And, as this movie shows, things can only get worse if the exorcist himself becomes possessed. Anthony Hopkins gives an over-the-top performance as the exorcist. Far from being campy, his character is vulnerable and fallible, but also driven by faith which gives the character credibility and dignity. Thus the movie avoids becoming a caricature of other demonic possession movies and offers a story that is engaging and plausible. After all, we do live in a world where all kinds of behavior go unexplained, so why should a spiritual explanation not be considered?

Tokyo Joe (1949)

Good Humphrey Bogart movie. 29 January 2011

Although this movie is not one of Humphrey Bogart's more noted projects, it is a good movie. At first the plot seems absurd but as the story unfolds it becomes more comprehensible. It is hard to imagine that there was a time when

the United States actually occupied Japan and directly supervised the Japanese people. It was another era, when the United States was in every sense of the term the dominant power. Once again Humphrey Bogart believes that he has been jilted by a woman and once again finds out that there is more to the story, and in this movie, this scenario works well. Alexander Knox is great as the other main male character but it is Sessue Hayakawa who once again delivers a strong performance as a shady, underworld figure in post-war Japan. This movie is worth watching.

127 Hours (2010)

Never travel without letting someone know. 28 January 2011

Given the terrifying nature of Aron Ralston's ordeal, the movie was surprisingly low key. Perhaps this was due to the fact of Mr. Ralston's recklessness which led to his mishaps or maybe the sheer senselessness of what he was doing, which seemed to be pointless, self-indulgent, and never explained in the movie. After all, nobody told him to go hiking in the middle of nowhere. Yet that is what he did, and for that he almost lost his life, which is the crux of the story. How he saves himself is amazing and shocking. To self-amputate a part of one's body is an act of sheer desperation, yet it was a dilemma that he brought upon himself. James Franco's performance is outstanding.

The Way Back (2010/I)

Compelling story. 26 January 2011

Even though the story is far-fetched and indeed challenges the limits of plausibility, it's an engaging, interesting and at times dramatically powerful movie. The movie also teaches a very important lesson: Walking thousands of miles through dense forests, across deserts and over mountains, in nasty weather, can be hard on one's feet. This movie features some of the harrowing close-up shots of beat-up feet maybe in the history of cinema. Between Ed Harris and the young lady who plays the female escapee, there's enough foot damage to keep a team of podiatrists busy for years. Indeed, after watching this movie, one might think twice before deciding to take a walk across a desert - with no water or food - which brings up another point dramatized in this movie: Never take a 4,000-mile walk without bringing matches. At some point you'll have to make a fire, and it's not easy to make a fire in the middle of nowhere without matches. Now, the soviet Gulags were deliberately placed in the middle of Siberia precisely to deter the kind of escape portrayed in this movie. Indeed, the authorities were practically inviting prisoners to try to escape and with good reasons: first, there was no place for the prisoners to flee to and second, the environment was far more punishing than the prison itself, meaning that there was probably more of an incentive for inmates to stay in the prison and try to make the best of a bad deal

than to leave and be at the mercy of the forest, snow, cold and wild life. Nevertheless, the movie presents a compelling story about desperate people trying to escape to freedom, and that alone makes the movie worth watching.

The Green Hornet (2011)

Campy character as hero. 22 January 2011

In this movie a comic actor plays an action hero as buffoon. Is this a premise that can work? It would be like asking whether the character Superman could be played as a clown or whether Batman could be portrayed as befuddled though well-meaning oaf. It depends on the actor and the script and in this movie both work well. Seth Rogen plays the title role with mix of campyness and seriousness that creates an engaging and ultimately credible character. Yes, the Green Hornet has many weaknesses, and others do most of the heavy work when fighting crime. Yet the character earns the audience's respect, which is evidence of Mr. Rogen's effectiveness as an actor. The movie works because the story is simple. A weak, vain man wants to do something with his life and decides to do something in which all his weaknesses will be exposed. Can he overcome his weaknesses? That is the movie's theme.

The Company Men (2010)

Job security is a thing of the past., 22 January 2011

There is little doubt that losing a job is among the most traumatic events that can happen in one's life. Losing a job not only means loss of income and the uncertainty and worry that accompanies such a loss, but also loss of self-esteem and loss of confidence in the future. These themes are effectively dramatized in this movie. The main character, a young, well-paid white collar worker, loses his job and it changes his life, and not necessarily for the better. The movie shows how all of us are subject to economic forces way beyond our ability to control. As the movie shows, nobody is immune to the effects of these economic forces. Huge companies can be downsized, bought up, dismantled and disappear. Sometimes it's easy to believe that these corporate entities will go on forever, but it's an illusion. There is no security; there is no reward for loyalty. And while thousands of workers lose their jobs, corporate executives, that is, those who actually own these companies, pay themselves millions of dollars. Yet, as the movie shows, these huge salaries do not guarantee economic security either, as one's company can be put up for sale. When the movie tries to get moralistic, the story gets a little mushy, but for the most part the story stays on track and avoid that pitfall. Ben Affleck, Tommy Lee Jones and Chris Cooper give strong performances as the company men; the rest of the cast, which includes Craig T. Nelson and Maria Bello, are excellent too. This movie is worth watching.

Season of the Witch (2011)

Not a bad movie. 14 January 2011

This is not a bad movie. Neither is it great, but nevertheless it is watchable. It has a story. It has a plot. The acting is good. Nicholas Cage and Ron Perlman give credible performances. It is true that the story is far-fetched and challenges plausibility, but it deals with the supernatural, so that is only to be expected. Soemn of the special effects are cheesy, but so what? It's the story that counts and here the story is what drives this movie. Once again, there is a frail, young woman who causes so much havoc, yet at first glance she seems so harmless. This theme, of the helpless young girl as both victim and harpy, is continued in this movie, with good results. Far from being hokey, the story contains enough dramatic material to keep the audience's interest. There are those who may lambast this movie, dismiss it as just another Hollywood potboiler, and they may be right. Nevertheless, the movie does present a story and does not purport to be something that it is not, which affords the movie a modicum of integrity.

"Married with Children: All in the Family (#2.22)" (1988)

Another hilarious Al Bundy debacle. 13 January 2011

This episode is hilarious. The laughter is nonstop as Al has to deal with his in-laws. Of course, Al lets everyone know how he feels which makes matters only worse. This episode is AITF at its best. Every character is funny. And what's more, they are lovable too. The two uncles, the triplets, Al, Peggy, Kelly and Bud are one and all wonderful. Once again Al wants what he thinks is his only to find out, again, that he is but a human doormat who is meant to play the fool. What makes it funnier is that Al knows that he's a patsy, yet there is nothing he can do about it. He is the victim of circumstances of his own doing. His being married and having children is reduced to a gag, with Al being the number one object of ridicule and laughter, for Al Bundy is a symbol of the human condition and his plight epitomizes the constant uphill struggle to obtain a measure of happiness in a world where things seemed to be stacked against us.

How Do You Know (2010)

Flat, dull, pretentious. 5 January 2011

There is nothing sadder in moviedom than a comedy that is not funny. This movie is supposedly a farce but its execution is completely flat. Reese Witherspoon is a great actress but not in this movie. Jack Nicholson plays a caricature of his screen persona. Paul Rudd is not funny. This movie may have worked better if Owen Wilson had played Paul Rudd's character. This movie needed a Steve Martin or a Chevy Chase or maybe a Cary Grant. Dan Ackroyd

may have helped. There are so many things wrong with this movie. Maybe it's the insipid script, the uninspiring story, the miscasting, the overall banality of the production. Whatever it was, it all contributed to producing a movie that is flat, dull, pretentious and mediocre. To the movie's credit, the ending is okay but that's not saying much when compared to its utterly innocuous start. The strongest performance is that of Owen Wilson's and even here the performance is uneven as the character waivers between fits of immaturity and attempts to act like a responsible grown up. That it is Mr. Wilson who is called upon to provide some actual drama exemplifies the triteness of the story and the uninspired quality of the performances. The movie is purportedly a comedy but it generates no laughs. No amount of pouting by Ms. Witherspoon could rescue this movie. Although lovely and charming as usual, she cannot overcome a weak script. The scenes with Paul Rudd and Jack Nicholson are devoid of anything that even remotely approaches comedy, or drama for that matter. Interestingly, Jim Bouton has a small role in this movie.

The Fighter (2010)

Two brothers; both champions. 2 January 2011

What a great movie! The movie starts rather unspectacularly but soon builds into a strong, compelling dramatic story about two incredibly strong characters, one of whom is sick, who stick with each other and help each other overcome their personal obstacles. Mark Wahlberg and Melissa Leo are outstanding, but this movie is a showcase for Christian Bale whose performance is remarkable. Mr. Bale portrays a character who by any reasonable standard should be detested yet by the end of movie is worthy of admiration. The movie also provides a candid and powerful portrayal of the dysfunctional family and how the fighter copes with these issues to achieve success. For the fighter is not a wanton punching machine. He actually cares and the movie shows it. One is fascinated by the nature of the family dynamics and how they affect the main characters. Instead of being corny or contrived, the story is presented in a straightforward manner that lays out the issues. The character of Mickey Ward is heroic, that of his brother sublime. Both deserve respect; both became champions, one in the ring; the other in life.

Little Fockers (2010)

What a hilarious movie!, 26 December 2010

This movie is hilarious. The laughter is nonstop as the Robert DeNiro once again proves that he is one of the great actors of American cinema. Mr. DeNiro's portrayal as Jack Byrnes is brilliant and generates lots of laughs as he projects his distorted fears onto his hapless son-in-law who is completely overwhelmed. Everyone in this movie is funny. Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand showcase

their comedy skills, especially Ms. Streisand whose portrayal of a Jewish grandmother as television talk-show personality cannot help but produce laughs, with Ben Stiller as a great straight man. Indeed, Mr. Stiller should be nominated for a Best Straight Man Award. The misunderstandings around "Andi Garcia" are is source of much amusement. This movie is a must watch for anyone who likes to laugh and enjoys lighthearted comedy.

True Grit (2010)

What a wonderful movie., 26 December 2010

Although considered a remake, this movie differs significantly from its predecessor. In the 1969 movie the story revolves around the Rooster Cogburn, in this movie the focus of the story is the 14 year old girl. In the 1969 movie Rooster Cogburn is a larger than life character; in this movie he is portrayed as having many flaws. In the 1969 movie much of the violence is played down, in this movie the violence is explicit. In the 1969 movie Mattie seems older than 14 years old, in this movie Mattie is barely an adolescent. The 1969 movie showcased John Wayne, this movie is more or less has an ensemble cast. The 1969 movie presents a straight forward plot, in this movie the story is more complex and reveals more about the culture in which the story is set. Instead of trying to recreate the John Wayne role, Jeff Bridges presents a different type of Rooster Cogburn. The Bridges' Cogburn is a broken down man, hardly a heroic type, yet still endearing. The character is drunk, violent, and a social outcast, yet still commands respect due to Bridges' skillful performance. A lesser actor would have made Rooster Cogburn seem a caricature or buffoon; with Mr. Bridges that pitfall is avoided. However, accolades are in order for Hailie Steinfeld who plays Mattie, the 14 year old girl. She succeeds in carrying this movie and is the star. Her performance is strong and appealing and provides an excellent role model for children. Although the movie includes a certain amount of graphic violence not suitable for young children, the movie sends a positive message regarding courage, virtue, responsibility and loyalty. The ending of the movie is especially effective. What a wonderful movie.

Summer Storm (1944)

Stagy but entertaining. 14 December 2010

This movie is a stagy Hollywood 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 miscast. Playing someone star struck was not Mr. Sander's forte. Linda Darnell was beautiful and was also a great actress but casting her as a Russian peasant, and a self-centered, illiterate one at that, was a bit of a stretch. The idea of her character actually duping the George Sander's character tests the limits of

plausibility. One is hard pressed to ignore Mr. Horton's jocular American inflection suggesting a character which belonged at Ebbets Field instead of Russia. 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.

Black Swan (2010)

Superb, brilliant, phenomenal. 13 December 2010

Natalie Portman's performance is stunning, amazing, phenomenal, completely deserving of official recognition. 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 too. 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. The director, Darren Aronofsky, manages to put together a brilliant work of art, successfully combining all the elements needed to produce a movie that is superb.

Deutsche Wochenschau Nr. 681/40/1943 (1943)

Slick, well-packaged, blatant, shameless propaganda. 11 December 2010

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 were being defeated on all fronts, the Nazis just went on churning out newsreels showing how well things were going. One can 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.

The Tourist (2010)

Lots of fluff but entertaining. 11 December 2010

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.

The Next Three Days (2010)

Surprisingly good movie., 9 December 2010

This is 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. 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 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 that he is a great 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 commit acts of desperation.

Faster (2010)

A cinematic miracle. 4 December 2010

Get off your high horses, all you critics who panned this movie. This movie is not pulp, is not trash, is not trite, is not shallow. As we wander through the landscape of the story, we encounter many surprises: good acting, a compact, comprehensible story, lots of action, and good cinematography. Billy Bob Thornton and Dwayne Johnson make this movie happen. This movie is proof that even in this age of the potboiler miracles can happen.

The Mayor of Hell (1933)

Compelling and timeless story. 28 November 2010

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 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

This movie showcases one of Bing Crosby's best performances. He plays a washed up actor who is given an opportunity to redeem himself yet is on the brink of failing miserably ... 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. 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 William Holden can barely hold his own. He's great but its Crosby and Kelly who dominate this wonderful and inspirational movie that everyone should watch.

Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)

Intense movie. 27 November 2010

In this movie Maximilian Schell steals the show. He dominates the movie. The movie raises several questions. 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 if yes, of what? This is one of the more powerful movies Hollywood has 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.

Burlesque (2010/I)

Hollywood musical with lots of kick. 25 November 2010

Cher is excellent in this movie. 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 good storyline and has likable characters. This movie is proof that the Hollywood musical is still alive and kicking.

Fair Game (2010/I)

If you are thinking about whistle blowing, watch this movie first.
20 November 2010

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 gives 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.

Unstoppable (2010)

Clear the tracks! 20 November 2010

From start to finish, this is an 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. 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.

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