

## Movie Titles that begin with "T"

2 Days in New York \* 2 Guns \* 20<sup>TH</sup> Century Wome \* 10 Items Or Less \*12 Years a Slave \* 13<sup>th</sup> \* 20 Feet From Stardom \* 21 \* 21 Grams \* 21 Jump Street \* The 24th \* 25th Hour \* 27 Dresses \* 200 Meters \*3 Days to Kill \* 3:10 To Yuma \* Tadpole \* Take Shelter \* Take The Lead \* Take This Waltz \* Taken \* The Taking of Pelham 123 \* Taking Woodstock \* Talk To Her \* Talk To Me \* Tallulah \* The Tao of Steve \* Tàr \* The Taxi Driver \* Taxi To The Dark Side \* Tea With the Dames \* Ted \* Tell No One \* Temple Grandin \* The Tender Bar \*The Terminal \* Terri \* Terribly Happy \* Test Pattern \* Testament of Youth \* Thank You For Smoking \* Thank You For Your Service \* Thanks For Sharing \* That Evening Sun \* Theater Camp \* Their Finest \* Thelma \* Thelma & Louise \* The Theory of Everything \* There Will Be Blood \* They Shall Not Grow Old \* Thin Ice \* Things Behind The Sun \* Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead \* Things We Lost In The Fire \* Things You Can Tell Just By Looking At Her \* Thirteen \* Thirteen Conversations About One Thing \* Thirteen Days \* This Is Where I Leave You \* Thor: Ragnarok \* This Is 40 \* This Is The End \* Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri \* The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada \*Three Identical Strangers \* Thumbsucker \* Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion \* Tick, Tick...Boom! \* Ticket to Paradise \* Tigerland \* Till \* The Tillman Story \* Timbuktu \* A Time For Drunken Horses \* Tim's Vermeer \* Tina(2021&2023) \* Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy \* A Thousand and One \* To All the Boys... \* To the Bone \* The To Do List \* To Leslie \* To Rome With Love \* Top Gun: Maverick \* Together Together \* Tomb Raider(Lara Croft Tomb Raider) \* Tommy's Honour \* The Tomorrow Man \* Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am \* Top Five \* Top Gun: Maverick \* Topsy Turvy \* Touching The Void \* The Tourist \* Tower Heist \* The Town(2010) \* The Town(2022) \* Tracks \* Traffic \* The Tragedy of Macbeth \* Training Day \* Trainwreck \* Traitor \* Transamerica \* The Transporter \* Transporter 2 \* Transsiberian \* The Tree of Life \* The Trial of the Chicago 7 \*The Trip \* The Trip to Greece \* Tristram Shandy \* Troy \* Tropic Thunder \* True Grit \* The Truffle Hunters \* Truman \* Trumbo \* Trust Me \* Truth \* The Truth Vs Alex Jones \* Tsotsi \* Tully \* Tumbleweeds \* Truly, Madly, Deeply \* Turn Me On Dammit \* Turtles All the Way Down \* Turtles Can Fly \* The TV Set \* Twenty-Eight Days \* Twenty-Eight Days Later \* Twenty-Fifth Hour \* Two Days, One Night \* Two Faces of January \* Two Family House \* Two Lovers \* The Two Popes \* Two Weeks Notice

**2 DAYS IN NEW YORK:** (2012/2014-1) We rented this one because Julie Delpy writes, directs and stars. (Delpy wrote and appeared in the *Before Sunrise/Sunset/Midnight* trilogy.) She and Chris Rock play a couple whose lives are disrupted when her Father and sister visit from Paris. Delpy's character is an artist and a showing of her photographs takes place during the visit. Chris Rock plays her husband. He plays it straight, but it's almost impossible not to laugh at him, especially when he has conversations with a cardboard stand-up of Barack Obama. *Rotten Tomatoes* only gives this movie 64% on its Tomatometer, and audiences rated it a mere 43%, but we enjoyed it more than that. Delpy is a charming actor, and we liked her take on how life experiences change perceptions and attitudes. **GRADE B-**

**2 GUNS:** (2013) The charisma of Denzel Washington and Mark Wahlberg saves this crime thriller which would, without them, be an unremarkable shoot-um-up buddy cop flick. If you are turned off by gratuitous violence, you may want to skip this one. Multiple incidents of torture, brutality, and even animal cruelty may cloud your appreciation for the undeniable humor sprinkled throughout the film. Two undercover agents, one from the DEA and the other with Naval Intelligence are played by Washington and Wahlberg. They are both trying to snare a Mexican drug lord (Edward James Olmos) but in the beginning neither is aware of the true identity of each other. What the film has going for it is the chemistry between Washington and Wahlberg and the bickering-buddies-banter that sets up their characters and works to hold your attention throughout. The action isn't believable for a second, but that should be expected from a film based on a comic book series. As with the cowboy westerns from my youth, the good guys never miss and the bad guys always do. Barbara and I can't give this film high marks, but we both appreciated the excellent cast and somewhat gripping story. **GRADE C+**

**20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WOMEN:** (2016) I must start by saying this was a "strange" movie populated with a pleasant group of eccentric, if not bizarre, characters meandering through life looking for meaning. Written and directed by Mike Mills (*Beginners*) this semi-autobiographical story is loosely based on Mill's childhood. Set in Santa Barbara, California, in the late 1970s, the film features Annette Bening, Greta Gerwig, Elle Fanning, Billy Crudup, and 15 year-old Lucas Jade Zumann. It earned 91% on Rotten Tomatoes with 106 reviews counted, but just remember, critics are usually kind and forgiving to off-beat films. Annette Bening is the best known actor in the group, but *20<sup>th</sup> Century Women* was an ensemble project. Bening plays Dorothea, a divorced single mother who I would describe as an uptight free spirit. She is a fascinatingly complex woman. Gerwig, plays Abbie, a punk-loving aspiring photographer with a crazy hairstyle and a manic approach to almost everything. Julie (Fanning), plays a neighbor girl who spends most of her time hanging around Dorothea's large boarding house which is in a constant state of disarray, much like all their lives. *20<sup>th</sup> Century Women* was not an A movie for Barbara nor me, but by its end we had grown to like it and we would recommend it to movie buffs who are tolerant of offbeat films. **GRADE B-**

**10 ITEMS OR LESS:** (2006 on video) We really liked this independent film with Morgan Freeman and Paz Vega. Vega is a star in Spain, and we were quite taken with her in *Spanglish*. Freeman plays himself—an actor prepping for an upcoming film. Doing research in a small grocery at the southern end of Los Angeles, he meets Scarlett, a grocery clerk on the "10 Items or Less" line. They spend the day together as Freeman helps Scarlett prepare for a secretarial job interview. A very charming film. It is a joy to watch these two actors interact—they are both terrific. **THUMBS UP**

**12 YEARS A SLAVE:** This film is based on a book with the same title written by Solomon Northrup, a free black man who lived in New York with his wife and children prior to 1841. He was first tricked, then drugged and kidnapped. He awoke in chains. Given a different name, he was taken to the deep-south to be sold into slavery. The horrors of slavery do not make for comfortable viewing and many will avoid it even though the praise of critics has been lavish. It is almost certain to be an Oscar contender. Northrup was one of the few who escaped the nightmare of bondage and returned to freedom. Had he not, we would never have heard his story. Chiwetel Ejiofor is brilliant in his unforgettable portrayal of Northrup. No less brilliant is Michael Fassbender in his portrayal of an unrelentingly brutal slave owner. In smaller, but very important roles are Brad Pitt, Paul Giamatti, Sarah Paulson, Paul Dano, Alfre Woodard, Benedict Cumberbatch and many other less well known names. American films have come a long way since "Uncle Remus" and the shameful

stereotypes of blacks in early films. Still, it is interesting that Hollywood turned to a British director (Steve McQueen) and a British male lead to bring us a shameful but realistic slice of American History. Barbara and I were both expecting to be more emotionally enveloped by **12 Years A Slave**, but it was a courageous project and powerful enough to earn a high grade. **GRADE A-**

**13<sup>th</sup>: (2016)** This is a 2016 thought-provoking documentary that rated a 97% on Rotten Tomatoes and is available for streaming on Netflix. The film is named for the 13th Amendment in the U.S. Constitution, which formally abolished slavery **except** as a punishment for criminality. Here is the exact wording of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment which was passed in 1865: "*Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.*" Acclaimed Director Ava DuVernay's takes a well-informed and thoroughly researched look at the American system of incarceration. Her analysis is even more timely today than it was four years ago. The 100-minute movie systematically goes through the decades following the passage of the 13th amendment showing how the wording of the amendment provided a way for the South to continue a supply of free labor. The applications have grown more subtle but continue to evolve in ways that allow for plausible deniability, soothing white conscience, but maintaining economic benefit to white stakeholders. It's not an easy documentary to watch because it holds the entire nation accountable. Not everyone will agree, but that's what makes it fascinating viewing. One of the more powerful statistics that will stay with me is that 97% of people incarcerated have never had a trial. Both innocent and guilty people will accept a plea bargain for a lesser sentence out of fear of getting the maximum one. Blacks, especially, won't fight for their freedom by going to what they fear is a biased court, even if they're innocent. Imagine being innocent, but charged with a felony and told you can plead guilty and receive a sentence of three years or going to trial and facing a possible sentence of thirty years. They agree to the plea bargain even if it means losing voting rights for their lifetime after the sentence is served. This powerful film provides viewers with a vital history lesson on racial injustices and black history. Barbara and I agree it is an important film worth your time. **GRADE A**

**20 FEET FROM STARDOM:** (2013) "Some people who will do anything to become famous, and some people will just sing." This Oscar Award-winning movie is about those people who just sing—the backup singers. The quote is from Lisa Fischer whose voice is remarkable, but who never quite had it in her to become a star. She, and many others portrayed here, believe, along with Fischer, that harmonizing may be the higher calling. Some have tried to become stars, but, as Sting says, becoming a star has little to do with talent and more to do with luck and timing. Darlene Love, who was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2011, is one former backup singer who made it, and she is featured. Cheryl Crowe and Pattie Austin appear as former backup singers who went on to solo careers. Along with such notables as Bruce Springsteen, Stevie Wonder and Mick Jagger, they talk about the contribution and importance of backup singers. They are the unsung heroes of popular music and this, their story, is illuminating. As one critic said, "*Morgan Neville's soul-stirring celebration of backing vocalists is a bona fide crowd-pleaser with substance to match.*" It certainly pleased us. We may never listen to some of those famous R&B and Rock songs the same way after seeing this movie. For any singer or for anyone who loves music, this is a must-see. **GRADE A**

**21:** 21 refers to a card game commonly known as Blackjack. The film, 21, hopes to exploit the commonly held dream of beating Vegas at its own game. It is loosely based on a best selling non-fiction book (*Bringing Down the House*) advertised as "the inside story of six MIT students who took Vegas for millions." It is a fascinating story, but sadly a mediocre movie. Barbara and I were hoping for a film that would not seem like being dealt a "stiff" that turns into a "bust." Sorry, I just couldn't resist that. Kevin Spacey, Jim Sturgess, Kate Bosworth, and Laurence Fishburne are the biggest names in the ensemble cast, but they can't save a screenplay that asks us to believe that a brilliant group of MIT students led by their brilliant professor do things that are so stupid that they are insulting. The film splits its time between trying to appeal to serious blackjack players and pandering to those who prefer a love story. In our opinion it fails in both. **GRADE C-**

**21 GRAMS:** This is a gritty tragic story told in an episodic non-linear style. In spite of the fact that the scenes jump back and forth in time, it is easy to follow the story of Paul Rivers (Sean Penn), a mathematics teacher who needs a heart transplant, Christina Peck (Naomi Watts) whose husband and two daughters were killed in a hit-and-run accident, and Jack Jordan (Benicio Del Toro) the hit-and-run driver. The three actors are flawless in their portrayals, but it is Del Toro's depiction of a man tormented by guilt that I will remember the longest. The film is shot in a grainy realistic style that fits the action perfectly. The scenes may seem haphazard in their arrangement, but director Alejandro Iñárritu must have given great thought to the order in which he revealed the people and their story. The problem I had with the film was that the structure of **21 Grams** intrigued me so much that I couldn't ignore it and concentrate on the story. That tended to lessen the film's emotional impact. Gary felt that same way. He wondered if the story would have been as compelling had it been told in a linear structure. He thought that a traditional structure might have made the story seem more melodramatic. Still, the acting is uniformly excellent and the people will be hard to forget. It definitely won't leave you with a warm feeling, but it is worth seeing. **GRADE B+**

**21 JUMP STREET:** In the late eighties, the TV show, *21 Jump Street* ran for four years. Now it is remembered primarily as the vehicle that launched the career of Johnny Depp. We never watched the TV show and really wish we hadn't taken the time to watch the new version. I can appreciate a good dick joke once in a while, but one bad dick joke after another does not a comedy make. Not for us, anyway. The idea of young-looking cops going undercover in high school to break up a drug ring sounded promising, and *EW's* grade of A- lured us into taking a chance. Even Roger Ebert liked the film and gave it three out of four stars. However, as good as Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum are at this nonsense, we couldn't get past the sophomoric script, studded as it is with fist fights, F-bombs, drug use, and hokey sentiment. Even the cameo by Johnny Depp couldn't save this one for us, although it probably raised our grade a bit. How can you give a movie with Depp, no matter how brief his appearance, an F? One on-line critic ended his review with the comment that he was "too old for this s—t." Our sentiment, exactly! **GRADE D**

**THE 24<sup>TH</sup>** (2020 on Cox demand): The movie is based on true events that transpired in Houston, Texas during the summer of 1917, when the all-Black 24th Infantry, part of the famed Buffalo Soldiers, mutinied on August 23. The riot, which lasted two hours, led to the death of 11 civilians, 5 policemen and 4 soldiers and resulted in the largest murder trial in history. Nineteen of the soldiers were hanged, and forty-one were sentenced to life at hard labor. That summer had already brought mass racial attacks against black people in Illinois, East St. Louis, and Chester, Pennsylvania, something the unit was aware of when they were sent to Houston in July. The

reports of marauding, homicidal white mobs no doubt etched themselves into the corners of the soldiers' brains. The movie lingers a bit too long after the mutiny, but they have a point to make. One of the soldiers, William Boston, when asked why he joined the Army, said, "For life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." That's all that black people want today. One of the white racists, who beat a soldier within an inch of his life, said, "We're going to take back our country." Unfortunately, there are some racists who feel that way today. Thomas Haden Church (*Wings, Sideways*) is the sympathetic leader of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and Trai Byers is good as William Boston, a soldier that the men admired for his education and his leadership qualities. The *New York Times* critic said, "*This stultifyingly earnest movie makes its points with such a heavy hand that its horrors struggle to resonate.*" I know what she means, but this is a piece of history of which everyone should be aware. There are no heroes here, but the movie does illustrate the struggle of black people to be seen as equal citizens. I say B-, but Gary thinks it deserves a B. **GRADE B/B-**

**25<sup>th</sup> HOUR:** (2002 release seen on video/DVD) Edward Norton is Monte Brogin, a drug dealer who is going to jail for seven years. In this film, we watch him spend his last 24 hours of freedom. Spike Lee directed this film and it shows what a talented filmmaker he is. Rosario Dawson is Monte's girlfriend who may or may not have been the one to tell the police where he kept his drug supply. Philip Seymour Hoffman and Barry Pepper are his best friends and Brian Cox is his father. Even though Monte profited from the misery of others, we can't help but feel tremendous sympathy for him. That shows what a good actor Norton is. **THUMBS UP**

**27 DRESSES:** There are some universal untruths known to everyone: "The check is in the mail" for example. Here's one that every bride says to every bridesmaid: "You can shorten the dress and wear it again." Has anyone ever done that? Jane (Katherine Hiegl) has heard that 27 times, and she's never worn one of the dresses twice, even though she has kept every one of them. This romantic comedy follows the generic formula: girl meets boy, at first they don't get along, but eventually they get together. Nothing new here, but Hiegl and James Marsden are charming actors and it's fun to watch them reach the inevitable conclusion. Jane loves weddings and has worked as an unofficial planner for her many friends, but when she has to help her sister plan a wedding to the man she, herself, is in love with, she falls out of love with other people's weddings. Marsden is Kevin, a journalist who yearns to escape the wedding desk and write feature stories. He hopes his story about Jane, the perennial bridesmaid, will further his career. Marsden has had two nice parts in films this year. He was perfect as Prince Edward in *Enchanted*, and he also played Corny Collins in *Hairspray*. Hiegl is a lovely woman who is both a good actress and a skilled comedienne, and that's a terrific combination. She was especially appealing in the recent *Knocked Up*, and though the critics are lukewarm about this film, I think it will be popular at the box office. Gary and I thought it was a pleasant afternoon's entertainment and agree on a grade of B. **GRADE B**

**200 METERS:** 2022 (Available for streaming on Prime Video for \$2.99 rental) *200 Meters* is a drama that suggests a promising future for first-time feature filmmaker Ameen Nayfeh who both wrote and directed the film. The story is about Mustafa and his wife Salwa who are from two Palestinian West Bank villages only 200 meters apart but split by Israel's separation wall. Unwilling to succumb to what he believes are unjust laws Mustafa, who is Palestinian lives on the Palestinian-controlled side of the wall. Salwa, who is Israeli, lives with their children on the Israeli side. Mustafa, a Palestinian construction worker, uses his work permit to visit daily. Every night, Mustafa flashes a light from his balcony to wish his children on the other side a goodnight, and they signal him back. One day he gets the call every parent dreads: his son has been in an accident and is in the hospital. He will do anything to reach his son, and after being denied access through the checkpoint on a technicality, Mustafa embarks on a journey to cross the border illegally. Palestinian director Ameen Nayfeh's debut drama shows us the life-threatening struggles of daily life under occupation in an urgent story of resistance, dignity, family, and hope. Ali Suliman as Mustafa is at the heart of this movie, which captures the grinding indignities of day to day Palestinian life. The movie is partly in English and but mostly in foreign languages. It is fully subtitled in the foreign language scenes but not in the scenes in English. At the age of 91, I have to confess my hearing is not what it once was. I had considerable difficulty hearing the scenes in English. Barb still hears quite well so her grade is a little higher than mine. **GRADE B/C+**

**3 DAYS TO KILL:** (2014) Kevin Costner stole my heart in Bull Durham, the 1988 movie that became my favorite sport/romance movie of all time! It's good to see him back on the big screen. I only wish the script were better in 3 Days To Kill. It's to Luc Besson's credit that he added some character development to a movie filled with explosions, shooting, car chases, etc., etc., but the story line for Costner, that of a dying CIA agent—he's given three months to live—who tries to re-connect with his estranged wife and daughter, is almost laughable in its desire to hit every soap opera button. Teaching his teenaged daughter to ride a bike? Teaching her to dance? Taking her on an amusement ride? Really? And when the CIA persuades him to do one last killing job in exchange for an experimental drug that may extend his life, my suspension of disbelief went out the window. But, it was good to see Costner again in a role he can play believably in spite of the plot's artificiality. And Connie Nielsen as his wife, and Hallie Steinfeld as his daughter were lovely. When Costner returns to his apartment in Paris, he finds a family of squatters living there. I think they were in the story merely to provide a child-birth scene. Again, REALLY? Gary says that the plot is worth a D, but he'd give the movie a C. I might add a plus to that grade, but only because I'm still smitten with Kevin Costner. **GRADE C+/C** (I'm hoping for better with Draft Day due out soon.)

**3:10 TO YUMA:** Gary and I have fond memories of all those westerns we saw as kids, so we are delighted that Hollywood has recently resurrected the genre. This film is a remake of a 1957 film of the same name starring Glen Ford and Van Heflin. This new version stars Russell Crowe and Christian Bale. It tells the story of a charming but brutal killer named Ben Wade (Ford/Crowe) and the rancher (Heflin/Bale) who volunteers to deliver him to the 3:10 train to Yuma where a territorial prison awaits. Peter Fonda, almost unrecognizable in a white beard, is a Pinkerton train guard who has been chasing Wade for years. The NY Times critic thought that Crowe, Bale, and Fonda were the main reasons to see the film, and he called it a "serviceable addition to the current western revival." I think "serviceable addition" is a good way to describe *3:10 to Yuma*. We didn't love it, but we did like it quite a bit. We thought Crowe's performance was a standout. Bale, is, as usual, excellent, but Crowe had the best lines and delivered them beautifully. Gretchen Moll plays Bale's wife and Logan Lerman is very good as Bale's 16-year-old son—a boy who wants to support his father, but who can't help but be fascinated by the legendary gunman. We think the film deserves a B+, but then, we are partial to westerns. **GRADE B+**

**TADPOLE:** We thought this movie was a total delight! Oscar (Aaron Stanford) has the mind of a 40-year-old in the body of a 15-year-old. He speaks fluent French and quotes from Voltaire. He's not interested in the girls at his prep school because they don't have any "experience." Besides, he has a monster crush on Eve (Sigourney Weaver), his stepmother. Back home at the family's apartment on

the Upper West Side for Thanksgiving, he resolves to confess his love. Before he can do that, however, he happens to sleep with Eve's best friend, Diane (Bebe Neuwirth), and this leads to some very funny scenes as Oscar tries to keep Diane from mentioning the incident. John Ritter is Oscar's well meaning but out-of-the-loop father. Neuwirth has some funny scenes and she nails every one. Stanford, in his first movie role shows tremendous promise, and Weaver and Ritter are also excellent at bringing this witty script to life. Roger Ebert didn't like this one because he couldn't stop thinking that the plot would have been unthinkable if the genders had been reversed. He's right, but I think he needs to lighten up. We thought it was a very amusing film and agree with the critic who called it "a cheeky comedy knockout." Shot on digital camera, it made me want to revisit New York. Even with garbage bags on the street, the City looks terrific! **GRADE A-**

**TAKE SHELTER:** Michael Shannon is outstanding in this strange independent film that has garnered much praise from professional critics. Shannon, so good in HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*, is Curtis, a Midwestern blue collar worker who becomes increasingly certain that a storm of epic proportions is on the way. His fear impels him to build a shelter, taking out a loan at the bank and ultimately losing his job because of it. Is he delusional or prescient? You can argue either way, although with a mother diagnosed in her thirties with paranoid schizophrenia, my money is on delusional. Gary thought it was an excellent picture of a man losing his grip on reality, but the ending cast some doubt on the mental illness explanation. Director Jeff Nichols builds the story slowly as Curtis gradually becomes overwhelmed with dread. There are those who might feel that the pace of the storytelling, and the many shots of Shannon's face as he peers into the sky, make for a painfully slow movie. However, I was so curious to see where the story was going that the measured pace didn't bother me. Another actor from *Boardwalk Empire*, Shea Whigham, plays Curtis's best friend and Jessica Chastain, in her seventh movie this year, is excellent as Curtis's concerned wife. Ebert, who gave the movie four out of four stars, thinks Shannon should get an Oscar nomination for his performance. I agree. His performance is certainly worth an A, but we can't grade the movie higher than B for Gary and B+ for me. **GRADE B+/B**

**TAKE THE LEAD:** Pierre Dulaine is the dance instructor who is responsible for the successful introduction of ballroom dancing to the New York school system. This movie purports to tell how the whole thing got started. When Dulaine (Antonio Banderas) sees a young man attacking a car with a golf club, he decides to volunteer at the local high school. The principal (Alfre Woodard) gives him the task of supervising the inner-city school's worst students—those who spend each afternoon in detention. Naturally, they resist the idea of ballroom dancing. But, predictably, he wins them over. There was a wonderful documentary about this called *Mad Hot Ballroom*, which showed 5th grade students preparing for the city-wide ballroom dancing competition. It is the better film. Banderas is quite charming as a man who believes that ballroom dancing teaches much more than dance steps: It teaches good manners, respect and trust. However, *Take The Lead* is too full of cliches to earn a high grade from us. For example, the group of students he works with cover every possible ethnic group. Not very realistic. Plus, the student dancers look too much like professionals at the final competition. We did like seeing Rob Brown again. At 16, Brown appeared in his first film, *Finding Forester*, and when we saw him, we predicted that he would have a career in films. He was also in 2005's *Coach Carter*. He is graduating from college this year, so perhaps we will be seeing a lot more of him. *Take The Lead* is reasonably entertaining, but the documentary is terrific. **GRADE C+**

**TAKE THIS WALTZ:** Michelle Williams can play a character who is immature, indecisive and occasionally infuriating, but somehow make her loveable. That's just how good Williams is. In this newest film by writer/director Sara Polley (*Away From Her*), Williams is Margot, a woman who has difficulty making connections. She has been married for five years to Lou (Seth Rogan) who writes cookbooks. Their relationship, though quite immature, seems happy. Happy, that is, until she meets Daniel (Luke Kirby), a handsome sexy neighbor with whom she falls in love, or perhaps it's in lust. Will Margot make a new connection or will she cling to her old familiar one? And, if she does make a change, will she be happy? Those questions are answered in *Take This Waltz*, although you may not be happy with the answers. Rogan and Kirby are both very good and so is Sarah Silverman who plays Margot's alcoholic sister-in-law. Polly is skilled at making feelings visual, and she has actors that can do it beautifully. All are capable of disclosing much with little or no dialogue. One scene between Margot and Daniel is extraordinary. It is stunningly sensual although the two never physically touch. The movie is visually creative, but the story is told in a non-traditional way and that may not please some viewers. The song, *Take This Waltz* by Leonard Cohen figures prominently toward the end of the movie. We both thought *Take This Waltz* deserves a B for compelling visuals and exceptional acting. **GRADE B**

**TAKEN:** "*Taken* is movie junk food: fun while it lasts but not much more. Nothing wrong with that kind of snack now and then. You just wouldn't want a steady diet of it." That's what our local reviewer wrote about this film, and he got it right. This is a junk-food movie. It goes from plausible to implausible to ridiculously implausible, but it is fun while it lasts. Liam Neeson is Bryan Mills, a retired government operative—he calls himself a "preventer"—who has moved to Los Angeles to be near his daughter, Kim, who lives with Bryan's ex-wife and her new wealthy husband. Suspicious of everyone and everything by nature, he is worried when Kim goes to Paris with a girlfriend. Almost immediately, Kim is kidnapped by some Albanians and Bryan goes into action. The film does one good thing: it brings the deplorable international trafficking of women to our attention. Thousands of women and children are trafficked by businessmen into dens around the world. Although the modern slavers from Serbia, Albania, Bosnia, Turkey, Russia and Eastern Europe model themselves on the slavers of the Middle Ages, they now dress in expensive Italian suits, carry mobile phones and drive flashy automobiles. What's more, at least according to this film, they are protected by government bureaucrats who accept money in exchange for protection. Neeson's Bryan Mills is a clone of Jack Bauer (TV's 24); he can kill people with a single blow, but is impervious to bullets directed at him. I thought the car chases scene was so long that it became boring, but I liked Neeson's intensity and thought he was credible as a super-enforcer. Gary and I decided on a grade of B-. **GRADE B-**

**THE TAKING OF PELHAM 1 2 3:** Barbara and I both thought this remake of a 1974 crime drama got off to a good start, but lost its appeal in the last half hour. Denzel Washington plays a subway dispatcher in a tense battle with a criminal mastermind/madman played by John Travolta. If a ten million dollar demand is not met in exactly one hour, hostages will be killed at the rate of one per minute. There is considerable violence, but no more than is needed to advance the plot. Had the suspense and believability established in the opening been maintained throughout, this could have been a topnotch thriller. But when gratuitous car crashes and behavior that stretches credulity were used to find an ending, we had to lower our grade. **GRADE C**

**TAKING WOODSTOCK:** This film will be most appealing to those who have positive memories or feelings about what is often touted as the greatest music festival of all time, the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival. Ang Lee, who received an Academy Award for directing *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) took a different approach on this 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famous festival that drew a half million people to a farmer's field in upstate New York. The film ignores the entertainers and focuses on the impact of Woodstock on the local residents and especially on a young man trying to save a shoddy motel run by his immigrant parents. Think of it as a different window looking at a significant cultural event. All the actors were good but to Barbara and me, the appearance of Liev Schreiber playing a transvestite ex-Marine who volunteers as chief of security added just the texture it needed. Be warned, this is a film about Woodstock without any musical performances. It is not a great film, but if you go with the right attitude, we think you will enjoy this amusing tale which is actually based on a true story. For those of you who were young adults in the late 1960's, it may be a fun, mellow trip. **GRADE B**

**TALK TO HER:** This is a terrific film, but I have no idea how to write about it. To say that it is about two comatose women and the men who love them, makes it sound dreadful. But it's not. It has comedy, tragedy and suspense combined in a story that is never predictable and always surprising. It won a Golden Globe award for Best Foreign Language film and received a standing ovation from an appreciative Hollywood crowd. Benigno is a naïve young male nurse who falls in love with a ballet student he watches from his apartment across the street from the ballet school. When Alicia is injured in an automobile accident and falls into a coma, Benigno becomes her caretaker. Marco is a travel writer who falls in love with Lydia, a bullfighter. When she is gored in the bullring and falls into a coma, he and Benigno become friends. That's really all I can tell you because to say more would spoil the movie for you. Geraldine Chaplin appears as the Ballet Mistress. Javier Camara is Benigno and Dario Grandinetti is Marco and both men are excellent. The director, Pedro Almodóvar is best known in the US for *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), and *All About My Mother* (1999). He is a consummate filmmaker and his films are always innovative. He received a surprising nomination for Best Director at this year's Academy Awards. I give this movie an A-; Gary says B+, because he had a bit of trouble staying awake during the first half. He did, however, think the second half was a "Wow!" I'll end this review by quoting the New York Times reviewer who said, "When it's over, the realization of how much the movie means to you really sinks in; you can't get it out of your heart." **GRADE A-/B+**

**TALK TO ME:** "Actor Don Cheadle elevates every movie he's in." That's our local critic talking and he couldn't be more right. Cheadle's A+ performance raises this movie from a B to an A-. Cheadle totally inhabits his role here as real-life Washington, D.C. radio disc jockey Petey Greene. Cheadle is a truly remarkable actor. No matter what the role, he is able to completely immerse himself in the character he is playing. But Cheadle must share credit for elevating this film with Chiwetel Ejiofor (*Dirty, Pretty Things*), who appears as Dewey Hughes, the young radio station executive who recognized in Greene the "voice of the people." When Hughes puts Green on the air in 1965—the height of the Civil Rights era—Greene's flamboyant manner and his unprecedented "tell it like it is" style made him an instant hit with DC's black community. The story of the friendship that grew between the two very different men is enhanced by the chemistry between the two actors. The best scenes in the film occur after Martin Luther King's assassination when DC explodes in violence. It is sad that Greene was unable to handle his life beyond the radio station. He died in 1984 at the age of 53. Hughes went on to become a disc jockey and radio station owner and is currently a record producer living in Los Angeles. Taraji P. Henson (*Hustle & Flow*) adds energy and humor as Vernell Watson, Petey's longtime girlfriend. And speaking of actors who elevate movies, Martin Sheen appears here as the owner of Petey's DC radio station. **GRADE A-**

**TALLULAH:** (2016) We streamed this one from Netflix and Gary and I liked this movie about accidental motherhood starring Ellen Page and Allison Janey. Tallulah (Page) and her boyfriend, Nico, have been living in her van, but he leaves her to go back to New York to visit his mother. Eventually, Tallulah decides to follow him to Manhattan. She is scrounging food off room service trays in a hotel when a tipsy mother mistakes her for a housekeeping baby sitter and hires her to take care of a woefully neglected toddler. When the mother stumbles into the room very much later and passes out, Tallulah decides to rescue the little girl. She seeks out Nico's mother (Janey) for help, letting her think that the baby is hers and Nico's. If it weren't so well written it would be too unbelievable, but instead it's funny and touching and quite charming. The scenes between the wonderful Page and Janey are especially good. I should also mention that the baby's mother, played by Tammy Blanchard, has, by the end of the movie, turned the caricature of a neglectful mother into a believable and sympathetic character. Richard Roeper, one of the many critics who liked this indie gem, titled his review "*Tallulah: The funny, moving story of a baby snatcher.*" What more can I say. **GRADE B+**

**THE TAO OF STEVE:** Dex (Donal Logue) is a fat, sloppy, 32-year-old man who works in a preschool but he manages to have quite a bit of sex. That's because he follows a philosophy he calls the Tao of Steve—Steve being the quintessential cool guy. When he advises a friend on how to score, he quotes one of the tenants of that philosophy: Men and women both want to have sex, but women want to have sex 15 minutes after us, so if you hold out for 20, she'll be chasing you for five. In other words, eliminate your desire (because women can smell an agenda) and withdraw. This works for Dex until he meets Syd (Greer Goodmann) and truly falls for her. She is visiting Santa Fe to design a set for the local Operas production of Don Giovanni and when she tells Dex that Don Giovanni slept with 1,000 women because he was afraid he wouldn't be loved by one, it resonates with him. It's the story of his life. This lighthearted love story was a Sundance favorite and Logue won a best actor award. As a film festival movie Gary thinks it is worth a B, but while I thought it was pleasant, I can't go higher than C+. Perhaps the fact that I had a sore throat and didn't feel well affected my reaction. **GRADE: C+/B**

**TÁR:** 2022 (Available in theaters) Scoring an impressive 94% from critics and 78% Audience Score on Rotten Tomatoes, *Tár* is a psychological study of a tyrant's downfall. Cate Blanchett stars as Lydia Tár, an accomplished composer and the ruthless, passionate superstar conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. The story is about power, guilt, and the cost of greatness. Though you might not like the character she plays, it's hard not to be impressed with Blanchett's powerful performance. She is in nearly every scene of this 2h 38m film and it is hard to imagine any other actress who could bring the believability she brought to the role. Several critics saw *Tár* as one of the best films of 2022. Barbara and I went to the theater hoping to feel the same. Unfortunately we did not. We enjoyed spending time with the talented Cate Blanchett, but found the story slow moving and at times soporific. Our evaluation also reflects how we think our readers would respond to this really long film. **GRADE C+/B-**

**TAXI DRIVER:** (1976) *Taxi Driver* is a 1976 psychological thriller directed by Martin Scorsese and starring Robert De Niro, Jodie Foster, Cybill Shepherd, Harvey Keitel, Peter Boyle, and Albert Brooks. Think of it as a must-see classic film for movie lovers and film students. Roger Ebert, a well-known film critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* from 1967 until his death in 2013 praised it as one of the greatest films he had ever seen. It was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actor (De Niro), Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Foster) and it has been selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry. Set in a decaying New York City following the Vietnam War, the film tells the story of Travis Bickle (De Niro), a lonely and mentally unstable man who decides to do something about the "filth" in his city. Foster plays a 12-year-old child prostitute. She was 13 when the film was shot, and she went on to a long and successful movie career. If you are old enough, you may remember that *Taxi Driver* was infamously linked to the 1981 assassination attempt on the life of President Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley, an act for which he was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Hinckley stated that his actions were an attempt to impress Foster, on whom Hinckley was fixated. Scorsese was so depressed by the link with his film that he temporarily thought about quitting film-making. Both Barbara and I are pleased he didn't for he has established himself as one of the biggest names in filmmaking history. We are also glad we took the time while we are waiting out the Covid-19 restrictions to again see this film classic. The movie is now 44 years old and difficult to grade, so you may think my grade is a cop-out. You are probably right. **GRADE: A CLASSIC**

**TAXI TO THE DARK SIDE:** It was with great trepidation that Barbara and I elected to see this film. We knew it won the Oscar for Best Documentary at this year's Academy Awards. But we also knew it dealt with the subject of torture, Abu Grabe, Guantanamo Bay, the government's suspension of habeas corpus protection, and a few other topics we knew would be disturbing. The title is dripping with meaning. "To the dark side" refers to a post 9/11 quote by Dick Cheney, "We have to work the dark side." And "Taxi" refers to an innocent taxi driver (Dilawar) in Afghanistan who was beaten so badly that he died after five days of "interrogation." It was later proven that the informant who accused Dilawar was actually the terrorist responsible for the crime in question. But the brutal treatment of Dilawar is merely used as a segue to a detailed documentation of our government's official and unofficial policies condoning policies forbidden by U.S. constitutional and military law as well as international agreements. They, of course, justify these policies as necessary in a post 9/11 world. To quote Roger Ebert, "If you torture a man long enough, he will tell you anything to make you stop. If you act on that 'information,' you are likely on a fool's errand." Sadly, Colon Powell was on such an errand when his testimony to the United Nations helped lead us into the Iraq War. The testimony was based on untrue information obtained through torture at Guantanamo Bay. I will be surprised to hear that any of our readers have viewed this award-winning documentary. If you do, please respond. But in an effort to present another side let me quote from Yahoo Movies User Review: Grade F "This movie was made by people who really hate America, but love the terrorists." Obviously we don't agree. **GRADE B+**

**TEA WITH THE DAMES: (2018)** Imagine being privileged to eavesdrop on four legends of British stage and screen as they reminisce, and share their candid, delightfully irreverent thoughts on everything from art to aging to love to a life lived in the spotlight. Dame Maggie Smith, Dame Judi Dench, Dame Eileen Atkins, and Dame Joan Plowright are among the most celebrated actresses of our time. The film is 94 minutes of listening to four acting greats who have been friends for more than half a century reminisce about their lives and careers all intercut with scintillating archive material. The film was shot at the house that Dame Joan Plowright and Sir Laurence Olivier bought in Sussex when he was artistic director of the Chichester Festival Theatre. Plowright was married to Olivier for over twenty-eight years. She is now blind and has retired from theatre. Barbara and I found this to be a charming documentary as you might expect from two thespians and movie lovers who have spent most of our lives acting in or directing plays or going to movies when we found time. Other critics seem to agree. They gave unanimous approval with 100% on *Rotten Tomatoes* from the 57 reviews counted. **GRADE A-/B+** (The original title in the UK was *There Is Nothing Like a Dame.*)

**TED:** It's not easy to grow up when your best friend is a talking teddy bear. When John (Mark Wahlberg) was an eight-year-old, he wished his new toy bear could really talk to him. In a bit of movie magic, the wish became a reality. John named his bear Ted, and swore they would be best friends forever. Now John is 35, has a gorgeous girlfriend, Lori (Mila Kunis), a dead-end job, and still has a talking bear for his best friend. His favorite pastime is watching old movies and TV shows with Ted and a shared bong. When it gets to be too much for Lori, she insists that Ted move out. Ted does get a job and moves into his own apartment, but that only intensifies the trouble between John and Lori. All this sounds ridiculous, but in the hands of Seth McFarlane (who may be a genius) it works. McFarlane, the creator of TV's *The Family Guy*, had a hard time talking Wahlberg into taking the part, but he convinced him and all the other actors to play it for real. McFarlane was right: That's the only way it could work. What fun to see tough-guy Wahlberg having the only fight in the movie with a teddy bear, and the fight looks real, believe it or not. The best parts of the movie are the funny throw-away lines. McFarlane, who directed and wrote the screenplay, includes some very amusing pop culture put-downs. (My favorite involved Ikea.) Giovanni Ribisi and his chubby son are the villains of the piece and they handle the job well. We enjoyed the cameo appearances by Ryan Reynolds, Tom Skerritt, Nora Jones, and Sam J. Jones, the original Flash Gordon from the old TV series. This could be a terrific movie for kids if it were not for the well-deserved R rating, but that probably makes it even more entertaining for adults. We both thought Ted was very entertaining, and are somewhere between B and B+ when it comes to a grade. **GRADE B/B+**

**TELL NO ONE (NE LE DIS A PERSONNE):** (2006 seen on video) A doctor still grieves the murder of his beloved wife eight years earlier. When two bodies are found near the scene of the crime, the police reopen the case and Alex becomes a suspect again. The mystery deepens when Alex receives an anonymous e-mail with a link to a video clip, which seems to suggest Margot is somehow still alive, and a message to "Tell No One." Kristen Scott Thomas plays the doctor's sister. The French actor, Francois Cluzet, who plays the doctor is excellent. The mystery of what happened is a bit convoluted and at times puzzling, but, as Roger Ebert said in his review, "Even when it's baffling, it's never boring." **THUMBS UP**

**TEMPLE GRANDIN:** (HBO Movie) Claire Danes is brilliant as Temple Grandin, an autistic woman who has become one of top scientists in humane livestock handling. She is currently a professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University. She also speaks around the world on both autism and cattle handling. Yet, she didn't talk until she was almost four years old. When she was diagnosed with autism in 1950, her parents were told she should be institutionalized. Her mother refused to do it and worked tirelessly with her difficult daughter. Grandin tells her own story in her book *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*, a book which stunned the world because, until its publication, most professionals and parents assumed that an autism diagnosis was virtually a death sentence to achievement or

productivity in life. We urge our readers to seek out this remarkable HBO Biopic, not only to learn about an amazing woman, but to see an outstanding performance by Danes. Julia Ormond is Grandin's mother and Catherine O'Hara plays her aunt. David Strathairn appears as a science teacher who understood Grandin's unique abilities and encouraged her to excel. **GRADE A+**

**THE TENDER BAR:** 2021 (Netflix) This George Clooney-directed movie is based on 2006 memoir by journalist JR Moehringer, and the writer collaborated on the film. It is a coming-of-age tale about a young boy with an absent father. When JR's father doesn't pay child support, he and his mother are forced to move into the family home of his grandfather. Uncle Charlie (Ben Affleck) takes the place of the father figure in JR's life. Early on, Charlie tells Jr that he's watched him playing sports and he isn't very good. He suggests to JR that he find something else to concentrate on, and the boy tells his Uncle that he likes to read. Charlie is a great reader and owns a bar named "Dickens," so there is an instant connection. Jr's mother has a different path for the boy: She wants him to go to Yale and become a lawyer, but JR is destined to be a writer. He does graduate from Yale, however. Affleck is excellent and proves what a good actor he is. He's surrounded by a good cast—Christopher Lloyd is JR's grandfather. You will probably notice that I don't put periods after JR's name, but you'll have to watch the film to find out why. Anthony Lane, of the New Yorker magazine, said in his review that "*The gist of the critical response has been that 'The Tender Bar' follows a well-worn path. Fair enough, but is that such a sin?*" Gary and I don't figure it's a sin, and, in spite of what the critics on Rotten Tomatoes think, we think the movie is much better than a 51%. **GRADE B+**

**THE TERMINAL:** Tom Hanks creates an interesting and sympathetic character in *The Terminal*. We both thought he did a terrific job in bringing Viktor Navorski to life. Victor is a visitor from a fictitious country in Eastern Europe and he falls between our immigration cracks when his country's government is overthrown while he's in the air. Consequently, when he lands at the New York airport, he has no valid passport or visa. And he doesn't speak English. The Homeland Security Agent Frank Dixon (Stanley Tucci) sequesters Victor in the airport's international terminal. Victor proceeds to make a home for himself. He manages to learn some English, make some friends and find a job. He even meets a beautiful flight attendant named Amelia (Catherine Zeta-Jones). All of this is quite amusing and heartwarming in a very Frank Capra kind of way. We really enjoyed the first 3/4 of this film, but we were not captivated by the last 1/4. We thought some of the Security Agent's actions at the end of the film were not well motivated, and we didn't buy the Tian an'men Square bit with the janitor and the airplane. Overall, though, we were entertained by Spielberg's film and impressed with Hanks and all the supporting actors. **GRADE B**

**TERRI:** This is a difficult movie for us to evaluate. We admire the off-beat nature of a film that is, in the words of Bill Goodykoontz, our local film critic, "a smart, compassionate, genuine film about growing up." In fact, it was his four star review that sent us to the theatre. However, we also thought this movie festival favorite gave new definition to the term "slow-moving." Even critics who praise the movie use phrases like, "not prodded by impatience or a desire to rush through the story." There are several things to like about the movie. The acting is universally excellent. Jacob Wysocki is painfully real in his portrayal of Terri, an overweight outsider struggling to survive in high school and in the world. He is a nice, but very lonely kid, who takes loving care of his only family, his uncle Jim. John C. Reilly is masterful as an Assistant principal who recognizes that more than anything else Terri needs a friend. He tries to be that friend, and their scenes together are some of the best in the movie. Also worthy of mention is a young actor named Bridger Zadina as Chad, a troubled kid who befriends Terri. We liked the fact that in *Terri*, people talk the way people talk in real life, around issues, not always directly at them. The film handles teen sex and drugs with such honesty that Roger Ebert thought its "R" rating was "absurd." He thought it was much more wholesome than the PG13 rated *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*. If you are an independent film buff and can tolerate slow pacing, you will enjoy *Terri* for its realistic and touching portrayal of young outsiders. If, however, you're more of a *Transformers* fan, you should probably avoid it. Gary was bothered by the slow pace a bit more than I was. **GRADE B-/C+**

**TERRIBLY HAPPY:** Most of our readers will not get the chance to see this sub-titled Danish mystery thriller on the big screen, but if it sounds interesting, you might want to consider saving it in your Netflix Queue or waiting for it to be released to Blockbuster. A Copenhagen cop, after a marital break-up and a nervous breakdown, is banished to a dismal backwater hamlet that is peopled by the kind of characters you might expect to see in a Coen Brothers film. Barbara and I were immediately drawn into what we thought was a taut, well-crafted story that held our attention and was apparently good enough to make *Terrribly Happy* Denmark's submission to the Academy for Best Foreign Language Film. The ensemble cast is outstanding and the action, though slow, is never dull. You have mystery, sex, murder, revenge, ironic justice. . .the whole package. Barbara and I agreed on a grade. **GRADE B+**

**TEST PATTERN:** 2021 (Available for streaming on Prime Video for \$4.99 rental or free on STARZ if you have a subscription) *Test Pattern* is a low-budget indie film that examines racial inequalities, failures in the healthcare industry, and how a loving couple, worth rooting for, cope with a difficult trauma. The film follows an interracial dating couple whose relationship is put to the test after the black girlfriend is sexually assaulted while on a girls' night out. The frantic boyfriend, Evan, must drive his distressed girlfriend, Renesha, on a wild-goose chase across Austin from one clinic to another so she can be forensically examined with a rape kit. The problems encountered on the search were enlightening and infuriating. The stress put on the relationship was compounded by systemic incompetence that seemed hard to believe, but I fear is a truth many victims of sexual assault encounter. The 82-minute drama was written and directed by Shatara Michelle Ford in her directorial feature debut. She received an impressive 95% from critics on Tomatometer, but only 53% Audience Score. Barbara and I had high expectations when we chose this film, but by the end found ourselves in closer agreement with the Audience Score than the Critic's Score. Still, I think the young director has promise and should be commended for tackling a difficult subject. **GRADE C+**

**TESTAMENT OF YOUTH:** (2014/2015) This movie is a touching love story combined with a powerful anti-war message. It is based on the memoir of Vera Brittain who eventually became a writer and an anti-war activist. The movie covers a time from just before the outbreak of WWI until a year or so after Armistice Day. Vera is a young woman whose only dream is to attend Oxford and become a writer--a dream that has been thwarted by her conservative father, who only wants her to marry well. But Vera persists, and when she is accepted into an Oxford college, her father relents. She begins a romance with one of her brother's friends, another would-be-writer, and they hope to spend unchaperoned time together when they get to Oxford. But WWI happens instead. At the height of the war, Vera leaves her studies to become a nurse. It's her experience in France taking care of wounded German soldiers that makes her question

the prevailing opinion that war is a noble and patriotic cause. Vera is brought to vibrant life by Alicia Vikander, who appeared in *Ex Machina* as the artificially intelligent robot. Roland, the boy Vera loves, is played by Kit Harington who will be familiar to anyone who watches TV's *Game of Thrones*, in which he plays Jon Snow. The two young actors make a charming couple. The cinematography is beautiful, contrasting the idyllic pastoral scenes of England with the stark scenes of the battlefields in France. We also thought the director, James Kent, did a masterful job. Although the story's style is mostly linear, Kent effectively cut back and forth between memory and reality. Our local critic called the movie "tough-minded and sometimes harrowing." It chronicles a war seen through the eyes of a woman who experiences the terrible devastation of that "war to end all wars." Emily Watson and Dominic West play Vera's parents, and Taron Egerton (*Kingsman: The Secret Service*) is memorable as Vera's beloved brother, Edward. Gary agrees that the movie deserves a high grade. **GRADE A-**

**THANK YOU FOR SMOKING:** This film is a very entertaining satire that savages the tobacco industry while showing little mercy to the anti-smoking proponents. The movie remains fairly faithful to the 1994 Christopher Buckley novel of the same title. Aaron Eckhart brilliantly plays Nick Naylor, an unapologetic spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies. He is smart, glib and utterly ruthless in his defense of people's right to kill themselves, while never admitting that cigarettes might actually do that. You might think the film would be filled with a lot of smoking and coughing and wheezing, but it is far more subtle than that. I never cease to be amazed at how independent film producers can assemble powerful supporting casts on a shoestring budget. William H. Macy, Rob Lowe, Robert Duval, Maria Bello, Sam Elliott and Katie Holmes are all outstanding at playing supporting roles. Both Barbara and I liked this low-budget film. **GRADE B**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE:** (2017) There have been plenty of movies about our brave service men and women, but few about what happens to them when they return home. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) dealt with men coming home from WWII, but that was before we had heard of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, before we fully understood how alienated our soldiers feel by a world they once lived in. This movie is based on a 2013 non-fiction book by David Finkel. In 2007 he was a reporter in Iraq embedded with the 2-16 Rangers. It was there he met Adam Schumann, one of the "Good Soldiers" in his 2009 book. Keeping in touch with some of the Rangers he met in Iraq, Finkel learned from soldier after soldier how difficult it was to be home. Adam and his wife are real people who went through much of what shows up on screen, although some parts have been dramatized and embellished as filmmakers are wont to do. Miles Teller is terrific as Adam who, when you see him laughing with his buddies, seems OK. But, he is haunted by the death of a man who took his place on a mission and was killed. His friend, Solo (Beulah Koale), has memory problems and rage issues stemming from a head injury. Another friend, despondent over a breakup, commits suicide. When Adam and Solo realize that they need help, they go to the VA, and are met with long lines and long waits before any help is offered. Both ultimately find the necessary help with Pathway to Home, a nonprofit organization in Yountville, California. We agree with the critics who said this was an important story, but we don't agree with those who found the film "emotionally flat." Gary and I were touched by the courage of these warriors, who everyone celebrates when they're on the battlefield, but forgets once they come home. **GRADE B+**

**THANKS FOR SHARING:** Starring Mark Ruffalo, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Tim Robbins, this is a film about sex addiction. "Isn't sex addiction one of those things guys make up when they're caught cheating?" asks a character in *Thanks for Sharing*. No, but it is one of the most misunderstood of the obsessive-compulsive disorders. A 2011 film titled *Shame* and starring Michael Fassbinder gave a much darker and perhaps more realistic portrayal of a person who needs sex constantly, but never finds any pleasure or relief from it. *Thanks for Sharing* isn't nearly as dark and depressing as the 2011 film. It is more entertaining while still giving insight into a misunderstood condition. There are humorous as well as warm poignant moments and the dialogue is sharp and witty. Barbara and I were impressed with the ensemble cast which included character actor Josh Gad as well as singer-songwriter and actress "Pink" aka Alecia Beth Moore. Some of the very real problems sex addicts have in creating interpersonal relationships play out in three interesting stories. Some of the best dramatic moments come near the end of the film when Big Mike (Tim Robbins) acknowledges his role in the broken relationship with his son. Professional reviews were mixed and the film probably won't generate Oscar buzz, but Barbara and I thought *Thanks for Sharing* deserves the attention of movie buffs. **GRADE B**

**THAT EVENING SUN:** If 84 year old Hal Holbrook has ever turned in a bad performance, I don't remember it. You may remember that he played in a popular TV Series *Evening Shade* for four seasons in the early 1990's and that for decades he has traveled the world performing *Mark Twain Tonight*, a one-man stage show. Holbrook is a veteran actor and in this small "indy" film he turns in one of his best performances. He plays a stubborn octogenarian in a serious film that has a scarcity of likable characters. He plays Abner Meecham, an elderly Tennessee farmer who has been discarded into a nursing home by a less than sensitive son. He finds himself considerably more lonely in the nursing home than he was living alone on his farm. Understandably, he leaves the home and returns to his farm, only to find that his son has already rented it out with an option to buy. A war of nerves follows. Dixie Carter who is his real-life wife plays his deceased screen wife in a series of dream-like flashbacks. Supporting roles are ably played by several talented actors, but it was the awesome talent of Holbrook that made Barbara and me glad we made a special effort to see this hard to find film. **GRADE B**

**THEATER CAMP:** 2023 (Available for streaming on HULU) 2023 Many people love live theater as do Barbara and I. This movie will resonate with some people, but for many it will miss the mark. Theaters will be the ones who enjoy it most. *Theater Camp* concentrates on some people's unquenchable desire to get on a stage and perform. The movie is set in the Adirondacks in upstate New York. *Theater Camp* had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in early 2023 and it received positive reviews from critics. It was named one of the top 10 independent films of 2023 by the National Board of Review so Barb and I were hoping for a film we could easily award a grade of "A". As summer rolls around again, kids are gathering from far & wide to attend a rundown little summer camp just after the founder suffered a seizure brought on by exposure to the strobe lights in the camp's most recent production: *Bye Bye Birdie*. She's in a coma. With financial ruin looming, the people left must band together in an effort to keep the camp afloat in her absence. The movie has an eclectic cast of characters, but it was the talented kids who stood out. Run time is a breezy 90 minutes and if the first 70 minutes had been half as good as the final 20 minutes, it would have gotten an A. *Theater Camp* may not be a masterpiece, but it certainly has a lot of heart. Barb grades it a little higher than I did. **GRADE B/B+**

Our thanks to Movie Views reader Holly V., IL for her recommendation.



**THEIR FINEST:** (2017) This charming film is adapted from Lissa Evans's 2009 novel "Their Finest Hour and a Half." The movie follows a group of screenwriters who have been hired by the Ministry of Information to boost morale at home by creating propaganda films sympathetic to the British war effort in the midst of the London blitz. The film they will make is about the amazing and well known Dunkirk rescue in which 338,000 troops were rescued from the beaches of Dunkirk, France. Realizing the film could use "a woman's touch," the Ministry hired Catrin Cole as a scriptwriter in charge of writing the female dialogue referred to in the industry as "the slop." If you love movies and are fascinated with the process of movie making, this may be a great way to spend a few hours with a rarely looked at side of WWII. *Their Finest* is billed as a Comedy, Drama, Romance and I guess it is all those things. The best known actor in the movie is Bill Nighy who you may remember from *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Here he brilliantly plays a gloriously vain, former matinee idol. The female lead, deserving special praise, is British actor Gemma Arterton. Barbara and I look forward to seeing the movie *Dunkirk* scheduled to be released on 21 July 2017. *Their Finest* brings tears as quickly as laughter and though it will probably not see wide release, but we think it is worth seeking out. **GRADE B**

**THELMA:** 2024 (Prime rental at \$9.99) The movie was the feel-good comedy of this year's Sundance, with a star-making performance by 93-year-old June Squibb as the title character, a Los Angeles grandmother who falls victim to a phone scammer and sets out to get her money back. In the role of her helper on her quest to get her money back, Richard Roundtree played Ben with surprising vigor. He was a lot younger than Squibb, but unfortunately he died in 2023, so this was his final performance. (Moviegoers will remember him as private detective John Shaft.) The movie was based on a real-life experience of director/writer Josh Margolin's own grandmother. (You see her in the closing credits, in a scene taken directly from the movie.) In an interview, Margolin said he wanted to celebrate his grandmother's strength and tenacity. (In real life, the family intervened before his grandmother sent the money, but it got him thinking what if...) In the first leading film role of her 70-year career, Squibb portrays the strong-willed *Thelma* with grit and determination, demonstrating that she is more than capable of taking care of business, despite what her daughter Gail (Parker Posey), son-in-law Alan (Clark Gregg), or grandson Danny (Fred Hechinger) might believe. Squibb did all of her own stunts in the movie, so she has grit and determination in real life! *Art S., IN* said in his review, "*The nearer you are to the leading lady's age, the more you'll enjoy it.*" We agree, and since we are in our 90s we give it a B+. **GRADE B+**

**THELMA & LOUISE:** (1991) We both recently read *Off the Cliff: How the Making of Thelma & Louise Drove Hollywood to the Edge*, by Becky Aikman, and it made us want to see the movie again. The 1991 movie didn't disappoint. The screenplay was written by a woman (Callie Khouri) and starred two women (Susan Sarandon & Geena Davis) in what became the quintessential road movie. The movie meant more to us after reading the book. We were able to appreciate what Ridley Scott brought to the directions. Even though the writer didn't like the truck explosion, you have to admit it made a memorable scene. We highly recommend the book, and after reading it, you'll have to revisit *Thelma & Louise*. The film is best known for its ending. In the film, Thelma turns to Louise and says "*Let's not get caught. Let's keep going.*" And keep going they do—driving their dust-covered Thunderbird right into the Grand Canyon. Callie Khouri explains it this way: "*They flew away, out of this world and into the mass unconscious. Women who are completely free from all the shackles that restrain them have no place in this world. The world is not big enough to support them.*" Although Davis and Sarandon and Scott were all nominated for Oscars that year, only Khouri won for best original screenplay. We watched it on Amazon Prime, but it will be gone from there on April 1<sup>st</sup>. It is, however, on Hulu. **Grade A**

**THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING:** (2014) Viewing this extraordinary film, I couldn't decide if I would call it a love story or a biopic. It is, of course, both. The love story focuses on Stephen Hawking and his first wife, Jane. Hawking is, arguably, the best known living scientist in the world today. It is a rare person who doesn't recognize his robotic voice almost immediately. Bringing the movie to life are the mesmerizing performance of Eddie Redmayne (*Les Misérables*) and the wonderfully subtle acting of Felicity Jones. Hawking is an English theoretical physicist, cosmologist, and author who at the age of 21 was given the earth shattering news that he had ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, a progressive neurological disorder that robbed Hawking of movement and speech. He was given only two more years of life expectancy. Defying the odds, he is currently 72. The disease crippled his body but thankfully spared his mind and apparently his reproductive system. Jane, his wife for twenty-five years and mother of his three children wrote the memoir on which the screenplay is based. Wisely, the movie doesn't dwell more than briefly on Hawking's scientific theories for it would be easy to get bogged down in math and black holes. Barbara thinks the man whom the movie is about is more remarkable than the movie, although she agrees the performances are extraordinary. She grades it a little lower than I do. **GRADE B+/A-**

**THERE WILL BE BLOOD:** This film is an acting tour-de-force for Daniel Day Lewis. He plays a man with no redeeming characteristics yet holds you spellbound with his intensity and skill. Paul Dano, who was so good as Little Miss Sunshine's brother, also gives an outstanding performance. Lewis is Daniel Plainview, a man for whom oil is the only thing that matters; a man who looks at people and finds nothing worth liking; a man whose competitive drive is such that it isn't enough for him to win—he wants all others to fail. Dano plays two brothers; Paul, who tells Daniel about the oil under his family's land, and Eli, a self-professed prophet and healer. It is an epic story of oil, power and faith. The major conflict in the film is the fight for power between Daniel and Eli. The film is directed by Paul Thomas Anderson who has made a name for himself with films that many find quite weird. He directed *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia* and *Punch Drunk Love*. We didn't care much for *Boogie Nights*, but we liked *Punch Drunk Love*, and we gave *Magnolia* an A/B+ grade. There is no doubt that Anderson is an accomplished filmmaker. This film, like his previous films, is visually arresting, and the story is never predictable. However, I felt like an uninvolved observer for the entire 2 hours and 38 minutes. I was never drawn into the story and, other than a few shocking scenes, felt little emotional involvement with the characters. Gary felt the same way. We agree that such a film is not "A" material or us, but because of the superior acting and skilled filmmaking, we can give this film a B+. However, it is not a film we want to see more than once. **GRADE B+**

**THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD:** (2018) Barbara and I agree this is an exceptional documentary film. New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson, best known as the director, writer, and producer of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy used digital restoration techniques to bring World War I which ended 100 years ago to life in a new, high-tech way. Dust, scratches and tears have been removed from old grainy, blurry, black-and-white newsreel clips as Jackson brings events from the pages of history books to the big screen in a way that has

never before been seen. Critics agree that it is an impressive technical achievement with a walloping emotional impact. It received 98% on the *Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer* with 109 reviews counted. We tend to think of the early 20th century in strictly black-and-white terms. Jackson changes that with richly colored images bringing young men and boys to life as they faced the fear and uncertainty of war. This historic revisiting marks one hundred years since the end of what is often referred to as "The Great War." Barbara's father was in the tank corps and she still has a gas mask brought home by him. Our thanks go to Peter Jackson for this profound achievement. **GRADE A**

**(Barb's Note:** Be sure to say after the movie has ended to see how they restored those old films. It is fascinating.)

**THIN ICE:** (2012) This movie is what I would call a "confidence caper comedy." Two of my all-time favorite films are the 1973 Academy Award winner *The Sting* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, a hilarious 1988 comedy starring Michael Caine and Steve Martin titled. These films set the bar very high for con comedies. Although *Thin Ice* doesn't clear that bar, it does provide a pleasant two hours of entertainment. Underappreciated Greg Kinnear gives his usual terrific performance playing a glad-handing insurance salesman always looking for a weakness to exploit. Equally terrific performances are delivered by Alan Arkin, playing a slightly addled old farmer who seems to have fallen heir to an expensive violin, and Billy Crudup, playing a low level crook who may be a psychopath. Both Barbara and I felt that if the talented performances had been in the directorial hands of the Coen Brothers (*Fargo*), the movie might have been as good as the performances. As you might expect, there are twists and turns that keep you guessing, but I don't want to give any of them away. Though we can't give it our highest marks, this independent film is fun and worth seeking out. **GRADE B**

**THINGS BEHIND THE SUN:** (2001 on video) In Cocoa Beach FL, a woman shows up drunk on the same lawn on the same date three years running. She's Sherry (Kim Dickens), a singer building a reputation on college campuses, especially for her signature song about having been raped. A rock magazine in LA takes notice, and writer Owen (Gabriel Mann) recognizes her: his older brother orchestrated her gang rape and involved him. Owen heads for Florida, ostensibly to do a piece on her, but in reality to try to put his own demons to rest. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

**THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD:** (1995 release reviewed in 2004) Jimmy the Saint (Andy Garcia) has been trying to go straight, but when his business loan is bought by a crime boss and former colleague (Christopher Walken), Jimmy agrees to do one more job to pay off the loan. He assembles a group of his former crime buddies, but the job goes quite badly and the five criminals face imminent death. The cast list includes Treat Williams, Steve Buscemi, William Forsythe, Christopher Lloyd, and Jack Warden. It's a Tarantino wannabe at least as far as the dialogue and blood and gore are concerned. We agree with Ebert who said it's a movie you might enjoy as long as you don't expect a masterpiece. **THUMBS UP**

**THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE:** Benicio Del Toro had been acting in films for ten years before we noticed him in *Traffic* (2000). Since that appearance both Barbara and I have been impressed, if not blown away, by his performances. This film is no exception. He is totally believable as a heroin addict struggling to get his life together. In the female lead is Halle Berry playing a grieving widow with two children trying to cope with an incomprehensible tragedy. After her Academy Award-winning performance in *Monster's Ball*, Berry has made some mediocre films, but here she is back to her Oscar form. We have seen many films that focus of the grief that follows a loved one's death, but rarely has the grieving felt as real and heart-breaking as it does in this film. The two young actors who play Berry's daughter and son were especially good. This is a compelling drama about people in crisis and has been ably directed by European filmmaker Susanne Bier. I don't think this film will receive the attention deserves at the box office, but we recommend it with a grade of A. **GRADE A**

**THINGS YOU CAN TELL JUST BY LOOKING AT HER:** It is unfortunate that this 1999 gem of a movie never got theatrical release. Although it received positive buzz at Sundance and Cannes film festivals, writer-director Rodrigo Garcia apparently couldn't get a distributor. It was sidelined directly to Showtime. This movie is a series of vaguely interconnecting vignettes set in a San Fernando Valley neighborhood. It boasts a dynamite cast: Holly Hunter, Glenn Close, Calista Flockhart, Amy Brenneman and Cameron Diaz. It's no wonder these fine actresses were drawn to the script. Garcia has a wonderful talent for writing revealing moments, and each actress lives up to the fine writing. There is not a weak scene here: all are splendid. I don't want to tell you anything about the plots of these vignettes because that would deprive you of the joy of discovery. Gary thought this was the best movie he has seen in a long time and he hopes that many of you will watch this one. The only thing he didn't like about the film was its title, and we wonder if the Hollywood studios dismissed it as a "chick-flick" because of the title. Both Ebert and Roeper highly recommended this film, and so do we. We originally gave it an *Enthusiastic Thumbs Up*, so I guess that would be at least an A-. **GRADE A-**

**THIRTEEN:** It isn't easy being thirteen. Especially if you're a girl trying to find your way between childhood and womanhood. At the beginning of this movie, Tracy is everything a parent wants in a thirteen-year-old: She's a good student, she has a sweet disposition, and she still has Barbie Dolls and stuffed animals on her bed. But, in junior high those things don't make you one of the cool kids. The coolest girl in school is Evie, who is thirteen going on twenty-five and dresses like Brittany Spears would if she shopped on Melrose Avenue. Tracey decides she wants to become Evie's friend and she succeeds in attracting Evie's attention. Eventually they become best friends, but in the process Tracey changes drastically. She begins to dress like a sexpot and experiments with a variety of drugs. Watching Tracy's life fall apart is difficult but probably something any parent with a girl approaching thirteen should see. Evan Rachel Wood (TV's *Once And Again*) brings Tracy vividly to life. Nikki Reed is also excellent as Evie. Reed wrote the original screenplay for this film when she was thirteen and she was fourteen when she played the troublemaker, Evie. She based her screenplay loosely on her real life experience as a "good" girl who turns bad in order to be part of the "in" crowd. Catherine Hardwicke, the film's director, was dating Reed's father and when she realized that Nikki was having problems, Hardwicke suggested that Reed keep a journal, but she wrote a screenplay instead. Hardwicke collaborated on a final draft and the result is this excellent film. Holly Hunter is Tracy's loving-but-totally out-of-the-loop mother, Melanie. Jeremy Sisto (HBO's *Six Feet Under*) is Melanie boyfriend. **GRADE B+**

**THIRTEEN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ONE THING:** If you are tired of big, loud, special effects Hollywood movies, and if you appreciate small, character-driven independent films with realistic dialogue and superior acting, then you will want to see this film. Jill Sprecher directed *13 Conversations* which she wrote in collaboration with her sister, Karen. Their previous effort was *Clockwatchers*

(1997). The movie introduces us to four characters: Troy, a prosecuting attorney who thinks he has the world by the tail (Matthew McConaughey), Gene, a middle aged divorced father who seems to be terminally depressed (Alan Arkin), Beatrice, a happy young woman who works for a cleaning service (Clea Duvall), and Walker, a math professor who is bored with his marriage (John Turturro). Their conversations center around happiness, but the events the characters experience demonstrates how little control we have over our lives, how a random event can irreversibly alter our reality and our level of happiness. Arkin has the most screen time and he is a marvel. McConaughey, Turturro and Amy Irving, who plays his wife, are also excellent. Clea DuVall is very impressive as a woman whose positive outlook on life undergoes a change when she is accidentally injured. The movie reminded me of *Magnolia* and *Lantana* in the minimal way the characters' lives intersect. It is, however, much calmer and less energetic than those two films. One critic thought it was "*challenging, thoughtful, and, at bottom, overly cerebral.*" We thought it was a very good movie, and Movie Viewer Dick H., Berkeley, CA, said he thought it was the best movie he has seen in a long time. Gary says B+, but I would go as high as A-. **GRADE A-/B+**

**THIRTEEN DAYS:** It is to the director's credit that he manages to sustain the tension throughout the film's 2 hours and 15 minutes, even though we know the outcome. He (Roger Donaldson) does it by making us identify with Kenneth O'Donnell (Kevin Costner) and experience those 13 tension-filled days in October of 1962 as he might have. Although Costner pushed the Boston accent a bit far at times, we both accepted him in the role of advisor to President Kennedy. Bruce Greenwood, who appeared as John F. Kennedy, was right on point: his accent seemed natural, his demeanor was presidential, and he moved like a man in constant back pain. I have read that he studied extensively to play Kennedy and came to admire the man greatly. Steven Culp was equally good as Robert Kennedy, and Dylan Baker looked remarkably like Robert McNamara. I was a bit puzzled by the occasional use of black and white photography. Sometimes it designated scenes that might have appeared on a TV news report and that seemed appropriate. But the reason for other black and white scenes escaped us. I suspect that some of the events surrounding the Missile Crisis have been massaged for dramatic effect. For example, it seems that O'Donnell doesn't figure significantly in any of the historical accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis. (However, it should be noted that O'Donnell's son Kevin, the Earthlink millionaire, is an investor in the company that produced *Thirteen Days*.) This story had great significance for us--we remember the events and the people involved. I would be interested to know how the film plays for people who didn't live through those thirteen days in 1962. **GRADE: B --** (Note: A famous quote came out of the crisis: Dean Rusk is credited with the line, "*We went eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked.*")

**THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU (2014)** I'm not sure why critics have been so snarky about this movie. One even went so far as to call it 'one of the worst of 2014.' We liked it...a lot! It may be because we remember the book and enjoyed it immensely. It also may also be because it has an outstanding cast that perfectly fit into their roles. And it may be because we like comedies where the humor grows out of the characters, characters that you get to know and like. And we did like getting to know the Altman family as they sit Shiva for their father. We first meet Josh (Jason Bateman), the middle son, who is having a very bad year. He recently came home to surprise his wife (Abigail Spencer), but found her in bed with his boss. Next, he learns that his father has died, and that his dying wish was that the whole family would spend the required seven days honoring his memory together in the family home. Jane Fonda plays Josh's mother, Tina Fey is his sister and Corey Stoll and Adam Driver are his brothers. Added to the already stellar family cast are, among others, Timothy Oliphant, Rose Byrne and Connie Britton. Josh soon learns that his imperfect life is not unique. Each family member has his or her own difficult issues, and, as he gets to know his siblings better, he comes to grips with his own problems. The only family member who seems truly happy is a delightful toddler who carries his potty chair with him every where he goes. Since listening to the audiobook, we have listened to or read all of Jonathan Tropper's books. We were pleased to learn that Tropper wrote the screenplay, and while movies are rarely as good as the book upon which they are based, we liked this movie almost as much as we enjoyed the book. **GRADE A-**

**THOR: RAGNAROK: (2017)** The critics love this version of Thor because it has humor and the actors obviously had a lot of fun making it--more fun than we had watching it, I'm afraid. I did appreciate the humorous parts, but they were too few and too far between for my taste. The massive amount of killing, fighting and destruction was still too boring to entice me to ever see another Marvel Comic movie. The director, Taika Waititi, said that he wanted to make Thor more like the Australian actor who plays him, calling Hemsworth charming, kind and funny. That, I agree with. He's also a gorgeous hunk. It's Hemsworth and the promise of a comic take on a comic book movie that took me to the theatre. Thor is surrounded by a group of cohorts, not the least of which was The Hulk. Mark Ruffalo's appearance was welcome, and I also enjoyed Jeff Goldblum as a Roman Emperor-type villain, Tessa Thompson as a booze-guzzling Valkyrie, and Tom Hiddleston as Loki, a former villain who turned into a hero...almost. But, it is Cate Blanchett as Hela, a super villain with her hair slicked back into antlers, who brought Gary to the theatre. She is terrific and because of her, Gary raised his grade from an F- to an F. The director did double duty as appearing as Korg, a crumbling pile of rocks. Walking out of the theatre, I was prepared to give the movie a grade of D. But, as I wrote the review, I decided that the humor was enough to raise my grade to a C. Those who like Marvel Comic movies will surely love this one, even if we did not. **GRADE C/F**

**THIS IS 40:** It's hard to keep the romance alive when you're turning 40, your kids are always fighting, you have issues with your parents, and your spouse's habits are getting more and more annoying. Judd Apatow's latest comedy is more grown-up and a bit more serious as it follows a couple we first met in *Knocked Up*. Pete (Paul Rudd) and Debbie (Leslie Mann) have been married for 15 years and both are facing their fortieth birthdays. Both Rudd and Mann are outstanding. Each of them has the ability to portray emotions without words. Wonderful faces! I'd see any movie that featured either one of them. Like all Apatow comedies, this one isn't particularly plot-driven but instead shines a light on specific moments in the life of a family. Some moments are ridiculous, a few are touching and almost all are hilarious. I am happy to say that in *This Is 40* there are no vomit scenes and only one very minor fart scene, although, as we have come to expect in an Apatow movie, there is a copious use of profanity and the "F" word in all its various forms. In a burst of nepotism, Maude and Iris Apatow appear as Pete and Debbie's children and they acquit themselves admirably. The supporting cast includes Apatow favorite Jason Segel, and Melissa McCarthy and Chris O'Dowd from *Bridesmaids*. Albert Brooks as Pete's father and John Lithgow as Debbie's dad were a happy addition to a stellar cast. Be sure to stay through the credits for an outtake of the scene with McCarthy in the school principal's office. If you enjoyed *The Hangover*, *The 40 Year Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up* you're sure to enjoy this one. **GRADE B+**

**THIS IS THE END:** (2013) Seth Rogan is one of the writers, one of the producers, one of the directors, and one of the stars in what Richard Roeper says is "one of the most tasteless, ridiculous and funniest comedies of the 21st century." Barbara and I can agree on two out of three of his adjectives. But it occurs to me that an octogenarian cannot fully appreciate raunchy gross-out adolescent humor. The concept sounds interesting. Several comics playing themselves are forced to hole up in James Franco's house as the world outside unravels in a Biblical apocalypse. The ground opens, L.A. is in flames. Hellfire is raining down and bubbling up. Many celebs you will recognize are swallowed into the earth. By morning, all who remain from the previous night's party are James Franco, Seth Rogan, Jay Baruchel, Craig Robinson, and Jonah Hill, as well as Danny McBride playing a boorish and abrasive intruder. The cast seemed to be having great fun while pushing the envelope of taste. As we left the movie, I commented that, for me, the scenes ranged from flat to mildly interesting. The film came in at a little under two hours, but it seemed longer to me. Barbara liked it a little more than I did, but then she is a little younger. Most critics, who are also younger, liked it a lot better. We look forward to hearing from *Movie Views* readers who see *This Is the End*. **GRADE: D/C-**

**THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI:** (2017) This offbeat unpredictable film was written and directed by Martin McDonagh, an award-winning playwright who also wrote and directed one of our favorite movies, *In Bruges*. (See Archives) Mc Donagh is a master at deftly tiptoeing the line between very dark comedy and violence filled drama. He also seems to be a master at casting and drawing unforgettable performances from his cast. Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson, and Sam Rockwell play the leads in this movie and all handle the screenplay with extraordinary talent. After months have passed without finding her daughter's murderer, Mildred Hayes (Academy Award winner Frances McDormand) makes a bold move. She rents three billboards leading into her town and displays an angry message for the chief of police. (Woody Harrelson) Mildred believes the police are not doing enough to find the killer, and she wants the world to know. Barbara and I have seen Mc Donagh's work both on stage and on film and are familiar with his irreverent style. If you are unfamiliar with his work, be warned that it is not your typical Hollywood film. It is a hot-blooded tale, seething with rage, but with frequent flashes of humor. Richard Roeper (Chicago Sun-Times) writes "This is the best movie I've seen this year." We can't go quite that far. For us it wasn't as good as *In Bruges*, but it was good and we will continue to seek out plays and movies written by Martin McDonagh. **GRADE A**

**THE THREE BURIALS OF MELQUIADES ESTRADA:** In his first feature film, director Tommy Lee Jones demonstrates consummate story-telling skills. He draws you slowly into this story of friendship, death and redemption. I don't want to tell you anything about the plot because I think it would spoil your enjoyment of this unpredictable film. The story takes place in both southwest Texas and Mexico, and the scenery is pure desert in all its starkness and beauty. Jones stars as a working cowboy named Pete Perkins. His best friend is Meliquiades Estrada, played by Julio Cedillo. Barry Pepper is a border control officer and January Jones is his young, bored wife; Dwight Yoakam is a local sheriff, and Melissa Leo is a waitress in the run-down diner. Although the film begins with Melquiades' death, Jones uses random flashbacks to acquaint us with the dead man. Though at least one critic thought the film was too slow, we were captivated by the story. The writer, Guillermo Arriaga (*21 Grams*) was honored at Cannes in 2005 as best writer, and Jones was named best actor. The Chicago Tribune critic called it "fascinating and unpredictable," and the Atlanta Journal Constitution thought it was "smart, challenging and moving." We have always admired Jones's acting skills. Now we are equally impressed with his directing skills. **GRADE A**

**THREE IDENTICAL STRANGERS:** (2018) This is a riveting, stranger-than-fiction documentary that tells a compelling story of triplets reunited at age 19. Don't let the "documentary" label keep you away. It contains as many twists and turns as you would find in a fictional thriller. Barbara and I loved it and think it is the "must-see documentary of the summer. Three strangers are reunited by astonishing coincidence after being born identical triplets, separated at birth, and adopted by three different families. The filmmaker, Tim Wardle, keeps a great deal from the viewer, and then parcels it out in discrete chunks. When the triplets found each other it made national news. There are TV clips of them with Tom Brokaw, Jane Pauley, and Phil Donahue. At first the focus was on the similarities between the triplets emphasizing the importance of heredity in the old Nature vs Nurture controversy. Later the differences emerged emphasizing the importance of nurture. I won't be a spoiler and reveal the shocking secrets that were withheld. Suffice it to say, it is a film worth seeing. **GRADE A**

**THUMBSUCKER:** Adolescence is not an easy time for anyone. Justin Cobb (Lou Taylor Pucci) is no exception. He's bright, but underachieving; he doesn't fit in with his classmates, can't connect with girls, and doesn't feel comfortable in his skin. Oh yes, and there's that thumb sucking thing. *Thumbsucker* made its debut at the Sundance Film Festival and it is a film festival kind of movie. It focuses on Justin and his family and there are no explosions and no fiery emotional outbursts. We agree with O.A. Scott of the NY Times who said that the movie's "refusal of large gestures and loud noises is a decided virtue." Pucci (bearing a slight resemblance to Johnny Depp—maybe it's the hair over his eyes) is excellent in the role of Justin. He changes over the course of the movie, partly because he wants to change and partly because he starts, and ultimately stops, taking Ritalin. Pucci makes us believe those changes are real, and we want him to succeed because we like him. Vincent D'Onofrio, so glib in his TV role, is Justin's inarticulate father, incapable of sharing his thoughts and feelings with his son. We are reminded of what a good actor he is. Tilda Swinton is remarkable as Justin's mother and their relationship is central to the movie. What's more, they look very much alike. Keanu Reeves is a sympathetic and rather strange orthodontist, and Vince Vaughn is one of Justin's teachers. Writer/director Mike Mills shows gentle affection for this unique family, and he skillfully avoids using melodrama or cliches to tell his story. **GRADE B**

**TIBET: CRY OF THE SNOW LION:** (2003 Release) Not many of our readers will have an opportunity to see this brilliantly made but harrowing documentary of Tibet. It was ten years in the making and focuses mostly on the Chinese Governments determination to wipe out Tibetan culture and identity. It is so much more than an intelligent documentary with breathtaking cinematography, though it is certainly that. With narration from Martin Sheen and voiceovers from Ed Harris, Tim Robbins, and Susan Sarandon, the film speaks on behalf of the Tibetan people. There are horrifying photographs and a video of a peaceful demonstration that turns into a massacre of Buddhist monks. We found the film moving and objective. I found a powerful quote from Boxoffice Magazine: "*There is scarcely any need for facile Michael Moore-style editorializing here--simply contrasting the testimony of tortured Buddhist nuns with the hollow rationalizations of Chinese government stooges provides more than enough proverbial rope with which to hang what is arguably the*

*world's most insidious and sophisticated terrorist regime.*" It is difficult for me to grade this powerful documentary, but we strongly recommend it. **GRADE B+**

**TICK, TICK... BOOM!:** (2021 Available for streaming on Netflix) Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner Lin-Manuel Miranda who wrote and starred in Hamilton makes his feature directorial debut with this musical. The film is, at least in part, an adaptation of a futuristic sci-fi musical, *Superbia*, by Jonathan Larson. Larson later revolutionized musical theater as the creator of *Rent* which opened in 1996 and became a Broadway smash hit running for 12 years and making it one of the longest-running shows on Broadway. But even before *Rent* he wrote *TICK, TICK...BOOM!* It was an autobiographical musical, a one-man show detailing his creative process and being young and hungry in New York in the early 1990s. The young theater composer was waiting tables at a New York City diner in 1990 while writing what he hoped would be the next great American musical. The 1990's setting means the AIDS crisis casts a shadow over the period. Larson lived his life and wrote his music like he was running out of time, and he was only in his early 30's. The tragic irony is that he was right to fear the ticking clock. He died of an aortic aneurysm at age 35 on the day of *Rent's* first public preview and he never saw any of its success. Playing the lead in this film is Andrew Garfield, an Academy Award nominee and Tony Award winner who gives a fantastic performance in this energized and powerful movie. One critic wrote, "Andrew Garfield doesn't portray Larson, he BECOMES Larson." Barbara and I loved the movie which speaks to our theater background. But even if you aren't a fan of musicals, I think there is enough in this film that by the end you will need Kleenex. **GRADE A**

**TICKET TO PARADISE:** 2022 ( Seen in a real movie theatre.) I am fast becoming a fan of Kaitlyn Dever, who was the star of *Rosaline*, reviewed in last month's issue. In this movie, she plays the daughter of George Clooney and Julia Roberts and she is as adorable and as good as she was in *Rosaline*. (We first noticed her in the series *Unbelievable*. If you haven't seen that series, go to Netflix and check it out. You will see an actor of tremendous range in one so young.) When Lily (Dever) graduates from college she is apprehensive because her long divorced and embittered parents have to sit next to each other. But, this is a romantic comedy, so you know at the beginning that at the end of the movie, her parents will get back together. It is wildly implausible but entertaining nevertheless because the people are enjoyable to watch and Bali has gorgeous scenery. We didn't like it quite as much as MV reader Art S., IN (reviewed in the last issue) did, but Gary and I do like Clooney and Roberts. As Art said in his review, "It made you yearn for the old time Hollywood movies that took your mind off things for a couple of hours with celluloid bliss." **GRADE B**

**TIGERLAND:** (2000 release seen on video) "My father says the Army makes all men one. But you never know which one." *Tigerland* begins with this quote, spoken by one of the Infantry soldiers being trained for Viet Nam. "Tigerland" is the name of the camp where the infantrymen spend their final week of training before shipping out. It has been called the second worst place in the world. It is designed to look as much like Viet Nam as possible, and the only difference between being in "Tigerland," and actually being "in country," is the absence of live ammunition. We agree with Movie Viewer Jim S. who said that the film is "as horrific as any combat film." None of the actors are familiar names, but several are memorable. Raymond Boz, the film's protagonist, is played by Colin Farrell, an Irish Actor who I am anxious to see again. Boz is a cynical soldier, but a natural born leader. He befriends Jim Paxon (Matthew Davis), a naive young man who enlisted in the Army for the experience, hoping to write a novel about that experience. These two actors have only a few screen credits, but I hope this 2000 film is a boost to their careers. The New York Times reviewer criticized the film for "its secondhand sentimentality," but the Los Angeles Times reviewer said it was a "taut, spare drama, that is consistently fresh, engrossing and unpredictable." Both Ebert and Roeper gave it a thumbs up, and Roeper called it a "gem of a movie." Joel Schumacher is the director. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

**TILL:** 2022 (For \$19.99 rental *Till* is available for streaming on Prime Video ) "**Powerful**" is an insufficient term to describe this profoundly emotional film about the true story of Mamie Till Mobley's relentless pursuit of justice for her 14 year old son, Emmett Till, who, in 1955, was brutally tortured and lynched while visiting his cousins in Mississippi. *Till* received 98% from 139 critics on Rotten Tomatoes and 97% Audience Score. The movie opens with a seemingly benign segment that gives glimpses into the happy life shared by Emmett and his loving mother, Mamie, beautifully played by Danielle Deadwyler. There's no foreshadowing of what is to come. Despite her misgivings, his mother allows him to go to Mississippi on a visit because he's growing to manhood and she can't protect him forever. So she waves goodbye to her son from the train going South.....and she never sees him alive again. The power of the film is as much in what it withholds as in what it reveals. It does not show us Emmett's graphic torture, mutilation, and murder. It does not need to. His face is enough. Nothing more is required to illustrate the kind of hell that Emmett endured during his final hours. His mother, Mamie, took the vital step of arranging an open casket funeral for her son and wielded the power of the Black press to disseminate images of his unrecognizable body far and wide. She wanted the whole world to see what happened to her son. Mamie Till-Mobley's fight for justice helped galvanize the civil rights movement. Although Till's murder has been the subject of countless documentaries and books, it has never been the subject of a feature film until now. Then again, the killing of Emmett Till took place in a country where a grand jury refused to indict the murderers. They confessed to the crime to *Look Magazine* not long after a jury of all white male Mississippians absolved them of any wrongdoing. Mamie died at 81 in 2003. She is buried near her son, where her gravestone reads, "**Her pain united a nation.**" Sad to say justice can be painfully slow in coming. Nineteen years after her death and sixty-seven years after her son Emmett's death, Congress finally enacted the Emmett Till Antilynching Act. It happened in March, 2022. There's nothing fun or entertaining about watching *Till*. But it is a sufficiently powerful motion picture that offers more than a history lesson. Barbara and I were shattered by it. **GRADE A**

**THE TILLMAN STORY:** Pat Tillman was a front page news story from the time he decided to leave a multimillion-dollar professional football contract to join the military until his tragic death in Afghanistan. The front-page stories might have ended after his funeral and the awarding of the Silver Star for valor if his family hadn't valued truth over fraudulent heroism created and nurtured as a propaganda tool by the military hierarchy. Josh Brolin narrates this hour-and-a-half documentary that will be seen, unfortunately, by depressingly few people. In this respect it will suffer the same fate as most documentary films. Friendly fire, sometimes called fratricide, is known to have occurred in all American wars. But the significance and frequency of "friendly fire" is often suppressed or ignored by politicians and the pentagon. It is a rare family that would challenge an official account of a son's or daughter's heroism and spend years trying to uncover the true story. The Tillman family, choking back tears of frustration and rage, refused to keep their mouths shut. In the end they

succeed in forcing the military to acknowledge the original cover-up and change the official story. In so doing, they change not only written history but hopefully a disgraceful military tradition. **GRADE B+**

**TIMBUKTU:** (2014) When I was a little boy growing up in southern Iowa I heard the name Timbuktu and from the context surmised it must be an exotic place in a distant land....I guess it was. It is a city on the edge of the Sahara Desert located in Mali. The Northwest Africa country of Mali was formerly known as the Sudanese Republic. Now it is also a critically acclaimed film with a timely message. It has not only received high praise from critics and audiences at Film Festivals, but it has also been nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 87<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards this year. The film tells the tragic story of ordinary Mali people trying to live normally while being harassed by swaggering jihadists toting rifles and machine guns who have recently inserted themselves into the usually quiet community intent on imposing their version of Sharia law. It is a simple tale emphasizing the filmmaker's outrage at irrational Islamic extremism, but tempered with compassion and even occasional humor. Every day, the new improvised courts issue tragic and absurd sentences. A female singer is sentenced to 40 lashes for singing, and 40 additional lashes for being in the same room as her accompanist. Young men play virtual football (soccer) without the ball which is banned, and the occupiers impose the right to forcibly marry local women. Outrage with religious oppression is often broken with startling scenes of natural desert beauty. Although this is a work of fiction, it gives us a compelling glimpse of a culture that is far removed from ours and extraordinarily difficult to understand. If you chose to see this film, watch for the link between the haunting opening scene and the final scene. It leaves me with an indelible memory. Barbara and I both enjoyed the film and recommend it especially for foreign film buffs. **GRADE B+**

**A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES:** This is the first Iranian film shot in Kurdish, which is the mountainous area of Iran on the border of Iraq that is home to Iranian Kurds. The writer/director of the film comes from this area and made the film to honor his relatives and friends. The Kurds are a minority of twenty million living in several middle-eastern countries. In Iran they are the poorest of the poor. Many make their living as smugglers, crossing the border in spite of land mines and ambushes by the Iraqis. The events in the film take place in bitter winter weather, and the drunken horses in the title are the mules used by the smugglers. In order to keep the mules warm and walking during the bitter Iranian winter, the smugglers pike the mules' drinking water with alcohol. This small lovingly made movie tells the story of a family or orphaned brothers and sisters who truly love and care for each other. One of the boys is a crippled dwarf who needs an operation and his brother and sisters love him so much, they will do anything to get him the medical help he needs. The actors are nonprofessional and the story is told in a naturalistic style that is partly fiction and partly documentary. The children are wonderful--very natural and engaging. This is a very sad story and it is certainly not everyone's idea of a good movie. It is definitely not a good date film! We only suggest you see it if you like independent foreign films with subtitles and some hand-held camera work. Compared to other Iranian films we have seen, it deserves a B. Compared to the films our readers are used to seeing, it's probably only worth a C. **GRADE: B/C**

**TIM'S VERMEER:** (2013) Johannes Vermeer ("Girl With a Pearl Earring") was only a moderately successful painter in his lifetime but his reputation grew, and he is now acknowledged as one of the greatest painters of the Dutch Golden Age. This film is an hour and twenty minutes of fascinating speculation about how a 17th century Dutch painter was able to capture almost photographic accuracy in his paintings 150 years before the invention of photography. It is a compelling detective story made by illusionists Penn and Teller. Teller, the quiet one, directs and Penn, the talker, acts as enthusiastic narrator. The film gives a detailed account of the exhaustive efforts of Tim Jenison, an independently wealthy software inventor. He is obsessed with his hypothesis that Vermeer used 17th century optical techniques to produce his extraordinarily realistic paintings. If he is correct, the lines between art and technology may never be the same. Years of exhaustive research and labor culminate with evidence I feel inadequate to describe. If you are at all interested, Barbara and I urge you to see this unique film. It is difficult to evaluate documentary films with the same grading system used for feature films, but I will try. **GRADE A-**

**TINA:** (2021 Available for streaming on HBO Max) Told in five powerful acts, *Tina* is a two hour documentary covering the astonishing life story of 81-year-old Tina Turner, one of the biggest pop stars in the world. I must confess that I was never a fan of Tina and was only tangentially aware of her amazing life. Born Anna Mae Bullock in poverty in Tennessee, this is a tragedy-to-triumph story of survival, ultimately earning her the title Queen of Rock and Roll. Much of the Tina Turner story is well-known, including the years of emotional and physical abuse she endured at the hands of abusive husband/producer Ike Turner. She was able to escape that torturous relationship with little more than her name. In the 1980s, Turner launched one of the greatest comebacks in music history. Thankfully, her life is so interesting and full of so many big highs as well as tragic lows that it's all but impossible to make a boring movie out of it. Near the film's end, Tina hints that this documentary may be her last public appearance. She doesn't look her age, but her body shows signs of frailty following a stroke and kidney transplant that is in sharp contrast to those electrifying live performances. I recommend this movie and hope it allows you to see Turner with fresh eyes, as well as admire her artistry, survival, and resilience. I liked the movie more than Barbara, who thought it was good, but too long. **GRADE A-/B**

**TINA:** 2021/2023 (Available for streaming on MAX) Tina Turner, a music legend known as the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll", died yesterday. It seems like a perfect time to view and review the 2021 documentary titled simply: *Tina*. Spanning six decades, we hear from *Tina* a wealth of never-before-seen film footage, audio tapes, personal photos, and interviews. Told in five powerful acts, the film presents a mesmerizing, account of her life and career. The film recounts the ups and downs of the singer's life with candor and insight. It acknowledges the extreme abuse inflicted upon her during her 16 years of marriage to her former husband, Ike Turner. But this documentary is so much more than the mental and sexual abuse inflicted upon her by her former husband. We also see a woman stand up to her abuser publicly giving other women the courage to do the same. Following her divorce, she started again with little more than her name. It wasn't easy, but her remarkable rebirth took her to "a record-breaking queen of rock 'n' roll." It was one of the greatest comebacks in music history. This documentary was Tina's way of saying thank you — and goodbye — to all of us. Barbara and I loved the film. **GRADE A**

**TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY:** According to Webster, restraint means "not excessive or extravagant." Without doubt, restraint is the operative word for this John le Carré spy story set in the bleak days of the cold war. George Smiley is drawn out of retirement to find a mole in the inner circle of MI6. Gary Oldman, in an extraordinary and extraordinarily restrained performance, plays Smiley perfectly.

He will definitely please le Carré fans. The story telling is as restrained as Oldman's performance. As Smiley discovers clues that point to the mole, we, the audience, are left completely in the dark. We know that Smiley is getting close, but we have no idea where he is headed. I assume that when you're in the spy business, control is everything, especially control of your emotions and reactions. Oldman is very good at that. So are Colin Firth, Ciarán Hinds, Toby Jones and David Dencik, who comprise the group under investigation. One of them is the mole. At times we suspect each of them. John Hurt is, as always, excellent as Smiley's former boss, Control. We see him mostly in flashbacks. This is a cerebral spy story, with only a couple of shootings and no chases or explosions. I suppose young people will not like it, since they have grown up with the *Mission Impossible* and *Bourne* movies. Even Gary said he frequently felt irritated at the intentional obtuseness of the story. Irritated perhaps, but he was never bored because the actors are so interesting to watch. However, he can't grade the movie higher than a C, while I liked it better. There is a bit of spy slang in it that can be difficult to decipher, but readers of the books probably won't have a problem with it. **GRADE B/C** (In 1979, Alec Guinness played George Smiley in a BBC series with the same title.)

**A THOUSAND AND ONE:** 2023 (Streaming available with a subscription on Amazon Prime Video or for rental on Vudu or Apple TV) *A Thousand and One* offers a poignant New York story of survival. Set in the 1990s and 2000s, it follows a single mother, Inez, who decides to take a boy out of the foster care system and raise him as her son. The two struggle with life as they set out to reclaim their sense of home, identity, and stability in a rapidly changing New York City. *A Thousand and One* is an American drama written and directed by A. V. Rockwell in her feature directorial debut. It premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Prize. Critics loved it as evidenced by an impressive 97% on the Rotten Tomato's Tomatometer based on 124 reviews. The film also received critical acclaim and was named one of the top ten independent films of 2023 by the National Board of Review. A word about the film's title: *A Thousand and One* was the address of their apartment (with a missing number 10 01) that they lived in for years. It also refers to the never-ending obstacles Inez had to overcome in her efforts to give her son, Terry, a better life than she had. It's not a coincidence that the movie is set in the era of Mayor Rudy Giuliani who would go on to be known nationally because of his racism. He was also the architect for the controversial law-and-order race-based "stop-and-frisk policies." The movie was not based on a single true story, but it will be all too familiar for those who grew up black and poor in a big city. It would be hard to deny that the story would have a greater emotional impact on someone with that unfortunate background, but it also gives a thought-provoking perspective on poverty that even the luckiest among us could learn from. Barbara and I were especially impressed with the work of Teyana Taylor who played Inez. Taylor is a singer-dancer-turned thespian. This was her first leading role in film and I hope it turns out to be her breakout performance. *A Thousand and One* was not an easy movie to summarize and it is not easy to grade. **GRADE A-** Usually when I grade a film **A**, I am not in doubt. I have been entertained and/or emotionally moved. With this film, I can't claim to have been entertained and I fear that some of our readers will find it a difficult movie to watch. Barbara grades it lower than I did. **GRADES A/B**

**TO ALL THE BOYS: ALWAYS AND FOREVER** (2021 on Netflix) It takes a lot to get me excited about teenage romance, and this movie didn't do it for me. Granted, it's the third movie in a rom-com trilogy, but it didn't make me want to see the first two movies. Our local critic allowed that it's "pretty corny," but then she went on to say, "But what did you expect?" I expected better. After all, she did give the movie 4 out of 5 stars. The two teen-lovers were adorable, and the ending almost won me over, but getting there was painful. The chemistry between Lana Condor and Noah Centineo has apparently grown over the years, at least according to our Lauren Seria. One of the critics on Rotten Tomatoes said that the movie is "kind of an eye-roller for anyone over 25," and Gary and I are very much over 25. The first movie of the trilogy was an overnight YA classic, and I think my junior-high self would have loved it. Gary and I just wanted it to be over. **GRADE C-**

**TO THE BONE** (2017-Netflix) This movie is based on the real-life experiences of writer/director Marti Noxon. It tells the story of Ellen (played by Lilli Collins) and her battle with anorexia. Ellen enters a group home run by an unconventional doctor (played by Keanu Reeves) where she and the other residents go on a sometimes funny, sometimes harrowing journey through their addictions. Beefing up and slimming down for roles is all part of the job of an actor. But for Collins, 28, there was an added danger: She wanted to look like someone with anorexia, years after overcoming her own disordered eating, which included consuming nearly nothing, using diet pills and throwing up. "I personally knew that this was something I needed to do to tell this story," says Collins, who struggled with both anorexia and bulimia. "I wanted to be able to best exert my experiences on (Ellen) by going to the lengths I felt comfortable going to as an actor." She won't disclose how much she lost, "but I was held accountable by a nutritionist, by (our director), by my mother, by our producer," she says. She did, indeed, look the part of an anorexic, and that added much to this Netflix movie. It was nice to see Carrie Preston (Elsbeth Tascioni on *The Good Wife*) playing Ellen's concerned stepmother and Lilly Taylor playing her mother. **GRADE B**

**THE TO DO LIST:** (2013) This was a film Barbara and I wanted to like. Sadly, we didn't. Set in the summer of 1993 in Boise, Idaho, Brandy, a high school valedictorian, feels prepared for college except for sexual experience. She wants to shed her uptight image and her virginity before taking on college, so she uses her organized brain to compile a checklist of sexual escapades. The idea doesn't sound bad, and Brandy is played by Aubrey Plaza. We both saw Aubrey in her first major big screen role, *Safety Not Guaranteed*. We loved her performance and gave that independent film an "A". Some critics liked this movie and we heard laughs in the theater, but for us *The To Do List* just didn't work. Maybe we just don't have a high tolerance for raunchy sex comedies (we didn't care much for *Superbad* either). But I like to think a more likely explanation is that this film just wasn't funny or fun. The best scenes were when Connie Britton and Clark Gregg, playing the parents of Brandy, had a few moments of screen time. You may have guessed we can't give this film high marks. **GRADE D**

**TO LESLIE:** (2022 Available for streaming on Netflix) Inspired by true events, this two hour film is a heartrending study of addiction and redemption. A West Texas single mother wins the lottery and squanders it just as fast, leaving behind a world of heartbreak. The film stars British actresses Andrea Riseborough as Leslie Rowland, a single mother and alcoholic who squanders all the prize money she received after winning \$190,000 in the lottery. She hoped the money would change her life, but six years later the money is gone and she is a raging drunk, unable to stay put in one place or hold down a job. Riseborough's gut-wrenching performance cannot be overstated and she is backed up by a powerful supporting cast including Allison Janney, Mark Maron and Stephen Root. The movie follows Leslie's troubled life, as she battles addiction and loneliness. Unwelcome and unwanted by those she wronged, it's a lonely motel clerk named Sweeney (Marc Maron) who takes a chance when no one else will. With his support, Leslie comes face to face with

the consequences of her actions, a life of regret, and if she doesn't blow it, a second chance to make a good life for her and her son. Critics loved the movie giving it 93% from 103 reviews. Audience scores were nearly as high as it earned 87% based on 250 ratings. Barbara and I liked it too. **GRADE B+**

**TO ROME WITH LOVE:** Woody Allen makes a movie a year, and he doesn't always hit it out of the park. This new one isn't his best, but for Woody Allen fans, it will be enjoyable. And fans of Rome will love it for the beautiful views of the eternal city. The movie is about celebrity, love and singing in the shower, but mostly it's about celebrity. In 1998, he wrote a movie titled *Celebrity*, and he is still fascinated with the subject. He explores what happens to people when they become celebrities, what happens to people who are seduced by celebrity, and what happens when celebrities are no longer famous—when people say to them, "Didn't you used to be...?" He pokes fun at the Paris Hiltons and Kim Kardashians of the world: people who are famous for being famous. In *To Rome With Love* Allen introduces us to four stories. Each one has amusing moments but they never quite coalesce into a whole. My favorite story involved Jesse Eisenberg, Greta Gerwig, Ellen Page and Alec Baldwin. I thought it was the cleverest of the four. Roberto Benigni, who won an Oscar in 1997 for his role in *Life Is Beautiful*, is amusing here as an ordinary man who suddenly finds himself famous. Fabio Armiliato, who is an important tenor on the international opera scene, adds his glorious voice to the role of a man who can only sing in the shower. (It's true. We all do sound better in the shower.) Judy Davis and Woody himself play a married couple who travel to Rome to meet their daughter's intended. Allen should take a cue from the success of last year's *Midnight In Paris* and resist casting himself in the typical Woody Allen part. He is a better writer and director than he is an actor. We couldn't decide between a Grade of B and B-, but decided on a B-. **GRADE B-**

**TOGETHER TOGETHER 2021** This is a most unusual romcom with no happily ever after. We stayed for the filmed Q and A afterwards, and the writer/director of the movie, Nikole Beckwith, said that there is romance in falling in "friend love." The average audience is obsessed with happily ever after and the typical romcom has it, but people come in and out of our lives and who is to say that friendship isn't romantic. Ed Helms plays Matt, a forty-something man who would like to become a single father. The first time we see Anna (Patty Harrison), who is a twenty-something woman, she hopes to become Matt's surrogate. Over the course of nine months we see them come together as loving friends. We don't know what their relationship will be after the baby is born, but the beauty of their connection is not diminished by that lack of knowledge. Gary and I were delighted by this unconventional and poignant story. Gary doesn't care much for Ed Helms, so he was apprehensive about the film, but afterwards he said that Helms had found the perfect role and that he was perfect in it. We both liked Patty Harrison, and thought she was excellent in the role of Anna. The supporting cast, which included a number of comics, was equally excellent. (We saw *Together Together* in a movie theater with only one other couple present.) **GRADE B+**

**TOMB RAIDER/LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER:** If you enjoy playing violent video games, you will like this movie. If the thought of watching Angelina Jolie's artificially enhanced bosom in tight spandex turns you on, you will like this movie. Roger Ebert said this film elevates "goofiness to an art form." He thought it was monumentally silly, yet wondrous to look at. Although the special effects are exciting and Jolie is rather nice to watch, the movie's appeal escaped us. Ten-year-old Nathan who went with us, thought it was a terrific movie. He wants to buy it on DVD when he saves enough money. There you have it. **GRADE C-**

**TOMMY'S HONOUR:** (2017) *Tommy's Honour* tells the true story of Old Tom Morris and his son, Young Tom who helped shape the early history of golf. As avid golfers, Barbara and I were hoping to be entranced by an "A" movie. It didn't ascend to our hopes, but that doesn't mean it isn't a good film worth seeing. Old Tom Morris and his son, Young Tom, combined to win eight of the first 12 British Opens, a tournament Old Tom founded in 1860. He was the local caddie master, club & ball maker, and greenskeeper, at the fabled Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, but wasn't allowed to set foot in the Club House. He accepted his station in life, but his son Tommy rebelled against both his father and the class system. The golf scenes are mostly authentic, right down to the little pile of sand used for golf tees in those days. Wooden tees did not come into use until the 1920's. Old Tom and Tommy, Scotland's Golf Royalty, were touched by drama and personal tragedy and much of the movie focuses on that. Non golfers can focus on that part of the film and don't need to know a chunk from a whiff to enjoy the story. This better-than-average historical drama with standout performances and beautiful rugged landscapes was directed by Jason Connery who is the son of Sean Connery, perhaps best known for portraying the character of James Bond in films between 1962 and 1983. The movie will not be easy to find on the big screen, but Barb & I think it is worth seeking out later when it is available on Amazon or Netflix. **GRADE B**

**THE TOMORROW MAN** (2019) One of our local critic warned us about this movie. He said that no one should ever go, and the critics on *Rotten Tomatoes* only gave it 57%. But, we're Blythe Danner fans, so we decided to go. We should have heeded the warning! Danner was her usual charming self, and Lithgow was good enough but his character was so disagreeable that we couldn't identify with their love story. Lithgow is Ed, who spends his life preparing for a disaster that may never come. Danner is Ronnie, who spends her life shopping for things she may never use. Since becoming geriatrics ourselves, we usually enjoy geriatric love stories, but not this time. The script was leaden and the conflicts seemed contrived. The 94 minute running time seemed oh, so much longer. Gary and I were bored, and that's the kiss of death for a movie. **GRADE C** (But only because of Blythe Danner.)

**TONI MORRISON:THE PIECES I AM:** (2019) This two hour documentary is a fitting tribute to the work of Toni Morrison, American novelist, essayist, editor, teacher and professor emeritus at Princeton University. Before her, no African American — let alone an African American woman — had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Previous recipients were William Faulkner and Ernest Hemmingway. She was also a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom. It doesn't matter whether you've read all — or any — of Morrison's books. Either way, if you see this film, you are likely to leave the theater wanting to pick one up on the way home. Fortunately there are many from which to choose. The filmmaker revisits Morrison's life and books and explores the inspiration for her writing. It is a pleasure listening to her soothing voice and it is obvious she is a born story teller. As you would expect, there are many talking heads including Oprah Winfrey and Angela Davis. They were joined by a chorus of scholars, critics and friends singing praises for her work. Morrison has had a distinguished literary career, but it has not always been easy. Even Toni Morrison had to fight off the haters. She has often been criticized for her "narrow" focus on black life and especially black women. It is an attitude with which black women are all too familiar. There is a long history of being held back because of race and/or gender. The



movie is long and we think it might have been better had it been tightened to 90 minutes. I realize that few will see it and not everyone who does will enjoy it. But Barb and I agree it is well worth seeing. **GRADE B**

**TOP FIVE:** (2014) Chris Rock made this movie with dozens of his friends. We think Chris Rock is a very funny guy, but I think we were too old for this movie. Most of the references to Rap stars and pop culture celebrities went over our heads. In the last scene it was fun for us to see, however briefly, some people we actually recognized. I assume that younger people will find this movie a lot funnier than we did. Gary admitted that several scenes in the last third of the movie were good enough to raise his grade to a C. I did get some laughs at Rock's take on fame and/or celebrity and the problems it creates. The opening scene, before even the title, is particularly funny as Rock and Rosario Dawson discuss their views of the place of race in the world today. Rock plays Andre, a comic famous for a series of movies in which he plays Hammi, a bear who is a cop. (They appear to be the kind of cop/buddy movies that we would avoid if they were real.) Rosario Dawson is Chelsea, a journalist conducting an interview with Andre on one of his most hectic days: his most recent "serious" movie is opening, and it is also the eve before his wedding to a reality TV star, played by Gabrielle Union. The new movie is about a Haitian slave revolt and it definitely is not what people expect from Andre. They are more interested in his impending marriage, much to his dismay. On this day-long interview, we learn quite a bit about Chelsea and Andre, and, in typical romcom fashion, we feel certain they will wind up together. Along the way we see scenes of Andre enjoying the excesses of celebrity, and spending time with family and friends. The "N" word is ubiquitous, but always used black on black, so apparently that is OK. In general, the vocabulary is scatological and the sex is graphic. One reviewer said, *If seeing Cedric the Entertainer naked in a threesome is amusing, then this is your kind of movie.* I think he pretty much said it all. **GRADE C**

**TOP GUN: MAVERICK:** 2022 (Prime with Paramount+) Tom Cruise and Jerry Bruckheimer have done it again, although it took them 27 years to do it. (*Top Gun* was in 1986.) After thirty years, Maverick is still pushing the envelope as a top naval test pilot when he is tapped to train Top Gun's elite graduates on a mission that demands the ultimate sacrifice from those chosen to fly it. Maverick must confront the ghosts of his past, especially when among the students is the son of his friend "Goose," who died in the first movie. Called "Rooster," he is ably played by Miles Teller. The "Iceman" (Val Kilmer) returns as Admiral Tom Kazansky, who has Maverick's back, and recommended him for the training job. Val Kilmer had throat cancer and has lost his voice, but through the magic of Sonantic, they fed hours of Kilmer's archival recordings through an A.I. to generate a voice model that is a vocal clone of the actor. It was nice to see Kilmer acting again. (Check out our review of *Val* in the Archives.) My son-in-law told me the flight scenes are thrillingly real, and as a pilot he ought to know. One of the biggest stories from behind the scenes of *Top Gun: Maverick* is the real inflight scenes that were shot. This meant actors getting into real Boeing F/A 18F Super Hornet aircrafts. Actors had to endure a rigorous training program to prepare for the film, and nearly every actor threw up. The story, though suffered by comparison with the original, although Jennifer Connelly and Tom Cruise got together in the end. It wasn't the genre that we usually like, but it is entertaining and the flight scenes were extraordinary even on our screen at home. **GRADE B+**

**TOPSY TURVY:** I was particularly looking forward to this film because I had the fun of playing Yum-Yum at the Interlochen Music Camp in Traverse City when I was 17 years old. However, I was disappointed with the first hour of the film. Both Gary and I felt that, in spite of a few good scenes, too much time was spent on developing the situation and the characters. But once Gilbert went to the Japanese exhibit and began to conceive the idea of a comic opera with Japanese characters, the film really took off. We LOVED the last hour and a half! It was a pure delight: the rehearsals, the salary discussions, the conflicts with the costume designer and the choreographer, and the notes at the end of the dress rehearsal should charm anyone who has ever taken part in a musical stage production. Jim Broadbent was a great Gilbert, a man his mother remembers as a humorous child, but who, as an adult, seemed to take little fun from his own uproarious lyrics. Arthur Sullivan, a composer who always felt that the light fluff he and Gilbert produced was not worthy of his talents, was portrayed by Allan Corduner. Mike Leigh (*Secrets & Lies*) must have great affection for Gilbert and Sullivan's works. I wonder if this film will appeal to people who have no background in their operettas. We decided that the first hour of the film was worth a C, but the last part was worth an A, so we settled on a grade of B+. **GRADE: B+**

**TOUCHING THE VOID:** (2003 Release) To say this is an enthralling film about mountain climbing sounds a bit like a British understatement. I know I won't find words powerful enough to describe it. Roger Ebert pays it tribute by confessing that he did not take a single note during the entire film. He simply sat transfixed as this incredible story of human endurance unfolded. It is the true story of Joe Simpson and Simon Yates who set out to climb the west face of Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes. We know that Simpson and Yates survived, because the movie shows them looking straight on into the camera, remembering their adventure in their own words. We also see the ordeal re-enacted by two actors and experienced climbers as stunt doubles. The film is not just completely convincing, it is compelling. Siula Grande is a little over 21,000 feet high, but the summit has been reached by no one but Simpson and Yates. By way of comparison, Mount Everest is over 29,000 feet high, but has been conquered by hundreds of climbers. I am not saying Mount Everest is an easy climb. I'm just saying, don't miss this film. **GRADE A** (Barb: Even though I knew Simpson survived his fall, it was nevertheless a gripping, nail-biting experience for me.)

**THE TOURIST:** This is an old fashioned movie that was fun to watch, but will probably not work its way very deeply into my long-term memory. The stunning beauty of Angelina Jolie held my attention for a couple of hours and the sex appeal of Johnny Depp seemed to work his magic on Barbara. It also has the magic of Paris and Venice. The Tourist is a slow paced romantic thriller filled with intrigue but probably insufficient explosions and car chases to attract young people. Paul Bettany plays a Scotland Yard cop on the trail of a faceless villain who owes the English government 744 million pounds in back taxes. The faceless villain has also stolen a lot of money from a British gangster who hires Russian henchmen to get it back. Frank Tupelo (Johnny Depp) is an American Tourist who is a math teacher from Wisconsin who gets caught up in the tangled web and the smoldering sexuality of Jolie. Barbara and I liked the film a little more than most critics. **GRADE B-**

**TOWER HEIST:** He's back! And he's funny! It's been quite a while since we've seen Eddie Murphy in a good role. Except for voicing the donkey character in the *Shrek* movies, he hasn't done much since 2006's *Dreamgirls*. This heist comedy benefits from his presence. When one of the tenants (Alan Alda) in an exclusive high-rise apartment building rips off the staff's pension fund, the building manager (Ben Stiller) conspires with a few employees and a bankrupt tenant (Matthew Broderick) to steal the money back. Since none

of them has any criminal skills, Stiller calls upon Slide (Murphy) to give them some "professional" assistance. Casey Affleck is Stiller's brother-in-law and a member of the heist team. Gabourey Sidibe, who got an Oscar nomination for her role in **Precious**, is called upon for her safe-cracking skills, and Michael Peña and Matthew Broderick round out the group. It was hard to imagine this inept crew bringing off any plan, especially one as outrageous as this one. Alda was excellent as a charming but unscrupulous financier. (Is there any other kind these days?) We had to overlook some glaring incredulities with the heist itself, although timing it with the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade was a good choice. **Tower Heist** won't rank with the best heist movies, but it did provide a few laughs and is entertaining enough to get a C+ grade from us. **GRADE C+**

**THE TOWN:** 2010 Unquestionably, this is Ben Affleck's film. He is co-writer of the screenplay, director, and leading actor in this bank-heist crime drama set in his hometown, Boston. Affleck is assisted by the outstanding acting of Jon Hamm (TV's *Mad Men*), Jeremy Renner (*The Hurt Locker*), and Rebecca Hall (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*). Barbara and I agree that this is a good movie, but not an A movie....of course very few movies reach that level of excellence. It is certainly good enough to stop questions about beginner's luck on his first directing effort in **Gone Baby Gone**. The film is almost certain to do well at the box office and it should. Affleck plays Doug MacRay, a career criminal struggling to find a way out of "the life." He is torn between his loyalty to childhood friends and his desire to start a new life. **The Town** opens with this statistic: "There are over 300 bank robberies in Boston every year. And a one-square-mile neighborhood in Boston, called Charlestown, has produced more bank and armored car robbers than anywhere in the U.S." At the end of the closing credits, mention is given to the fact that there are thousands of honest hard working citizens also living in Charlestown. Don't expect a masterpiece, but if you are looking for a solid, well directed bank heist film by a young director with a promising future, see it. **GRADE: B**

**THE TOWN:** 2010/2022 (Prime rental \$3.99) Boston bank robber Doug MacRay (Ben Affleck) falls for a woman his gang had previously taken hostage after robbing a bank of which she was the bank manager. Feigning a chance meeting with her to ensure that she can't identify them, they embark on a love connection. The movie was an adaptation of author Chuck Hogan's novel *Prince of Thieves*. This is the critics' consensus on Rotten Tomatoes: "Tense, smartly written, and wonderfully cast, it proves that Ben Affleck has rediscovered his muse -- and that he's a director to be reckoned with." A word about that incredible cast: Jeremy Renner (*The Hurt Locker*) as Affleck's friend and fellow robber, James Coughlin; John Hamm and Titus Welliver as the FBI agents on the trail of the bank robbers; Blake Lively as Coughlin's sister and former girlfriend of MacRay's; and Chris Cooper in a small but pivotal role as MacRay's father. Affleck has affection for Boston, especially the neighborhoods of South Boston, ever since he and childhood friend Matt Damon co-wrote **Good Will Hunting**. Written and the end of the film is this dedication: "Charlestown reputation as a breeding ground for armed robbers is authentic. However, this film all but ignores the great majority of Charlestown residents, past and present, who are the same good and true people found most anywhere. This movie is dedicated to them." In spite of glowing reviews, we view **The Town** as a great B movie, maybe even a B+. **GRADE B/B+**

(We had seen this one in 2010, but it didn't look at all familiar to us. So much for memory...

**TRACKS:** (2014) In 1977 Robyn Davidson, a 22 year-old writer, set off on a grueling 1700-mile trek across the sprawling deserts of western Australia. This film tells her remarkable story based on her book of the same title. Australian actress Mia Wasikowska, a favorite of ours, inhabits the role. It is a lonely journey. Mostly she has only the company of her dog and four unpredictable camels. Because she needed financial backing she reluctantly agreed to the occasional presence of a National Geographic photographer, Rick Smolan, played by Adam Driver who caught TV audience's attention with the role of Adam on the landmark HBO series *Girls*. As you might expect, the scenery is sometimes a cinematographer's dream and sometimes a challenge. It is a slow moving adventure, but a fascinating one. Why would a young woman endure the staggering loneliness, the dust, the heat, and the flies. No satisfactory answer to that question is ever offered in the film. In real life Davidson has not just refused to give a reason; she has insisted that it is a foolish question to ask. She walked across Australia for the same reason that Mallory climbed Mount Everest. "Because it's there." It was a life-changing journey and Barbara and I were glad we saw it, but we are reluctant to recommend it without some reservations. **GRADE B-**

**TRAFFIC:** Traffic is not a pretty picture, but neither is our country's War on Drugs. However, the movie is successful: The War is not. The \$19 billion we spend each year has done little if anything to stem the flow of illegal drugs. This war is not winnable, and it hurts more people than it helps. Steven Soderberg makes this point not by preaching, but by giving us three different stories. 1. Michael Douglas is Robert Wakefield, a judge who has recently been appointed as our country's new drug czar. As he struggles to understand the drug problem, his teenaged daughter is becoming addicted to crack-cocaine. Erika Christensen shines as Wakefield's daughter, Caroline. Amy Irving, in a rare screen appearance, is her mother. 2. Benicio Del Toro is Javier Rodriguez, a Tijuana policeman whose efforts to catch drug dealers are thwarted at every turn by a corrupt system. 3. Don Cheadle and Luis Guzman are two San Diego DEA agents working to build a case against a high powered drug dealer masquerading as a businessman/philanthropist. Catherine Zeta-Jones portrays the drug dealer's wife as a naive woman who, because of circumstances, learns to be ruthless. She is totally believable, and Miguel Ferrar is noteworthy as a witness whose days are numbered. These stories are only minimally intertwined. Soderberg shoots each story in a different color palette: Yellows and browns for the Mexico scenes (which are also in Spanish and subtitled), blues and grays for the Wakefield story, and full color for the San Diego tale. This unusual technique helps us switch from story to story easily. I thought the Mexican story was the most spellbinding, but I got caught up in all three. Benicio Del Toro is powerful as the Mexican cop. He received a Golden Globe nomination for best supporting actor. Don Cheadle is also a standout. The script was inspired by a five-part "Masterpiece Theater" series named Traffik, which ran 10 years ago and traced the movement of heroin from the poppy fields of Turkey to the streets of Europe. If we were to grade this movie on pure enjoyment, we would give it a B+, but as skilled moviemaking, it deserves an A. **GRADE A**

**THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH:** 2021 (Now streaming on Apple TV+--7 days free, then \$4.99/month) Based on a Shakespearian play, this filmed version was written, directed, and co-produced by Joel Coen. It marks the first of Joel's films made without his brother Ethan who, after a career of Oscar-nominated films, seems to have retired. The film stars Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand who are helped by a talented group of supporting players. This Macbeth is faster-paced than many, barely clocking in at 105 minutes, about

half of the running time for the unabridged stage play. It was shot entirely in black and white on an LA soundstage. Be prepared for a creative use of shadows, fog, and crows. If you're not familiar with the story, Macbeth, egged on by his wife, becomes consumed by his ambition to become and stay King of Scotland. Washington, sporting a salt-and-pepper beard, plays Macbeth as a world-weary general in his twilight years. McDormand plays Lady Macbeth as a behind-the-scenes manipulator. The tale's central power couple are two of the most infamous characters in literature, performed by generations of actors in staged plays and in over 30 movies. If you have ever seen the play or movie you are likely to remember the three witches in the opening scenes. They give Macbeth a prophecy that sends him on a tragic descent into murder, betrayal and guilt. In Coen's adaptation, the memorable three witches are condensed into one lonely crone played by British stage legend Kathryn Hunter. It is only when we catch her reflection in a body of water that we see the one figure multiply into three. Later in the play, the versatile Hunter also plays an old man. As is typical in Shakespeare's tragedies, the stage will be littered with dead bodies by the final curtain. Lady Macbeth, who begins as the instigator of the conspiracy to assassinate the king, gradually breaks with her husband over his murder of Macduff's family. She then falls into guilt and madness over what she has done. Macbeth's great epiphany before he dies is that success only means that you are next in line to be succeeded, and the inevitability of death means that life is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is an interesting adaptation of Shakespeare's play, but it would not be the best introduction to the Bard of Avon's work. On the other hand if you are a lover of Shakespeare, Barb's and my recommendation is: get thee hence and witness this adaptation. **GRADE B+**

**TRAINING DAY:** Two of our movieviewers raved about Denzell Washington's performance as the baddest cop in Los Angeles. (See Readers' Views.) I agree that Washington gives a bravura performance, but this is one ugly movie! And with the real life ugliness we experienced on September 11, I couldn't take the make-believe violence here. Also, I know there are bad cops in this world, but, given the 200 New York policeman who died trying to save people in the Trade Towers, I don't want to see a movie about evil cops right now. *Training Day* tells the story of one day in the life of a rookie narcotics officer named Jake Hoyt, played by Ethan Hawke. Hoyt is excited when the day starts, because he is finally going to get a chance to put away drug dealers--to arrest the bad guys. He thinks he will learn a lot from his partner, a legendary Narcotics detective named Alonzo Harris (Denzell Washington). He does learn a lot. He learns how rotten a bad cop can be. Gary thought the screenwriters did a great job creating individual scenes filled with tension and dramatic interest. However, he thought the absence of any believable connecting material made for a disjointed, confused story line. The violence of the ending would have been laughable if it hadn't been so horrible. I did not like this film! Gary gives it a B-. I can go as high as a C-, but only because both Washington & Hawke were excellent. **GRADE C-/B-**

**TRAINWRECK:** (2015) Written without a co-author and starring herself, stand-up comedian Amy Schumer may jump to a new level with this, her first feature film. It is a romantic comedy with a twist directed by Judd Apatow and well liked by critics and audiences. We agree. When Barbara and I decided to see *Trainwreck*, I warned that we should be prepared for a plethora of raunchy scenes. I can't say that the film is without "raunch", but no more than has become standard in movies today and I would say less. Considerably less than her Comedy Central sketch comedy show, *INSIDE AMY SCHUMER* which is in its third season. The film is filled with sharp humor and heart-warming moments. It exposes everyday sexism and double standards. Schumer plays Amy. Since she was an impressionable little girl, Amy's head was filled with arguments from her rascal of a dad (Colin Quinn) that monogamy isn't realistic. That philosophy led to an uninhibited life free from romantic commitment, but not terribly fulfilling. Her head is turned by a successful sports doctor beautifully played by Bill Hader who is probably best known for his work as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*. The movie is filled with cameo appearances by well-known Hollywood stars and famous sports personalities. A shortened list would include LeBron James, Marisa Tomei, Tony Roma, Matthew Broderick, Chris Evert, and Daniel Radcliffe. Special credit is well deserved by Tilda Swinton who is barely recognizable playing another of her brilliant characters who help cement her growing reputation as a chameleon. We feel sure that *Trainwreck* will give a big boost to Amy Schumer's career. **GRADE B+**

**TRAITOR:** Barbara and I are both Don Cheadle enthusiasts and we loved his low key but riveting performance in this action thriller that is also an intellectual drama. Dealing with terrorism and a war between good and evil raises many questions, and brings to mind a simple line from the film, "The truth is complex." The film takes us on an exciting chase around the globe and gives us a glimpse of the minds and strategies of extremists and how far government agencies might go to combat threats. Guy Pearce and Archie Panjabi are outstanding in supporting roles, and Jeff Daniels is effective in a small, but important performance. Barbara was impressed with the tight plotting which built the tension slowly up to the climax. She also appreciated the fact that, although there are some frightening explosions, the story does not depend on special effects. **GRADE B+**

**TRANSAMERICA:** Felicity Huffman will definitely be my choice for a Best Actress Oscar because of her outstanding performance as Bree in *Transamerica*. How difficult it must have been to be a woman playing a man trying to be a woman; to have to lower her voice so that she could sound like a man trying to raise his voice. And to do it all with grace, humor and a gentle humanity. Huffman was brilliantly up to the challenge. Just as Bree Osborne is about to have her sexual reassignment surgery, she learns that, as Stanly, she fathered a son named Toby who has been arrested in New York. Her therapist (Elizabeth Pena) suggests that she should not have her surgery until she can come to terms with the "son" issue, so Bree travels to New York to bail Toby out of juvenile detention. Ultimately, the two take a road trip across the country. Graham Greene is Calvin Two Goats, a Native American who helps them out along the way. Several critics have suggested that the film doesn't quite live up to its star. While that may be true, Huffman's performance is so good that you can't help but like the film. Kevin Zegers is excellent as Toby, and we especially enjoyed the scenes with Graham Greene. We thought writer/director, Duncan Tucker, handled the difficult subject of transsexuality with compassion and a good deal of humor. **GRADE A**

**THE TRANSPORTER:** (2002 release seen on video) He transports things, and he isn't particular what he transports. He has three unbreakable rules: never change the deal, no names, and never look in the package. When he breaks one of his own rules, he gets in big trouble. Of course, trouble is what this movie is all about. We rented the DVD because we rather liked *Transporter 2* and wanted to see the beginning of what I have no doubt will be a series. This first movie introduced Frank Martin (Jason Statham), a retired special services operative living in Nice. It also introduced Luc Besson as a suspicious police Inspector. (Besson is also the producer and co-writer.) As in *Transporter 2*, Martin manages to fight 9 or 10 men without sustaining any serious injury. The same can't be said of the men he fights. The martial arts choreography of the fights scenes is exceptional and Statham performs the maneuvers with skill and

style. And, of course, there are the obligatory car chases. The unbelievable action scenes made us laugh and I suspect that we will see **Transporter 3. THUMBS UP**

**TRANSPORTER 2:** Not the kind of movie we usually see, but we were entertaining our grandson last weekend and thought he would like it. It was actually better than we expected. Jason Statham makes a terrific tough guy, and he never carries a gun. He manages to eliminate his adversaries by using his fighting skills and whatever is at hand that can possibly be turned into a weapon. Most of the stunts are total fantasy—they could never happen, but they made us laugh. Ebert calls the film, "wall to wall with absurd action." but he, too, enjoyed it. Statham is Frank Martin, an ex-Special Forces operative living in Miami. In this film, his job is driving the son of the chief of Homeland Security to and from school. When the boy is kidnapped, Frank promises to get him back. He does, but that's not the end of the peril. Statham makes the movie work. He was memorable in two Guy Ritchie films, **Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels** (1998), and **Snatch** (2000), and he is strong and charismatic in this one. (Bit of trivia: Statham was a member of the 1988 British Olympic Diving Team and he has also done some fashion modeling.) Nathan gives this one a B+; Gary and I say B. **GRADE B**

**TRANSSIBERIAN:** (2008) When an American couple (Woody Harrelson and Emily Mortimer) traveling from China to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railway meets an outwardly friendly couple (Eduardo Noriega and Kate Mara) traveling the same route, deception soon gives way to murder in director Brad Anderson's tense tale of international intrigue. Harrelson plays an outgoing man and loving husband who is crazy about trains, hence the rail trip through Siberia. At one point, Mortimer paraphrases Tennessee Williams, saying to Harrelson, "Kill off all my demons, Roy, and my angels might die too." All of the characters seem possessed by both angels and demons, and it isn't easy to tell the good guys from the bad ones. Ben Kingsley plays a Russian cop who specializes in narcotics investigations, and he is definitely no angel, though he appears straightforward at first. The story line is not predictable and the tension builds throughout. We were on the edge of our seats. Gary was impressed and felt **Transsiberian** was better than many movies we've seen this year. This is another Holly V. recommendation. So far, she's two for two. We'd have to give this one a B+ or A-. **GRADE A-/B+**

**THE TREE OF LIFE:** When Barbara and I learned that this film with Brad Pitt and Sean Penn was being released in only one small theater in the greater Phoenix, we were puzzled. One might think it would open more widely. The first twenty minutes of the film solved the mystery. It may receive critical acclaim, but it will never be widely accepted by audiences. The Tree of Life was written and directed by Terrence Malick whose last writing and directing effort brought us *The New World* (2005). The first line of my review for that film was, "Watching this film for 2 hours and 15 minutes is like watching maize grow, only slower. The Tree of Life won the top honor at the Cannes Film Festival in May, 2011. Many professional critics admired and loved the film. Roger Ebert graded it "A" and said it was a film of vast ambition and deep humility. Quotes from other critics who loved the film include "ambitious and spectacular," "a transcendent achievement," and "insightful and ecstatic filmmaking. Color me shallow, but I side more with the critic who wrote, "I admire The Tree of Life - in the same way I admire the white-haired lady in the Guinness Book of World Records with 28-foot fingernails. By the way, after "The Tree of Life," you'll probably have to cut your nails..." Malick takes us on a time skipping journey of faith, creation, love, and family. For the first twenty or more minutes a brilliant and creative light show takes us "slowly" from the birth of the universe, through Jurassic riverbeds, and eventually to a small 1950's Texas town and memory images of a sometimes happy family. Pitt plays the father who is the hunter-gatherer in the era of Ike, big cars, TV's and DDT. In fact, the most memorable scene in the movie for me was a haunting shot of innocent neighborhood kids playing in a fog of DDT as a city truck rolls down the street spraying insecticide. The biggest name in the film, Brad Pitt, does not have a lot of screen time, and Sean Penn has less screen time than bit parts in most Hollywood films. In grading this film, Barb is more forgiving than I. **GRADE D+/C-**

(Note: Reader Lee U., Phx said that his personal view was more succinct than mine. He called it "a pretentious piece of shit")

**THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7 (2020)** Fifty years after the infamous conspiracy trial took place, it has finally been made into a first-class film. Written and Directed by Aaron Sorkin, **The Trial of the Chicago 7** is now available on Netflix. Sorkin is well known for his clever banter and crisp rapid-fire dialogue. He has created intelligent and entertaining television including **The West Wing** (1999-2006), **Sports Night** (1998-2000), and **The Newsroom** (2012-2014). This film is an instructive bit of history focused on charges arising from the 1968 riots that took place in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention when hippies and Yippies protesting the Vietnam War clashed with Chicago police. Shocking images of police firing teargas and beating demonstrators with their nightsticks played on network television news. A terrified older generation tended to side with police while younger people tended to side with the battered protesters. In the immediate aftermath of those riots, Attorney General Ramsey Clark of the Johnson administration had declined to press charges, having determined that the police had started the rioting. But once President Richard Nixon took office, the new attorney general, John Mitchell, decided to try the organizers on charges of conspiracy. In the first minutes of the film, Sorkin introduces the defendants through a series of flashback vignettes, which communicate their personalities and points of view. Then in a screenplay lasting just a little over two hours he covers some of the high-points of a trial that dragged on for five months. The trial started with 8 defendants including Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panthers who wasn't even in Chicago during the riots and had nothing to do with planning the protest. At one point Seale was bound and gagged for his frequent outbursts but was later severed from the case bringing the number of defendants to seven... **The Chicago Seven**. Sorkin put together a deep bench of acting talent with an impressive all-star ensemble. It is an extremely powerful film and incredibly relevant to where our divided nation is today. **The Trial of the Chicago 7** is a movie about a grotesque miscarriage of justice from 50 years ago. Both Barbara and I were deeply moved by this movie and we were left wondering, has our society learned nothing in the last half century? **GRADE A**

**THE TRIP:** (2010/2014-1) Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon play themselves in this combination character study and travelogue. Coogan is asked by *The Observer* to tour some of England's finest restaurants. When his girlfriend can't accompany him, he asks his friend, Brydon, to join him for the week's tour. It is a witty, mostly improvised ride through the North England countryside, with each man playing a loose version of himself. Apparently, they were reprising their roles in **Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story**, a movie we have not seen. Michael Winterbottom directed both movies. Although we didn't get all the references, we were very entertained by the conversations, the songs, the poems and the impressions both did in an effort to outdo each other. We laughed often. Foodies will enjoy the restaurant menus, and Anglophiles will enjoy the scenery and the history of the area. This is an unusual film—probably not everyone's cup of tea, but we liked it. Reader RB H., CA, recommended the movie and we thank him for it. **GRADE B**

**THE TRIP TO GREECE** (2020 rental on Amazon Prime): In this, the 4th trip in the series of films, actors Rob Brydon and Steve Coogan travel from Troy to Ithaca following in the footsteps of Odysseus. We traveled to Greece in 1994 and so we were anxious to watch this movie. We didn't recognize much except for the Earth's navel at Delphi. (Among the Ancient Greeks, it was a widespread belief that Delphi was the center of the world.) The movie followed the familiar format—the two friends eat wonderful food and talk about a variety of topics. Their conversations are mostly amusing. They know a lot about movies and they often imitate actors. Brydon is the best at mimicking actors, but Coogan is no slouch either. Coogan's career has morphed from comedian to serious actor, and he mentions *Stan & Ollie*, the 2018 movie in which he played Stan Laurel. There are also many mentions of Coogan's seven Bafta awards, mostly by Coogan. (The Bafta is the British equivalent to our Oscar.) Along the way, they talk about the scenes they encounter on their travels. Brydon asks Coogan if he will miss him after the trip is over, and Coogan replies, "Yes and no." He goes on to explain, "Your conversations can sometimes be exhausting." We are with Coogan on that. But then the movie takes a serious turn. Coogan's father, who has been in the hospital, dies, and he cuts the trip short to hurra home. Gary's father also died when we were in Greece. We were in Heraklion, on Crete when we got the news. The parallel sobered us quickly and we will remember that when we think of the film. However, we can only give the movie a grade of B. **GRADE B**



**TRISTRAM SHANDY, A COCK AND BULL STORY:** In retrospect it may have been a mistake to see this film the day following our Academy Awards Party. Barbara had difficulty staying awake and I was "underwhelmed." My expectations were high after reading Roger Ebert's glowing review. The film is about the making of a movie that is adapted from the notoriously unfilmable English literature masterpiece, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, written by Laurence Sterne. I have never read the novel and I get the impression few have, including the cast and crew filming the impossible adaptation. Ebert compares the effort to *This Is Spinal Tap*, which led to my high expectations. There were several humorous scenes, but too for my taste. Two of the funniest were one scene playing behind the opening credits and another playing during the closing credits. The material between these two scenes demanded more focus than Barbara could sustain and led to my mediocre grade. **GRADE: C**

**TROY:** This testosterone-fueled epic is a Hollywood version of the Trojan War loosely, I repeat, loosely, based on Homer's *Iliad*. Brad Pitt is Achilles, the Greek hero-warrior. His fight scenes were exciting, although some of his moves look like they came from a modern martial-arts movie. We thought Pitt was good in the role of Achilles, although some critics thought he looked more like a surfer dude than a Greek warrior. He is incredibly buffed and I thought he was quite lovely to look at. Eric Bana (*The Hulk*) is Hector, Troy's hero-warrior, and the battle between Achilles and Hector is one of the film's high points. You know the basic plot: Paris (Orlando Bloom), Prince of Troy, steals Helen (Diane Kruger) away from her husband, Menelaus (Brendan Gleeson) who asks his brother, Agamemnom (Brian Cox), to help him get her back. Agamemnom is just waiting for an excuse to wage war against Troy so he assembles all of Greece's city-state kings to join him. (Sound familiar?) In Homer's epic, the war lasted ten years: In the Hollywood version it lasts a couple of days, or 162 minutes of film time. In our opinion, too much time was spent on the battle scenes, which are impossible to follow, and surprisingly bloodless. Peter O'Toole is Priam, the King of Troy, and the best scene in the movie is one between Priam and Achilles. O'Toole can act circles around most of these younger actors! Julie Christie makes a cameo appearance as the mother of Achilles. We especially liked the humanity of Odysseus (Sean Bean). He had one line that was memorable: "In war, young men die and old men talk." Wolfgang Peterson directed *Troy*, which is the most expensive movie ever made, coming in at just under 200 Million. We fidgeted a bit during the battle scenes, but the last part of the film was better and earned the film a B rating from us. **GRADE B**

**TROPIC THUNDER:** It's difficult to parody a film genre that is already over the top. The gunfire and explosions in this movie about the making of a war movie look exactly like those in any legitimate war movie. It is easier to exaggerate the actors, agents producers, and film crew and the film does this quite well. We thought the pyromaniacal special effects guy was particularly funny. The film crew is in Viet Nam making the most expensive war movie ever made. (It's interesting that *Tropic Thunder* is the most expensive "R" rated comedy ever made.) It is based on a novel by a soldier who lost his hands fighting the Viet Cong. Nick Nolte is great as the author who wants the film to be authentic and suggests putting the actors on their own in the jungle. The incredibly self-absorbed actors are headed by Tugg Speedman (Ben Stiller), an action hero whose career is on the wane. He tried unsuccessfully for an Oscar by playing a mentally challenged farmhand, but as Kirk Lazarus (Robert Downey Jr.) tells him, "You should never go full retard. Just ask Sean Penn." Lazarus is a renowned Australian actor who has had his skin chemically darkened in order to play a black Sergeant. He is, not surprisingly, terrific. Brandon T. Jackson is Alpa Chino (say the name out loud) a rap star who wants to be a serious actor. His complaint is that the film has one good part for a black actor and "they gave it to a white guy from Australia." Jack Black plays a comic actor who is famous for playing every member of a family who are all fat and who all fart a lot. Jay Burachel rounds out the military company playing "the kid." You will be surprised by Tom Cruise who plays a comically profane producer and does a dance that is very amusing. Matthew McConaughey is Speedman's agent. Director and co-writer Stiller throws it all out there. Sometimes he hits, and sometimes he misses. But we did laugh frequently and give it a solid B. Actually, some of the funniest bits come at the beginning of the film when we see pretend trailers for movies starring Tugg Speedman et al. Be warned, though, that the film deserves the "R" rating it got. **GRADE B**

**TRUE GRIT:** Last year Jeff Bridges won an Oscar for playing a drunken singing cowboy, Bad Blake, in *Crazy Heart*. This year he has a chance to win another Oscar for playing a drunken old one-eyed cowboy, Rooster Cogburn, in *True Grit*. Bridges is superb in both roles and you will see little or no resemblance in the two. If you are as old as I am and have a good memory, as I don't, you may remember John Wayne playing Rooster Cogburn in a 1969 movie with the same title. The Coen brothers, Joel and Ethan, took on a risky venture. Making a Western these days is risky enough, but making a film that was headlined by John Wayne may increase the risk exponentially. Barbara and I agree that they pulled it off and have made an excellent film that will play well to critics, as well as Bridges, Coen brothers, and western fans. Even though it got no mention in the Golden Globe Awards, I will take the risk of predicting they will do better at the Academy Awards this year. A determined fourteen-year-old, Mattie Ross played by newcomer Hailee Steinfeld, is seeking justice after her father was murdered by the cowardly Tom Chaney, played by award winning Josh Brolin. Rooster Cogburn, played by award winning Jeff Bridges, is reluctantly joined by Texas Ranger La Bouef, played by award winning Matt Damon, to find, capture, and bring to justice the cowardly varmint. It is an old and simple story, but the screenplay is interesting, the acting excellent,

and the scenery spectacular. One of our regular readers was bothered by the stilted 19th century language used in the film, but still enjoyed it. It is Mattie's story, but the star-studded cast helps to elevate it to one of the better films of the year. **GRADE B+** (Note from Barb: The background music featured the song, *Leaning On The Everlasting Arms*, and everytime I heard it, I was reminded of that wonderful old movie, *The Night of the Hunter* with Robert Mitchum as a murderous preacher.)

**THE TRUFFLE HUNTERS:** 2020 but released in USA 2021 (We saw it on Starz, but you can buy it on Prime for \$12.99) This slow-moving but charming film explores a world most viewers will know nothing about. Set in the Piedmont region of Italy, it follows several old men and their truffle-hunting dogs as they hunt for the very rare and expensive White Truffles. It's a simple life as *The Truffle Hunters* roam the misty picture-pretty forests of Piedmont, and haggle with buyers in town. But there's trouble afoot. The men complain not only about the greed of other men, but about poisoned bait left by men who want to kill their dogs. And they do love their dogs! One of the hunters wants to stop, because, as one RT critic put it, "almost anything can be destroyed by money." The film is subtitled, and we had to watch in several sittings. If we had seen it in a theatre we would have enjoyed the beauty of the filming. Every scene was like a beautiful painting, and a large screen would have enhanced that. The critics of RT gave the film a 97%, but audiences, probably because it bored them a bit, gave it only 77%. It's difficult to grade, but Gary said that considering the slowness, he wouldn't give the movie an A. We settled on a grade of B for streaming it. **GRADE B**

**Ann Hornaday, film critic--The Washington Post**

*The Truffle Hunters* is at its best when the camera simply stays with the men and their cherished animals — symbols not just of a sadly disappearing way of life, but of a relationship of mutual care and stewardship that isn't quaintly sentimental as much as a matter of life or death.

**TRUMAN** (2015 released in 2017) At one point, this Spanish sub-titled movie got an astounding 100% from Rotten Tomatoes' critics. We agree that it is a wonderful movie. The question it asks is relevant for all: How do you say goodbye to your best friend? *Truman* is about love, friendship and death. In lesser hands, it could be trite and maudlin, but the director, writers and actors avoid that pitfall beautifully. There is not a mawkish moment in the film, and a surprising number of laughs. Tomás has come to Madrid to spend four days with his friend, Julian, who has decided to forego chemotherapy and let nature take its course. I should mention that Julian has a dog named "Truman," and he is determined to find an adoptive home for his beloved pet. Along the way we meet Julian's cousin, son and ex-wife as well as his doctor and Truman's veterinarian. The two friends are very different: Tomás, a college professor, likes to have a plan, but Julian, an actor and former matinee idol, is spontaneity personified. The two actors are brilliant and the writing is flawless. It is no wonder that the film won 29 awards. The time that Tomás and Julian spend together is both sad and delightful, and that is a winning combination. We urge you to make every effort to see *Truman*. **GRADE A**

**TRUMBO:** (2015) *The blacklist was a time of evil, and no one on either side who survived it came through untouched by evil.* The quote is from Dalton Trumbo's speech when he accepted the Screen Writers Guild Laurel Award in 1970. It had been a long road for Trumbo who, with the rest of the Hollywood Ten, was blacklisted in the 1940s for connections to Communism. After receiving a subpoena to testify before \*The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the writer served 11 months in jail for refusing, on principle, to answer the Committee's questions. Released from prison, Trumbo also refuses to stop writing, he just stops putting his name on the scripts. The Blacklist thus created a black market of scripts that were produced under pseudonyms. However, it was the efforts of those banned writers who kept writing that eventually resulted in the death of the Blacklist. Bryan Cranston is Dalton Trumbo and his performance may make people forget Walter White of TV's *Breaking Bad*. Diane Lane, a favorite of ours, plays Trumbo's wife, Cleo, and Elle Fanning is his older daughter, Niki as a teenager. Both are excellent. Since adding nine more characters might make the film a bit crowded, the screenwriter created the character of Arlen Hird, nicely played by Louis CK. He's a composite of five real-life communist screenwriters who knew Trumbo during that terrible time. Helen Mirren is terrific as the red-baiting gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, and others actors portray John Wayne, Edward G. Robinson and Kirk Douglas. Trumbo's real-life daughters, Niki and Mitzie, were heavily involved in the creation of the movie's script, based on Bruce Cook's book, *Dalton Trumbo*, so I suspect the effect that the writer's prison term and subsequent blacklist had on the family was fairly accurate. They did not come through it untouched. Most of those blacklisted were members of the Communist Party, but they were not un-American. In the film's press notes, Niki said that being a communist in the '40s was totally different than what it means now. It "meant that you were pro-labor and anti-Jim Crow, and you fought for civil rights for African Americans," she said. "It had nothing to do with Russia and everything to do with how an already great country could improve itself." Gary was thrilled with *Trumbo*, but I had reservations. They were not with the story, nor with my belief that we must remember when America lost its way so that perhaps we can find a better way in the future. My reservations had to do with Cranston, who at times looked to me like he was "acting" Trumbo rather than being the man. **GRADE A/A-**

**TRUST ME:** (2014) Clark Gregg wrote, directed, and stars in this look at the seedier and greedier side of Hollywood. You may or may not recognize the name, but you will probably recognize the face as Gregg has had dozens of roles on TV and in films over the past twenty-five years. Here he plays Howard Holloway, former child actor turned agent for child actors whose dream of making it big in Hollywood eluded him all his life. The trailers and posters suggest that the film is a feel good comedy. That is a little misleading. Although there are several humorous moments, the focus is more on the dark side of Hollywood with its backstabbing dirty deals, overbearing parents of child actors, and exploitation of anyone standing in the way of making a buck. Barbara and I were especially impressed with the parade of talented supporting actors playing small roles: Amanda Peet, Sam Rockwell, Allison Janney, Felicity Huffman and her husband William H. Macy, and Molly Shannon. Holloway makes a lucky discovery of a 13-year-old acting prodigy. It looks like he is about to close the deal of a lifetime which could catapult him into the big time. The actress playing the young acting prodigy is fifteen-year-old Saxon Sharbino and she is excellent. Clark Gregg is also outstanding in the movie he directed and also wrote. This is not an easy film to grade and professional reviews have been mixed. Barbara and I agree it is better than a C, but not an A. **GRADE B**

**TRUTH:** It has received mixed reviews, but I found *Truth* an engrossing political docudrama worth seeing. The film, based on a book by Mary Mapes, focuses on the last days of news anchor Dan Rather (Robert Redford) and producer Mapes (Cate Blanchett) at CBS News. The last time Redford played a legendary journalist was in 1976 when he played Bob Woodward in *All The President's Men*. With a runtime of 125 minutes (It seemed much shorter to me), the movie details the events surrounding a 2004 CBS 60 Minutes report

that then president George W. Bush had used his connections during the Vietnam War to land a no-show job in the Texas Air National Guard. Hot controversy erupted when the 60 Minute story was challenged as being politically biased and the supporting documents forgeries. The ensuing scandal ruined the career of Dan Rather as well as Mary Mapes. Since the film is based on Mapes' book, it should come as no surprise that the scandal is told from her viewpoint. It should also come as no surprise to those who know her work, that Blanchett is absolutely electrifying in her portrayal of Mapes. Even though this is a gripping drama with strong performances and able direction from first time director James Vanderbilt who also wrote the screenplay, I fear it will not receive as wide a distribution as it deserves... at least IMHO. I grade the movie higher than Barbara. **GRADE A-/B**  
(**Barb's Note:** Although I agree with the Mapes's POV. I did feel that the film was a bit of a polemic. Also, I felt that Redford did nothing to channel Dan Rather. However, I do agree that Blanchett was terrific, and I did enjoy the story.)

**THE TRUTH VS ALEX JONES:** (2024 Available for streaming on Max, HBO, Hulu and Amazon Prime Video.) If you chose to view this two hour 2024 HBO Documentary, I must warn you that it is likely to be one of the most infuriating films you see all year. The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was a mass shooting that occurred on December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut. Twenty children and six adults were murdered in the span of eight minutes. The documentary shows how, just as the parents were dealing with unfathomable grief, Alex Jones, through his broadcasts, began promoting the idea that the Sandy Hook shooting was a hoax. For years, Jones questioned the legitimacy of the mass murder, calling parents actors and claiming the children were still alive or never existed. His denial of the murders increased traffic to his website, INFOWARS, generating millions of dollars in revenue. This documentary takes us inside courtrooms in Texas and Connecticut to the trials against Jones, who was found liable for in a combined \$1.5 billion in damages. The rulings were quickly followed by Jones declaring bankruptcy. On top of grieving from the loss of their children, parents faced rampant harassment, including threats of rape and death from Jones' followers. As things currently stand, InfoWars is still spewing out misinformation and the families haven't seen a dime of the money owed them. The years of lies has caused some 24 percent of Americans to believe that the massacre at Sandy Hook was either definitely or partially staged. The film raises many questions we are left to grapple with: Why do so many Americans choose to believe conspiracies? More importantly, can we ever stop the distribution of fake news? How can so many people be so fooled by the 21st-century equivalent of a snake oil salesman? Unsubstantiated fabrications swept the country like a plague, destroying rational thinking and sparking an "us-versus-them" mentality that threatens to derail our democracy. Does truth even matter anymore? We should all fear the answer. At the time of writing this review only 12 professional critics have contributed to Rotten Tomatoes, but they all seem to like the documentary. It scored 100% on the Tomatometer. Rising above our anger and grief, Barbara and I liked it too. **GRADE A**

**TSOTSI:** The word "tsotsi" means "thug" in South African patios, and that's precisely what Tsotsi is: a thug who robs and kills with an icy detachment. He and his gang live in a shanty town in Soweto where the grimy streets team with people desperately trying to survive. When one of his cohorts accuses him of having no decency, he erupts in violence. One night, working alone, Tsotsi steals a car, shooting the woman driver. Later, he discovers a baby in the back seat. That baby changes Tsotsi's life. The movie, which won the Oscar for best foreign film, is a touching story of redemption. It is based on a novel by the acclaimed playwright Athol Fugard (*Boseman and Lena, Master Harold and the Boys*). The actor who plays Tsotsi (Presley Chweneyagae) is brilliant—he totally inhabits the role. You never catch him "acting." Gary read that he had done some community theater work, but this was his first movie. Credit must be given to director, Gavin Hood, for helping Chweneyagae make the transition from stage to film. Hood is a South African who paid his dues by appearing in a series of B-movies before traveling to Los Angeles to study film at U.C.L.A. Beautifully photographed and acted, this is a memorable film. **GRADE B+ -- Tagline: In this world... redemption just comes once**

**TULLY:** (2018) Written by Academy Award Winning screenwriter Diablo Cody and starring Academy Award winning actress Charlize Theron, this funny, profound and hugely entertaining movie is not only worth seeing but worth discussing afterward. In the 2003 film *Monster*, Theron won an Oscar after putting on 50 pounds to realistically play a serial killer. She shed the 50 pounds only to put them on again to give a brutally realistic portrayal of a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown in *Tully*. I will be disappointed if she isn't at least nominated for another Oscar for her amazing work in this film. Theron stars as Marlo, a mother of three including a precocious 8-year-old daughter, a special-needs son, and a newborn. We see a blend humor and honesty thanks to the insightful writing of Cody and the outstanding work of Theron. Also important to the film is Tully, a "night nanny" (Mackenzie Davis) who bonds with Marlo. In a supporting role Ron Livingston plays her husband. There is an important surprise that comes late in the film and which I will not reveal. Barbara and I hope you are able to see this unusual film. **GRADE A**

**TUMBLEWEEDS:** This was a good movie with which to start the new Century. Its story line is similar to the recent *Anywhere But Here*, with Susan Sarandon, but we thought this was the better movie. The daughter in this mother daughter story is only 12 years old and most of the time she actually likes her mother. In *Tumbleweeds*, Janet McTeer, who won a Tony for her performance in *A Dolls House* on Broadway, is Mary Jo Walker. Kimberly Brown is Ava, her daughter. Mary Jo has a habit of marrying the wrong man and running away from what inevitably turns out to be a bad situation. She and Ava jump in the car and drive off to a new life. Only the next life seems remarkably like the life they just left. Running from her most recent mistake, they wind up in San Diego. Before long Janet and Ave move in with a truck driver Mary Jo thinks he looks like the Marlboro Man. Jay O. Sanders plays Dan, a co-worker of Mary Jos who is without doubt the right man for her. We can only hope she will come to realize it. Dans wife died in an accident and the scene where he tells Ava about his wifes death is one of the best in the film. McTeer is totally believable. She is funny and vulnerable and her relationship with Ava is unique and charming. Brown is a lovely young girl who holds her own with McTeer. They create characters you can care about. **GRADE: B+**

**TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY:** 1990 (Amazon rental @ 1.99) I picked up a book at the library the other day called *Madly, Deeply*. It's Alan Rickman's (*Die Hard* and many others) diaries with a foreword by Emma Thompson. (She played his wife in *Love, Actually*.) The book reminded me of *Truly Madly Deeply*, a movie I remember fondly, so I decided to watch it again. Memory is a funny thing! I don't think I liked it as much as my memory of it, but it was still pretty good. He plays opposite the luminous Juliet Stevenson in this movie. It's about a woman who misses her dead lover, a cellist, so much she brings him back to her from the hereafter. She's ecstatic, at first. He's still dead of course, and always cold, but, when he brings his buddies--all dead musicians—to have an orchestra to play with, she begins to think she could move on. On Rotten Tomatoes, the Critics Consensus is: "Largely thanks to charming performances from Alan Rickman

and Juliet Stevenson, *Truly Madly Deeply* is an afterlife romance with infectious spirit." Try the movie. You might like it. At least you'll see Rickman and Stevenson in their prime! **GRADE B+**

**TURN ME ON, DAMMIT!** (2011) This is a charming little coming-of-age comedy from Norway. It is subtitled and the running time is only 1 hr. 15 min. It will not be easy to find, but Barbara and I enjoyed it and think it may be worth the extra effort, especially if you are fond of foreign films. Alma is a sexually curious fifteen year old who is consumed by her raging hormones that exacerbate her vivid imagination and active fantasy life. Alma and her best friend Sara live in a stultifying little town, a place they loathe so much that every time their school bus passes the sign that names it, they flip it the bird. Alma's life is complicated when Artur, a leading character in her sexual fantasies, makes a crude and awkward advance. Alma makes the mistake of telling her incredulous friends who not only refuse to believe her but also spread rumors at school. Suddenly Alma is an outcast and the rest of the film is a compassionate treatment of Alma's predicament and its resolution. It was refreshing to see a more realistic treatment of material I feel confident Hollywood would butcher. **GRADE B**

**TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN:** 2024 (Max) I listened to the novel by John Green and remembered how I loved it, but not much else about it. Gary, who didn't read the book, came to the movie without any expectations. He liked the movie, but I loved it, probably because I remembered the book. It's 17-year-old protagonist, Aza Holmes (Isabela Merced) has a severe case of OCD. She wishes she could be "normal," but she is obsessed with microbes, thinking that they are invading her body making her sick. Her thoughts frequently spiral out of control. She has a best friend, Daisy (Cree), who sympathetically understands Aza, although Aza's self-centeredness sometimes irritates her. Both Merced and Cree are outstanding playing flawed, yet empathetic characters. When Aza reconnects with Davis (Felix Mallard), her childhood crush, she is confronted with fundamental questions about her potential for love, happiness, friendship, and hope. Kudos to Hannah Marks, the director for finding such a creative way of showing Aza's thought patterns. *Turtles*, to its credit, never locates a specific source of Aza's troubles--perhaps it has something to do with her father's death. Nor does it try to unveil a solution to her suffering. There is a mystery involving Davis's father, but that is incidental. Gary thought that Mallard did a nice job playing Davis, Aza's love interest, but mostly because of a heartbreaking performance by Merced as Aza who gave the movie a B+. **GRADE B+**

**TURTLES CAN FLY:** (2004 release seen on video) This is a powerful piece of filmmaking with incredible performances from a cast made up mostly of children and teens from a Kurdish village in Iraq. The time is a week before the U.S. invasion. Most of the children are refugees who support themselves by disarming land mines and selling them to arms dealers in a nearby town. The children are so believable that the film plays like a documentary. The film does not take a political position, but simply shows the harsh realities of war and poverty. It isn't pretty, but if you chose to view it, its impact will be profound. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP!**

**THE TV SET:** (2006 on DVD) Netflix sent us this film by mistake, but we decided to watch it. Directed and written by Jake Kasden (*Walk Hard*), it is the story of a TV pilot as it goes through the Network process of casting, production and finally airing. David Duchovny is the hapless writer who has to watch his creation undergo changes demanded by the studio "Suits." He suffers as his clever and creative concept turns into something he wants to disown. Sigourney Weaver is a riot as the Director of Programming for the network, and Ioan Gruffudd is a studio exec who tries to be supportive, but eventually bows to pressure from above. The tagline for the film is, *A place where dreams are canceled.* We enjoyed the film and give it a **THUMBS UP**

**TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS:** Sandra Bullock made a big splash in the movie, *Speed*, but her subsequent films were all disappointments to us. In every one she seemed to play "cute," but not much else. In *28 Days* she has a chance to stretch her acting muscles, and she does quite well. We enjoyed her performance as Gwen, an alcoholic young woman whose antics result in her being sentenced to 28 days in a drug rehabilitation center. Bullock was believable as someone who uses her quick wit to avoid facing her disease. Dominic West is good in an unsympathetic part as her boyfriend, Jasper, and Viggo Mortensen is Eddie Boone, a man she meets in rehab. We thought Betty Thomas's direction was well paced and quite creative: we especially liked the way she handled the flashback scenes. Elizabeth Perkins is Lily, Gwen's older sister. They have an emotional scene together that was very well done. Steve Buscemi plays is straight as a drug rehab counselor. While some of the film is predictable, it avoids many of the rehab cliches we've seen in other films. It was written by Suzannah Grant who also wrote the screenplay for Erin Brokovich. Gary gives it a B+, but I settled for a B. **GRADE: B/B+**

**TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS LATER:** Let me say at the outset that science fiction is one of our least favorite genres. That being said, this is an exciting movie with an intriguing beginning and a disappointing ending. The film opens with some animal activists setting lab animals free from their cages in a London laboratory, even though the scientist in charge tells them that the animals are infected with a deadly virus. It is called a "rage" virus, and turns the infected in to savage zombie-like creatures. Jim (Cillian Murphy) is a bicycle messenger who has been in an accident and in a coma for over four weeks. When he spontaneously awakes, he finds that he is alone--really alone. There seems to be no one in the hospital and no one in the entire city of London. The scene of him walking across the Westminster Bridge and through the silent and empty streets of London is eerie and stunning. Jim eventually meets a couple of survivors and comes up against some of the infected who are determined to have him join their ranks. (Kind of reminded me of *The Night Of The Living Dead*.) The rest of the movie details his efforts to stay alive and unaffected. The ending degenerates into a savage shoot-out, and we didn't care much for all the carnage. Gary just can't give this one more than a C, but I would have to say B--because I was drawn into most of the action. **GRADE B-/C**

**TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT:** (2014) Imagine Sandra's (Marion Cotillard) dismay when she returns to work after a sick leave and finds that she has been "let go." Her boss gives her one chance to save her job: convince the majority of her 16 co-workers to forego their 1,000 Euro bonuses to save her job. She has the weekend to convince her colleagues. Sandra's sick leave was for depression, and she is still popping Xanax like candy, so the prospect of trying to convince nine people to vote for her on Monday morning is daunting, but she valiantly tries to do just that. Watching her visiting her co-workers over the weekend was watching a consummate actor at work. However, as is typical in so many foreign movies lately, watching her walk is less captivating. Why is it that foreign directors feel that when a character is told that the person she wants to see is two blocks away, the audience has to watch her walk every step of those



two blocks. We didn't like it in *Ida*, and we didn't care for it here. This movie has a simple story and depends on an outstanding performance from Cottillard. She was recognized for her performance by the critics and by an Oscar nomination. She is excellent in this movie, but she is no better than Jennifer Anniston was in *Cake*. The critics liked *Two Days, One Night* much better than they did *Cake*, but both movies are personal experiences of a woman under enormous stress. We appreciate the paucity of dialogue and the emphasis on the visual in many foreign films, and we also appreciated it in *Cake*. Although we admire Cottillard's performance, we believe the Oscar nomination should have gone to Anniston. **GRADE B**

**TWO FACES OF JANUARY:** (2014) We were so taken with Oscar Isaac in *A Most Violent Year* that we wanted to see another movie in which he starred. The fact that it also starred Viggo Mortensen and Kirsten Dunst only increased our desire, so we rented the DVD from Netflix. The story is based on a 1994 psychological thriller from Patricia Highsmith. It's a good story and a good movie. Three people come together in Athens: a young American working as a tour guide, a man escaping from his past, and his young, beautiful wife. The story is rife with lust, jealousy, greed, and even murder, and the three leads make it all work beautifully. Plus, the scenery of Athens and Crete is gorgeous. The movie got 82% from the critics on *Rotten Tomatoes*, but only 50% from audiences. That surprised me, because Gary and I thought the movie was engrossing, and the three actors were excellent. **GRADE B**  
(Am I the only one who thinks Viggo Mortensen is aging wonderfully? He gets better looking with each passing year.)

**TWO FAMILY HOUSE:** It is 1956 on Staten Island when we meet Buddy Visalo (Michael Rispoli). Buddy always thought he could have been a famous singer, like Julius LaRosa, but instead he married Estelle and went to work in a factory. For the 11 years of their marriage, Buddy has tried to make something of himself. After failing in several businesses, he uses an inheritance to buy a dilapidated house, hoping to turn the downstairs into a tavern called "Buddy's Place." He will provide the "live" entertainment, and Estelle and he will live in the upstairs apartment. Things do not go smoothly in this touching story about love and tolerance that is simply and beautifully told. Rispoli is wonderful! I loved this film enough to give it an A. Gary votes for a B+. **GRADE: B+/A**

**TWO LOVERS:** Yes, Joaquin Phoenix and Gwyneth Paltrow are excellent. Their skills elevate the classic movie dilemma of a man in love with a woman he can't have and neglectful of a woman who loves him. Yes, director James Gray is a skillful filmmaker who brings out the best in all his actors. But, I am getting tired of gloomy films shot entirely in a palette of blues and grays. I am getting tired of the jerky movements of hand-held cameras when their use serves no discernable purpose except to make a film "arty." Phoenix's Leonard is taking medication for extreme depression. (I could have used a pill after seeing the film.) His depression stems from an engagement that ended unhappily. He is living at home in a cluttered room and working at his dad's dry cleaning store. His only real interest seems to be photography, and that was, for me, the most interesting element of the film. Vanessa Shaw is lovely as Sandra, a woman who falls in love with Leonard and wants to take care of him. (He definitely needs taking care of.) Leonard likes Sandra but he is hung up on Michelle (Paltrow), a fetchingly self-obsessed woman who we instantly know is going to be trouble. When Isabella Rossellini makes her first appearance as Leonard's mother, I thought I was seeing Ingrid Berman reincarnated. Both Rossellini and Moni Moshonov, who is Leonard's father, are wonderful. Gary says the film held his interest because the acting was so good, but that he didn't really enjoy it. He would grade it at B-. For the acting alone, I can probably agree with him. We are at odds with the critics who for the most part wax poetical over this film. **GRADE B-**

**THE TWO POPES:** (2019) Inspired by true events, this Netflix film tells the story of one of the most consequential moments in the history of the Catholic Church. It also showcases two of the finest performances of the year. Jonathan Pryce and Anthony Hopkins star in this offbeat buddy picture, the story of an unlikely friendship between two men brought together by extraordinary circumstances. For the first time in 600 years two popes were alive at the same time. When Pope Francis took over in 2013, Pope Benedict became pope emeritus. You don't have to be Catholic or even Christian to enjoy and appreciate this excellent film. Pryce and Hopkins have already been nominated for Golden Globe awards for their performances and I will be surprised if they aren't given serious consideration for Oscar nominations. With whimsical direction and performances, a potentially ponderous story is elevated into something altogether enjoyable. One thing you must know. The conversations between Benedict and Francis from the movie probably didn't happen in real life. But, according to the director of *The Two Popes*, Fernando Meirelles, everything they say is real. All the dialogue is taken from speeches or interviews or their writings, so what they say in the film is what they said or wrote at some point in their lives. The two popes are ostensibly opposites, Benedict a conservative, ivory tower academic theologian and Francis more focused on modernization and reform. Barbara and I streamed this Netflix film at home and found it fascinating entertainment. **GRADE A**

**TWO WEEKS NOTICE:** You know the plot of this movie. It's the same plot that has been used in dozens, no, hundreds of romantic comedies: Boy meets girl in a cute way; boy and girl don't like each other; boy and girl are forced to work together, or live together, or drive across country together, etc.; after a while, boy and girl realize they love each other; boy and girl kiss, filmed by the obligatory revolving camera. We don't watch these films for the plot, but for the actors, and we like the film when we find the characters appealing, when there are enough funny lines, and when we really want the two of them to get together. Sandra Bullock is appealing as Lucy Kelson, a lawyer who tirelessly fights developers who want to rape the landscape. And Hugh Grant is at his best as George Wade, one of those developers. Most of the funny lines are his, and most of the physical humor is Bullock's. There are some funny lines and some funny bits, but I hoped for something different from the formula plot and was disappointed because there was nothing different. I can't go higher than a B-. Gary enjoyed it a bit more than I did. He says B+. **GRADE B+/B-**