

Movie Titles that begin with “I”

I Am Legend * I Am Not Your Negro * I Am Sam * I Am Woman * I Care a Lot * I Capture The Castle * I Could Never Be Your Woman * I Don't Feel At Home In This World Anymore * I Heart Huckabees * I Love You, Man * I Remember Mama * I Spy * I, Tonya * I Wish * The Ice Harvest * Ida * Identity * Identity Thief * The Ides of March * If Beale Street Could Talk * Igby Goes Down * I'll See You In My Dreams * The Illusionist * I'm Your Woman * The Imitation Game * The Immigrant * The Impossible * The Imposter * In A Better World * In A World * In America * In Bruges * In Good Company * In Her Shoes * In The Bedroom * In The Heart of the Sea * In the Heights * In The House * In The Land of Blood & Honey * In The Land of Women * In The Loop * In The Shadow Of The Moon * In The Valley of Elah * Incendies * Inception * The Incredible Burt Wonderstone * An Inconvenient Truth * The Incredibles * Indiana Jones & The Crystal Skull * Indignation * Inequality For All * Infamous * The Infiltrator * Infinitely Polar Bear * The Informant * Inglourious Basterds * Ingrid Goes West * Innocence * Inside Job * Inside Llewyn Davis * Inside Man * Inside Out * Insomnia * Instructions Not Included * The Insult * The Intern * The International * The Interpreter * The Internship * Interstellar * Into the Wild * Into the Woods * Intolerable Cruelty * The Intouchables * Introducing Dorothy Dandridge * The Invention of Lying * Invictus * Invincible * The Invisible Man * Iris * The Irishman * The Iron Lady * Iron Man * Iron Man 2 * Is Anybody There * Isle of Dogs * It Ain't Over * It Runs In The Family * The Italian * Italian for Beginners * The Italian Job * It's A Disaster * It's A Wonderful Life * It's Complicated * I've Loved You So Long

I AM LEGEND: Gary and I had different reactions to the post-apocalyptic mutant movie, so we'll give you both perspectives.

Barb: I realize that it's all totally improbable and rather silly, but every once in a while I like a good zombie movie. And if Wil Smith is the central character, so much the better. I liked seeing a beautifully buffed Smith roam the empty New York streets and didn't spend any time puzzling about why the city still had electricity and water. The mutants were as frightening as they should be in a movie like this. The idea that a virus engineered to cure cancer could cause devastating side effects is credible, even if the rest of the movie isn't. Wil Smith is a most engaging guy, and even alone on screen, he can hold your interest. I know he held mine. Because of Smith —

GRADE B

Gary: I usually like Wil Smith, but his buff body obviously doesn't have the impact on me that it does on Barbara. Although I am not a sci-fi enthusiast, I thought the idea of a genetically altered virus designed to cure cancer, but going horribly wrong, had promise. Even the idea of Smith as the only healthy survivor surrounded by mutated carnivorous creatures had possibilities. But I like a sliver of reality mixed into my limited fantasy flights. Grass growing up through the streets was good, but water running in the faucets and electricity still available throughout the city was more than I was willing to overlook. And what happened to the millions of bodies of those who didn't even survive as mutants? Wil Smith is good and the film is probably worth a higher grade than I can comfortably give.

GRADE C

I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO: (2016) This powerful Oscar Nominated film for best Documentary earned 98% from 91 Critics on the Tomatometer. It is a compelling look at race relations in the United States. Screenwriter and Director Raoul Peck uses film footage and writings of James Baldwin, American novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, and social critic to tell the ugly story of the Negro In America. At the time of his death in 1987, Baldwin was working on a book which would examine the civil rights struggle in America focusing on his friendships with three key activists, all assassinated: Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. That book was never completed, but Baldwin's letters and notes form the crux of the film. Peck's film consists of Samuel L. Jackson reading from the notes, as well as footage of Baldwin on talk shows and giving lectures. Jackson narrates from Baldwin's letters and other writings. He never attempts to imitate Baldwin's voice, but he does mirror the rhythms and the cadences of his speech, so that when Peck intercuts between Jackson's narration and clips of Baldwin speaking on television or to audiences, the transition is so smooth that you may not even notice. Barbara and I agree that it is a well-made documentary, but sadly it will be viewed by far too few. **GRADE A-**

I AM SAM: We enjoyed the performances in this movie, but we thought the script was very poor. Besides being patently manipulative, it seemed disjointed and too long. The character of Sam, the retarded father fighting for custody of his daughter, won an Oscar nomination for Sean Penn. Penn is one of our finest actors, but the writers didn't do him any favors here. He is described as both retarded and autistic, perhaps because it was felt the double whammy would give him more acting range. Instead, it made his retardation inconsistent: at times he seemed incapable of understanding simple concepts, but at other times he seemed almost astute. And there are too many holes in the script. For example, there is no way the Sam we saw in this movie could have raised such a well-adjusted child, even with the help of an agoraphobic neighbor (Diane Wiest). In their attempt to play on our emotions, the writers simply throw too much at us. Oh yes, I did dampen a few Kleenex, but I felt as manipulated as I do when I tear up at a Hallmark commercial. Moreover, there is a conflict between our sentimental desire to see a father and daughter reunited, and our common sense, which tells us that may not be the best solution. I agree with Roger Ebert who said, "Every device of the movie's art is designed to convince us Lucy must stay with Sam, but common sense makes it impossible to go the distance with the premise. You can't have heroes and villains when the wrong side is making the best sense." However, Dakota Fanning, who plays Lucy, Sam's daughter, is the most adorable child I've ever seen. She is worth the two hours it takes to sit through this movie. Michelle Pfeiffer plays the lawyer who helps Sam with his custody case, and, although she looks beautiful, her part seemed to lack focus. Sam's retarded friends are all convincingly played, and provide some good scenes. Overall, we have to give this film a **GRADE C+**

I AM WOMAN (2019/2020 on Amazon Prime): This is the biopic of Australian singing star Helen Reddy who sang *I Am Woman*, the unofficial anthem of the woman's movement. Gary and I saw her in Vegas and we were impressed because she sang song after song with little talking in between. When she sang *I Am Woman* at the end of her show the women in the audience (and some of the men) stood up and clapped and cheered. It was infectious. I'm sorry that I can't say the same for this bland biopic. Reddy, who died in September of this year, deserved better. One critic said that this movie was "oddly anti-feminist" and I know what he means. But, for me, it was enough that the actress who played Reddy did justice to the song which changed the lives of many woman and gave a voice to the feminist movement. It ended with Reddy's performance at a 1989 woman's march of Washington. It was a fitting tribute, and earned a few tears from us both, but we can't give this lackluster movie more than a grade of B. **GRADE B**

I CAPTURE THE CASTLE: Charming and delightful are the words that come to mind when reflecting on this story of an unorthodox family living in England in the 1930s. First of all, they live in a castle, but they haven't paid the rent in six years. The father (Bill Nighy) is a writer suffering from an extreme case of writer's block, and the stepmother (Tara Fitzgerald) has to take off her clothes every once in a while to keep from going mad. The story is told by Cassandra (Romola Garai), the 17 year-old daughter, and in the telling she demonstrates considerable writing talent herself. Garai is marvelous in her role. Cassandra's sister, Rose (Rose Byrne) is "the pretty one." Rose feels that the only way out a life that has become incredibly tedious is to marry a wealthy man. But where is she to find one? Behold two brothers, rich young Americans, arrive on the scene, and their arrival sets in motion a series of events that are engaging and entertaining. The brothers are played by Henry Thomas and Marc Blucas. We both enjoyed this film very much. It's like curling up with a good novel--plenty of romance and a good sprinkling of eccentricity. And the photography is gorgeous. It is based on the novel by Dodie Smith, who also wrote 101 Dalmatians. **GRADE A-**

I CARE A LOT 2020/2021 (on *Netflix*) Rosamund Pike won a Golden Globe this year for Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Musical/Comedy, for playing Marla Grayson in *I Care A Lot*. Grayson is a court-appointed guardian for dozens of elderly wards. She and her partner, Fern, put them in a home, sell their furniture and puts their house on the market. They pocket all the proceeds. It is a racket that has made her rich, but she wants more. So it is no surprise that when the doctor, who is in on the scam, offers a "cherry," a wealthy retiree with no living heirs or family, Marla jumps at the chance to become her guardian. The cherry is Jennifer Peterson (Dianne Wiest) who has secrets of her own, and a surprising connection to a gangster (Peter Dinklage) who does battle with Marla. Gary commented that the movie had one thing going for it: it was unpredictable. I wanted the guardian racket to be exposed, and that it wasn't lowered the grade for me. Pike is excellent and she gets hers at the end, but that wasn't enough for me. It is difficult to like a movie when all the characters are evil. **GRADE B**

I COULD NEVER BE YOUR WOMAN: (2007 release seen on video) This film got caught up in a distribution mess and wound up going directly to DVD. Michelle Pfeiffer is a 40+ divorced mom and the producer of a TV show about teenagers. She often relies on input from her young daughter, played by Saoirse Ronan (filmed before her breakout performance in *Atonement*). Paul Rudd plays a 29 year-old actor who falls for Pfeiffer, and he is amusing and appealing. It's fun to see Pfeiffer struggling with being the Mrs. Robinson to Rudd's Benjamin Braddock. It was directed by Amy Heckerling who wrote & directed the movie *Clueless* and also worked on the TV show of the same name. **MILD THUMBS UP**

I DON'T FEEL AT HOME IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE: (2017-Streamed from *Netflix*) Macon Blair, the writer and director, took his first feature film to the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Prize. The story follows Ruth, a nurse who is beginning to lose her faith in humanity. That loss intensifies when she finds that her home has been robbed. The thieves got her laptop and her grandmother's silverware. When the detectives don't seem to take the robbery seriously, she sets out, with the help of a neighbor, to find her stolen property. It begins a comedy and ends up something much more violent. One critic called it a *throwback to the Nineties post-Tarantino era of indie film*. Ruth is played by Melanie Lynskey, whom we remember as Rose on *Two and a Half Men*. An almost unrecognizable Elijah Wood (*Lord of the Rings*) plays Tony, the strange neighbor who joins Ruth on her quest. Both are excellent. In an interview, Blair said that the idea for a nurse character who's given up on people had been in his head for years. He finally decided on a vehicle for that character and the resulting movie won at Sundance and got a whopping 93% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes. Audiences were a bit less enthusiastic, probably because the movie is hard to pinhole. We enjoyed it. **Grade B**

I HEART HUCKABEES: Barbara sentenced me to write this review as punishment for dragging her to a film I wanted to see, but she felt was a monumental waste of time. I confess to being seduced by the trailer, the knockout cast, and a comedy concept that seemed to hold great promise. The idea of existential detectives helping confused souls with their existential crises sounded like a winner to me. An "A" review from the New York Times might have nudged me toward the box office too. I recall being similarly misled into buying a copy of Jean Paul Sartre's *Being And Nothingness* back in my youth when I thought I could get my head around such things. What I hoped would be a quirky romp turned out to be too quirky and disjointed for my taste. Barbara and I would have exited the theater before the end if we hadn't falsely believed the loose ends would be tied together and we would be blessed with some kind of philosophical epiphany. Alas....we weren't. **GRADE D** (I agree with Gary's review.)

I LOVE YOU, MAN: Paul Rudd has to be one of the most likeable actors on screen today. (A recent Entertainment Weekly magazine put his face on their cover saying "It's time to get to know the most lovable movie star on the planet.") Rudd is adept at playing sweet guys who aren't afraid to admit they like such movies as *Chocolat* and *The Devil Wears Prada*. In this film, Rudd is Peter Kalven, a real estate agent with skill but no sizzle. While planning his wedding to Zoey (Rashinda Jones), he's also trying to sell, without much success, the Lou Ferrigno mansion. Peter has always been a guy who gets along well with girls, but Zoey worries when she realizes that he has no real male buddies. Who will be his groomsmen? So Peter sets out to find some friends. After some disappointing and downright embarrassing "man-dates," he meets Sydney (Jason Segal) who is the perfect buddy for hanging out and kicking back. All three actors are gifted comedians and they are ably assisted by J.K. Simmons and Jane Curtin as Peter's parents, Andy Samberg as his gay brother, and John Favreau and Jamie Pressley as Zoey's friends. Ferrigno, himself, makes two amusing appearances. As is typical of comedies these days, there are plenty of raunchy comments and not-so-subtle sexual references. We liked Segal in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, where he played a guy so sensitive he couldn't stop crying when his girlfriend dumped him. In this film (as Manohla Dargis points out in her NY Times review), he is the quintessential man/boy: a would-be kid who just wants to hang out with the guys, even though most of his friends have moved on to families and careers. That makes him the perfect guy friend for the uptight Peter. Be sure to stay for the closing credits, because they include some funny scenes from the wedding reception. I'd give this enjoyable film a B. Gary laughed a bit more than I did, so he says B+ **GRADE B+/B**

I REMEMBER MAMA 1948/2021 (Recorded from Turner Classic Movies, TCM) Gary and I celebrated Mother's Day by watching this great old film. Directed by George Stevens, back from WWII, it starred Irene Dunn as Mama (Martha) and Barbara Bel Geddes as her daughter, Katrin. (Readers might remember Bel Geddes as Miss Ellie, the Ewing family matriarch on the long-running TV series *Dallas*.) The film was nominated for 5 Oscars, and spawned a TV series which had 8 seasons, 1949 to 1957. Dunn was wonderful as Mama and deserved her Oscar Nomination, but the rest of the cast was excellent, too. Edgar Bergen, sans Charlie McCarthy, appears

as a suitor to one of the aunts, and Rudy Valley has a brief appearance as a doctor, but Bel Geddes and Oscar Homolka, as Uncle Chis, are the most memorable. The film tells the story of the trials and tribulations of an immigrant family in San Francisco, circa 1910. Mama and Papa came from Norway because her three sisters were already here and because "it's good for families to be together." All four of their children were born in the US: Niles, the oldest and the only boy, Katrin, Christine, and Dagmar. I remember loving the movie and the TV series, but Gary doesn't have a clear memory of either. The film holds up remarkably well, and we encourage anyone who appreciates family drama in classic black and white, to give it a try. (It is available as a \$3 rental on Amazon Prime.) It was a terrific way to celebrate Mother's Day! I don't think I will give it a grade but it certainly deserves an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

I SPY: This is a fairly routine spy/comedy, although Eddie Murphy and Owen Wilson do provide some good laughs. Most of the best lines are throw-aways, so you have to listen carefully because Murphy talks very fast. We saw an interview with director Barry Sonnenfeld (*Men In Black*) and he said that he has learned never to put two comedians together in the same film--that you always need a straight man. The New York Times reviewer said it was interesting to watch the two comedians in this one try to upstage each other. Actually we thought they worked together quite well. Murphy is Kelly Robinson, a middleweight prizefighter who is pressed into service for some CIA-type agency. He is partnered with Wilson, who has recently been promoted from an "agent" to a "special agent." (He is quite proud of that.) Gary Cole does a funny turn as a "Super Spy," complete with an Hispanic accent and a shiny black ponytail. Betty Thomas from TV's *Hill Street Blues* directed. The story is a bit lame but we laughed often enough to give this movie a **GRADE B-**

I, TONYA: (2017) In 1994, Nancy Kerrigan was attacked by an unknown assailant after finishing a practice session for the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. All Gary and I remember about the incident was what we heard on the TV coverage, which seemed to be biased against Tonya Harding, believing that she and her ex-husband had something to do with the attack. The two skaters had been rivals at many competitions, and, although Tonya was probably the better skater, Kerrigan was a crowd and judge favorite and generally received the higher scores. Tonya, who made her own costumes, was characterized as a "red-neck" skater. She was, however, the first American woman to perform a triple axel in competition. That feat was as big a deal in real life as it was portrayed in the movie. Although Margot Robbie, who played Tonya, did portions of her own skating, the more complicated parts were done by experts and the triple axel was computer generated. Robbie, who is phenomenal in the role, was proficient at ice hockey, but, to be believable as a figure skater, she trained for 4 months, 5 days a week for a couple of hours a day. Robbie admits that "It was at times kind of difficult." The *I, Tonya* version of the story is based on interviews given by both Harding and Jeff Gillooly, her ex-husband. Their stories hardly ever matched up, so the filmmakers open the movie with this title card: "Based on irony free, wildly contradictory, totally true interviews with Tonya Harding and Jeff Gillooly." Director Craig Gillespie and writer Steven Rogers seem to believe in Harding's innocence. She has maintained to this day that she knew nothing prior to the attack on Kerrigan, and Robbie, at first skeptical, came to believe in Harding's version of the story. Fortunately for Nancy Kerrigan, her leg was not broken but she did suffer a bone bruise. The injury kept her from competing in the national championships the next day, which Tonya Harding won, guaranteeing her a spot on the Olympic team. We also enjoyed seeing Alison Janey play Harding's abusive mother—the woman can do anything and do it beautifully. It was, for us, a fascinating look at a moment in history. **GRADE B+**

I WISH: Kids the world over spend a lot of time wishing and that's what this Japanese movie is all about. 12-year-old Koichi, who has been separated from his brother because of his parents' divorce, wants desperately for the four of them to be a family again. He believes that the new bullet train service will create a miracle when the first trains pass each other at top speed, and persuades two friends to go with him on the adventure. They, too, hope that the force field created by two bullet trains passing will make their wishes come true. He meets up with his little brother and three of his friends and the group goes in search of wish fulfillment. Once the kids leave home on their adventure, the movie really takes off. Up until that time, it is rather slow-moving. It takes a while to introduce the seven young people, their families, and their desires, and Gary and I both got a little impatient waiting for something to happen. The writer/director obviously remembers his own childhood and is able to elicit terrific performances from the kids. The young people do talk like little adults, although I suspect that is due to the subtitle translations. Because of the slow beginning, Gary can't go higher than B-, but I enjoyed the scenes of the kids being kids and think it deserves a B. **GRADE B/B-**

THE ICE HARVEST: Critics were all over the map on this film noir black-comedy thriller. Reviews ranged from grades of A- to D-. Directed by Harold Ramus, (Groundhog Day) the action takes place on a really lousy Christmas Eve in Wichita, Kansas. "As falls Wichita, so falls Wichita Falls." This bit of meaningless profundity appears as graffiti throughout the film. John Cusack and Billy Bob Thornton play a couple of bumbling embezzlers who have taken two million dollars from an unforgiving crime boss played by Randy Quaid. Slapstick humor is skillfully added by the very drunk and always funny Oliver Platt. A seductive femme fatale played by Connie Nielsen adds just the right combination of sex and danger to the thin plot. If you saw *Bad Santa*, or the Cohen Brothers' *Blood Simple*, you can use either one as a litmus test to guide you toward or away from this film. Some critics hated it, but we enjoyed it and give it a grade of B. **GRADE B**

IDA: (2013/2014) This sub-titled movie is set in Poland about twenty years after the end of WWII. Anna is a young nun about to take her final vows. She grew up in the Convent orphanage, and her only living relative is an aunt—an aunt who never bothered to visit the girl. Before taking her vows, the Mother Superior sends her to a nearby town to visit the delinquent aunt. Anna learns some shocking things about her background, but nothing seems to have much effect on the relentlessly passive novice. The acting is good, the black and white photography is suitably grim, and we liked it only minimally better than *The Immigrant*. (We saw both *Ida* and *The Immigrant* on the same day.) **GRADE C**

IDENTITY: A terrible storm strands ten strangers in a Bates-like motel in this 21st Century version of *Ten Little Indians*. One by one, they begin to die. The filmmakers drop a few clues as to the identity of the killer, but the ending will surprise most people. We were. Movies like this usually have a good setup but falter when it comes to the conclusion. This one doesn't. There's plenty of suspense and plenty of blood, and it all happens on a dark and stormy night. It kept my attention to the very end. I can't really say much about the movie without giving away the plot. John Cusack, Ray Liotta, Amanda Peet, and Rebecca De Mornay—all but unrecognizable as a brunette—are four of the stranded travelers. Gary said he felt a bit manipulated by the film, but I think that could be said of all films in this genre. I liked it well enough to give it a B, but Gary is in the C+ range. **GRADE B/C+**

IDENTITY THIEF: (2013) Melissa McCarthy is hilarious. She is able to execute all the comedic bits her part requires from explosive bodily functions to every pratfall imaginable, and a few unimaginable ones. Just looking at her can make you smile and, in the next moment, she can bring a lump to your throat. Plus, she is adorable. The critics haven't been kind to this comedy/crime/chase/buddy movie, but we thought it was very amusing. Jason Bateman is the perfect straight man. When he discovers that his credit card has been maxed out and that there is an arrest warrant out for him in Florida, he realizes that his identity has been stolen. For some inexplicable reason, the Denver police can't do anything about it, and he is forced to go to Florida and bring the thief back to Colorado. (As with all comedies, you have to be willing to suspend disbelief.) As you can imagine, things do not go according to plan. The identify thief (McCarthy) has skipped bail and is being chased by a skip tracer. Plus, she has angered a local drug dealer who wants her eliminated, so a hit man and hit woman are also on her trail. McCarthy and Bateman are natural comedic partners. They obviously had great fun making this movie and we had great fun watching it. **GRADE B**

THE IDES OF MARCH: This is an intelligent film with a powerful cast and is the most realistic movie I can remember about the way we elect political leaders. Politics is a dirty business that can destroy idealists. You may remember from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* the soothsayer's warning to "beware the ides of March." But in today's political environment, anyone connected to politics needs to "beware every date on the calendar." This well-made political thriller is a showcase for some of Hollywood's finest actors. The cast is led by George Clooney and Ryan Gosling who prove, once again, that they are far more than pretty faces. Clooney also directed the film and was one of the authors and one of the producers. Helping move the thriller along is a dazzling supporting cast that includes Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Paul Giamatti, Evan Rachel Wood, Marisa Tomei, and Jeffery Wright. This Oscar laden cast plays well off of each other and produces excellent scene after excellent scene. There may be better films that will come along as we move toward the awards season, but Barbara and I agree that this is a film we think is well worth your time. **GRADE B+**

IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK (2018): This film is a love story set in Harlem in the early 1970s. It is based on a 1974 novel by American writer James Baldwin. The job of trying to bring the words of Baldwin to life on the big screen fell to writer-director Barry Jenkins, whose 2016 film *Moonlight* received an Oscar for Best Picture. Professional critics loved this movie. 231 critical reviews earned 95% on Rotten Tomatoes. Audience ratings were not as enthusiastic. Barbara and I can understand this because we were bothered by the excruciatingly slow pace of the movie. It sometimes seemed that Jenkins was stretching 30 minutes of story into two hours of film. The story is simple: a young African-American couple, expecting their first child see their family broken apart when the young man is falsely accused of rape and sent to jail. The story is ageless in its depiction of a love that is beaten and battered but can never be destroyed. It is made even more poignant because the injustices inflicted on innocent individuals and the bigotry behind those injustices are still so prevalent in America today. The acting is good and the entire cast told the story believably. We wanted to love this film because it is a story of injustice that needs telling. It just fell short of our hopes. **GRADE B+**

IGBY GOES DOWN: (2002 release seen on Video) If you like weird and unusual movies, this one's for you. Igby (Kiernan Culkin) is one screwed up young man, and little wonder. His father (Bill Pullman) is totally bonkers, his older brother (Ryan Phillippe) is, according to Igby, a fascist, and his mother is a controlling bitch. Igby calls his mother by her first name, Mimi, because, as he says, "Heinous One is a bit cumbersome." Igby is sort of a 21st century Holden Caulfield and Culkin is excellent in the role. This bizarre indie film was critically acclaimed, but didn't last long in the theaters. We can understand why. It is a very strange film. We sort of liked it, but we can't recommend it except to people who like weird and unusual movies. It was written and directed by Burr Steers. Roger Ebert gave this film 3 and a half stars and said: "It is an astonishing filmmaking debut, balancing so many different notes and story elements. What Steers has not lost sight of, in all the emotional chaos, is heart." Kiernan Culkin as a 21st Century Holden Caulfield. **THUMBS UP**

I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS: (2015) Our local critic began his review by giving some information about Carol (Blythe Danner) and some of her friends. He stopped mid-sentence to say "man, this is just sounding awful. But it's not." He's right. It's actually quite wonderful. It's a completely unpredictable story about an older widow discovering that there's still a life to be lived. It begins, oddly enough, with a death--the death of Carol's dog. This event makes her feel truly alone—more alone than even when her husband died twenty years ago. Carol meets two men—men who make her question the settled routines of her life. One is her pool boy, a twenty something young man who went to college to be a poet, came home to be with his aging mother, and found the only job for which he seemed qualified, that of cleaning pools. (Did I mention the movie takes place in Los Angeles?) The pool-cleaner is played by Martin Starr. We expected Danner to be terrific, she always is, but Starr was a happy surprise. He got his start on TV in *Freaks and Geeks*, and, although he has been in several films and many TV shows, we never really noticed him until now. He nails every scene he is in, even though he can't sing for sour apples. Sam Elliott plays a retired guy who likes Carol, and Rhea Perlman, Mary Kay Place and June Squibb play her bridge-playing and wine-drinking friends. The movie got high marks from most critics and it gets high marks from us. **GRADE B+**

THE ILLUSIONIST: It's a love story with plenty of mystery, a murder, and a bit of political intrigue. Who could ask for more? The cast of characters: Eisenheim (Edward Norton) is a famous stage illusionist; Sophie (Jessica Beal), Eisenheim's childhood sweetheart, now a duchess about to marry the haughty and evil Crown Prince Leopold (Rufus Sewell); Chief Inspector Uhl (Paul Giamatti) a lackey of the Prince. The setting is Vienna at the turn of the century and the photography brings that time beautifully to life. It's been a while since we've seen Norton in a film and he has been missed. He is one of our finest actors and he is splendid in this role. Beal makes Sophie more than just your standard heroine. Her Sophie is strong and independent, and she looks perfect in the period clothes. Giamatti is outstanding as a man willing to do almost anything to get ahead in the world, and Sewell makes for a perfect villain. If this all sounds like a melodramatic cliché, be assured that the movie is anything but. It is a grand illusion, and we were captivated by it. **GRADE A-**

I'M YOUR WOMAN: 2020 (Available on Prime Video) Julia Hart's film is a 1970s-set crime drama that is realistic and features terrific performances from all its main characters, including the baby. One day a gangster comes home to his bored housewife Jean (Rachel Brosnahan) and hands her a baby that she's always wanted. When she asks "Who is that," he says "That's our baby." When she is just getting used to having a child, her husband betrays his partners, forcing her to go on the run—with the baby—and with the help of Cal (Arinzé Kene). Cal says little and Jean doesn't know what going on. We don't either, but slowly we, and Jean, begin to figure it out. To

someone brought up on the Marvel Comic movies, this one might seem a bit tame, but Gary and I were brought up on Sidney Lumet and Alan Pakula films and we thought it was great. Besides, there is enough mayhem in the movie to keep our hearts pumping. Harry, the baby, is played by three babies, all of whom are delightful. Brosnahan and Kene are terrific as is Marsha Stephanie Blake, who plays Cal's wife, Teri. Julia Hart is one talented filmmaker! **GRADE B+/A-**

THE IMITATION GAME: (2014) This fascinating film might be described as a brilliant biopic with a mesmerizing performance by Benedict Cumberbatch, a nail-biting history lesson, a tragic personal story, and a likely contender for multiple Oscar nominations. Both critics and audiences give this fact-based film high marks and both Barbara and I think it is one of the year's best. Alan Turing is not a name many people recognize. He was a brilliant British mathematician, philosopher, pioneer computer scientist, wartime code-breaker and a closeted homosexual in a country and at a period in history when homosexuality was aggressively punished. He was also a war hero who saved countless lives by shortening WWII by months if not years. The work of Turing and his team was not known until years after WWII because it was highly classified. The team was warned that if they told anyone about the military work they were doing, they would be executed for high treason. The information was not declassified until the 1990's, nearly forty years after Turing's death. The talented actress Keira Knightley plays a woman of superior intelligence who, because of her gender, struggles with blatant sexism. Her platonic relationship with Turing is an interesting and important part of the story. It is a complex but easy to follow story that will have you laughing, shaking your head in wonder, and reaching occasionally for a tissue. This is not a movie to be missed. **GRADE A**

THE IMMIGRANT: (2013) This movie is not sub-titled, but it is dark and slow-moving. Ewa (Marion Cotillard) arrives at Ellis Island from Poland in 1921 with her sister, Magda. Unfortunately, Magda contracted tuberculosis on the journey and is sent to the Ellis Island infirmary where her health will be reevaluated after six months. When Ewa's aunt and uncle don't appear to meet her, and the authorities realize that she has no money, she is scheduled to be sent back to Poland. A well-dressed man named Bruno (Joaquin Phoenix) arrives on the scene. He seems to be a man of influence, and he offers to help her. Bruno claims to be from a relief agency, but in reality he has sinister reasons for helping Ewa. Money is exchanged between Bruno and the guards and the beautiful young immigrant leaves Ellis Island in his care. There are at least three themes in this movie: An immigrant's lot is not a happy one; Never trust the police; and finally, Even a pimp has some good in him. The two hour movie seemed to last a lot longer. Cotillard is too subdued throughout to be much of a heroine although she is lovely. Bruno is an ambiguous character and Phoenix plays it well, although he is a bit over-the-top at the end. Jeremy Renner appears as a possible savior for Ewa, but that ends badly. All-in-all, it was a depressing story. **GRADE C**

THE IMPOSSIBLE: (2012) *One death is a tragedy; one million is a statistic.* Joseph Stalin said it, but that doesn't make it any less true. You probably remember reading about the tsunami that devastated the Pacific Basin in the winter of 2004. It remains one of the worst natural disasters in history, but unless you were there, you probably didn't feel its impact deeply. But, in this movie, you witness the disaster through the eyes of a family of five. (You will see a photo of the real-life Spanish family upon whom this film is based at the closing credits.) They are excited to be on a Christmas vacation at a beautiful beach resort in Thailand. Everything seems idyllic, but you know what's about to happen. You experience the terror of the tsunami as it hits with virtually no warning. I don't know how the director was able to recreate it in such vivid detail, but you can almost feel yourself being swept away. First, you follow Maria (Naomi Watts) and her oldest son, Lucas, as they struggle to survive the flood. Their relief at finding safety is tempered by the anguish of not knowing what happened to the rest of the family. Next, you learn that Henry (Ewan McGregor) and the two younger boys have survived. You can feel Henry's panic as he searches for Maria and Lucas not knowing if they are dead or alive, although there may be a bit too much running barefoot through debris screaming "Maria"--"Lucas." The scenes of devastation are as remarkable as the tsunami itself, and for that the director and technicians deserve great credit. It is to the credit of Watts and McGregor that you can experience the human toll of the disaster. Special credit goes to young Tom Holland who is outstanding as Lucas in his first, but I suspect not his last, film. I can understand why some critics thought the tsunami scenes were more compelling than the human drama. They are the more memorable. When it came to grading this movie, we vacillated between a B and a B+. We eventually decided on B. **GRADE B**

THE IMPOSTER: This is a 95 minute stranger-than-fiction documentary-style film that plays out like a bizarre mystery. Without a trace, a 13-year-old blond blue-eyed boy disappears from his home in San Antonio, Texas. Three and a half years later a dark-skinned brown-eyed 23 year-old French-Algerian con-man first convinces authorities and later the family that he is the missing boy. The story is fascinating and Barbara and I were riveted by the after the fact interviews and were, perhaps, a little conned by the con-man himself. We think first time British film director Bart Layton deserves a lot of credit, for documentaries can be a bit boring. This one isn't. **GRADE B+**

IN A BETTER WORLD: (Reviewed in 2011) This 2010 Danish film won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It's a powerful story beautifully told. The universal themes are father and son relationships, dealing with the death of a parent, and bullies and their victims. The stories of two schoolboy friends and their fathers are used to illustrate those who act with cruelty and those who try to be kind. One boy's father is a doctor who works part of the time in a free clinic in an African country. The story switches between Africa and Denmark. Given the other submissions last year, I probably would have voted for *Incendies*, but I can see how this movie appealed to the Academy voters. If you rent the DVD you will see outstanding performances by the two young Danish actors. On DVD, the subtitles are in yellow and easy to read. We recommend this one. **GRADE B+**

IN A WORLD: (2013) Who is Lake Bell? Well, she wrote, directed and takes the leading role in this entertaining and well-written screwball romantic comedy set in a tiny niche of the film industry: movie-trailer voice overs. Her unique script won a Screenwriting Award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival. Bell plays Carol, a struggling voice coach trying to break into a cutthroat industry which has traditionally been dominated by men. It also throws her into direct competition with her father who is a giant in the voice over world. The film's title comes from the work of a real-life voiceover legend, Don La Fontaine, who with his booming baritone voice recorded more than 5000 film trailers and became identified with the opening phrase "In A World..." Bell's film is wonderful at exposing Hollywood shallowness and satirizing young women who talk like they have just inhaled helium. It is also just a very original romantic comedy. This is definitely an independent film and will not see wide distribution, but Barbara and I think Bell has a promising future and will look

forward to her next venture. Because we are both film buffs and are easily won over by films touching any facet of the industry, we must temper our enthusiasm with two grades: **GRADE B+/B**

IN AMERICA: The critics who don't care for this film criticize it for being overly sentimental and manipulative. It is a certified tearjerker and we recommend that you bring a good supply of Kleenex with you to the theater. But, sentimental isn't a bad word as far as we are concerned, and little Emma Bolger, who plays the younger daughter, Ariel, is so delightful that it's worth the price of admission just to watch her. Ariel, her sister Christy, and her mom, Sara (Samantha Morton), and dad, Johnny, (Paddy Considine) are present-day Irish immigrants. They enter the US from Canada and settle in Manhattan. Johnny is an actor, so the Big Apple seems the logical place for him. Dirt poor, they find a place to live in a crack-house neighborhood. Seen through the eyes of the little girls, however, it is a wonderful and interesting place to live. Sara and Johnny recently lost their son, Frankie, to a brain tumor, and they are having great difficulty handling his death. Johnny especially cannot come to grips with the loss. Christy, whose price possession is a camcorder, narrates the story. We often see footage that she has taken of the family and that adds an element of realism to the film. At first, the girls are frightened by a man living in their building. They call him "the man who screams," because he does scream--loudly. Mateo is played by Djimon Hounsou who was in *Armistad*. The camera loves his amazing face, and the scenes with him are some of the best in the film. Jim Sheridan (*My Left Foot*) directed the film and wrote it with the help of his two daughters. It is not strictly speaking autobiographical (the real Frankie was Sheridan's brother), but it is obviously very close to his heart. For us, the film didn't have quite the emotional power to make it an A" film, but we think it is a solid B+ movie. **GRADE B+**

IN BRUGES: Martin McDonagh is an award-winning playwright and one of the key innovators of a new genre of theater that has become known as "In Your Face" Theatre. It's function is to present the audience with vulgar, shocking, and confrontational material on the stage. We've seen a couple of his plays, and I think of him as the Quentin Tarrantino of the theatre. McDonagh is the writer and director of *In Bruges*, his first full-length feature film. It is representative of his bloody but funny plays. Two hit men, Ray (Colin Farrell) and Ken (Brenden Gleeson), are hiding out in Bruges, Belgium. They are awaiting instructions from Harry (Ralph Finnes) their boss. To pass the time, Ken is enjoying the sights of the quaint medieval town. Ray isn't enjoying much of anything. It's hard to categorize the film because while much of the film consists of amusing conversations between Ray and Ken, there is also the violence. . . and the blood. . . and the dwarf. Comedy and violence is an unusual combination but, in this case, it's very entertaining. Farrell and Gleeson are outstanding. Roger Ebert wrote that in the film "there are times of great sadness and poignancy, times of abandon, times of goofiness, and that kind of humor that is *really funny* because it grows out of character and close observation." And, like Ebert, the movie really made us want to visit Bruges! We suggest you take a chance on this one. **GRADE A-**

IN GOOD COMPANY: Dennis Quaid could certainly qualify as America's favorite movie dad. In this film, he is Dan Foreman, an ad sales executive for a sports magazine who is demoted when the magazine is bought by a global conglomerate. What's worse, his new boss—the man who took over his old job—is only 26 years old. Carter Duryea (Topher Grace) is Dan's new boss and a rising star with the conglomerate. Dan is father to two teenage daughters. His older daughter, Alex (Scarlett Johansson) is attracted to her dad's boss, and this causes Dan great consternation. However, the relationship between the young people is not central to the movie. It is the growing father/son relationship between Dan and his young boss that is at the heart of the movie. This is another example of a film that puts most of the funny stuff in the trailer. The preview makes viewers think the movie is an outright comedy, but, although it has plenty of funny moments, it also strikes a more serious note. It's about family, loyalty, and the heartlessness of corporate America. The script is better than average, and the acting is uniformly fine. Quaid is always good and we really liked Grace. We never watched his TV show, but we think he is a very appealing actor who is adept at comedy and the more serious moments. Marg Helgenberger (TV's C.S.I.) is Quaid's wife and David Payner is featured in a small, but significant role. Grandson Nathan agrees with a grade of B. **GRADE B**

IN HER SHOES: This is the story of two sisters so different yet so connected. The wonderful Toni Collette is Rose, the older sister. She is a lawyer, bright, driven to be the hardest-working associate in her law firm, and insecure about her looks. Cameron Diaz is Maggie, the younger sister. She is gorgeous, stacked, supremely confident in her appeal and unable to keep a job for more than a few weeks. Rose has alternated between wanting to protect and care for Maggie and wanting to strangle her. When Maggie discovers that she has a grandmother, Ella (Shirley MacLaine), living in a retirement community for active adults in Florida, she travels there hoping to wheedle some money from the old lady. However, Grandma proves to be no pushover. I liked the fact that the residents of the retirement community are real people, not caricatures. Ella's friend, Mrs. Lefkowitz (Francine Beers) is particularly amusing. Living with her Grandmother proves to be the best thing that ever happened to Maggie, and the elderly gentlemen think that Maggie, especially in her bikini, is the best thing that ever happened to them. MacLaine is perfect as Ella—I can't imagine anyone else doing the part. Mark Furst is very good as Rose's fiancé and Norman Lloyd has a small but pivotal role. The script is well-written, and director Curtis Hanson (*L.A. Confidential*, *Wonder Boys*) proves he is equally adept at lighter fare. The movie is funny and touching, and we laughed and wept and loved it. Of course, some critics are lukewarm in their reviews because of the movie's sentimentality, but we liked the movie because of its heart. We give it an A-. **GRADE: A-**

IN THE BEDROOM: As we left the theater, Gary said, "That was almost unbearably realistic." Ruth (Sissy Spacek) and Matt Fowler (Tom Wilkinson) are a long married couple whose only child is killed. Their son, Frank, had been seeing an almost divorced woman (Marisa Tomei) whose soon-to-be ex husband explodes in violence. The movie is based on a story by the late Andre Dubus who worked with Tod Field, the director, on the adaptation. There are many scenes with little or no dialogue, but the emotion is visible in every scene. Ruth and Matt are unable to comfort each other in the aftermath of the tragedy. Although each of them feels terrible grief, they are incapable of talking about it. I doubt you could find two actors any better at revealing emotions non-verbally. As Roger Ebert said in his review, "They are masters of the hidden struggle beneath the surface." The pace is sometimes painfully slow, but it fits the material. *In The Bedroom* has some of the most touching moments I have ever seen. When, after the funeral, Matt smooths the pillow that still bears the indent of Frank's head, even a stone would feel something. Marisa Tomei is at her best as Natalie Strout, the "older woman" in love with a boy. Nick Stahl is Frank, a college student who is infatuated with Natalie, but not sure it's more than a summer romance. We especially want to mention William Mapother who is Richard Strout, Natalie's husband. Mapother brings just the right

blend of nastiness and humanity to the role. This is definitely an A movie, but so emotionally wrenching that I don't think we could see it a second time. **GRADE A**

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA: This is a film Barbara and I would have missed had it not been for the rave review of one of our faithful **Movie Views** readers. (See Readers Views in this issue) We were reluctant based on the 166 reviews used by **Rotten Tomatoes** to arrive at a rather low 42% score on the **Tomatometer**. *In the Heart of the Sea* is an old school sea adventure directed by Ron Howard. It is based on a non-fiction book with the same title written in 2000. The book is about a hard to believe whaling adventure that inspired Herman Melville to write the American Classic, *Moby Dick*. The cinematography is breath taking with many aerial and underwater images. As we got up to leave the theater, Barb's insightful comment was "I feel water logged," For me one of the best things about the film was the feel you get for life in the mid-1800's and the dangers of whaling. It is difficult for us to imagine how important whale oil was at that time and the risks taken to get it. The movie opens in 1850 with Herman Melville trying to extract a closely guarded story from the last survivor of the whaleship Essex which in the winter of 1820 was assaulted by something no one could believe: a whale of mammoth size and an almost human sense of vengeance. I was a little more swept up in the story than Barb. **GRADE B/B-**

IN THE HEIGHTS: (2021) Playing in local theaters or available for streaming on HBO Max where subscribers can watch it free online) Lin-Manuel Miranda, the award-winning creator of *Hamilton*, is once again in the entertainment spotlight for a film version of his award winning 2008 Broadway Musical, *In the Heights*. It has been receiving rave reviews from both critics and audiences. Miranda wrote the earliest draft of *In the Heights* in 1999 during his sophomore year of college. After many more drafts and an opening Off Broadway early in 2008, the staged musical won over crowds with its up-tempo beats and uplifting message. After moving to Broadway, it was nominated for thirteen Tony Awards winning four including Best Musical. The film version was released on June 10, 2021, earning \$11.5 million on opening weekend. Miranda mixes hip hop with latin beats to give us a robustly performed love letter to Latin America and its people. The story involves a variety of characters living in the largely Dominican Washington Heights neighborhood of Upper Manhattan in New York City, where every member of the community pursues dreams of a better life. At the center of the story is Usnavi, a bodega owner who looks after an aging Cuban lady next door, pines for the gorgeous girl working in the neighboring beauty salon, and dreams of escaping to the shores of his native Dominican Republic. The leading role, Usnavi, is the unusual name given him by his father and cleverly explained in the film. Miranda played the lead in the on and off Broadway shows, but decided a younger man should play the film role. The job was ably filled by Anthony Ramos who was in the original cast of the massively popular musical *Hamilton*. *In the Heights* is a colorful Valentine to a neighborhood and a way of life embracing Latina culture. The energetic pace and commitment to nearly continuous production numbers for nearly two and a-half-hours was almost too much for two octogenarians. We liked it but we didn't love it. **GRADE B+**

IN THE HOUSE (DANS LA MAISON): (2013) Every house has a story and there's always a way in. A shy sixteen-year-old becomes fascinated with the house and family of a classmate and insinuates himself into both. When he writes about it for a literature class assignment, his teacher becomes involved in the story. The teacher, Germain, is a failed writer who loves literature. He cynically believes that most of his students are dolts, but he thinks Claude may have talent. Claude ended his first paper with "to be continued," and Germain is anxious to hear the next installment. He undertakes to give the boy special attention in the guise of helping an aspiring writer, but he becomes more and more obsessed with the story Claude is writing. Germain reads Claude's papers to his wife (Kristin Scott Thomas) and she, too, becomes involved. The movie weaves reality and imagination so skillfully that you're never quite sure which is which. Also, we're not sure if Claude, whose mother left him when he was young, is innocently using his imagination to create the perfect family, or if he is using the story to manipulate his teacher. For its uniqueness and skilled acting, this movie earns high marks from both of us. **GRADE B+**

IN THE LAND OF BLOOD AND HONEY: (2011) There is no end to man's inhumanity to man, and to man's inhumanity to women. Angelina Jolie has effectively demonstrated both truths in this story of love and war that she wrote and directed. The story is set during the Bosnian conflict of the early nineties, and introduces us to a Muslim woman and a Serbian policeman who fall in love just before the hostilities break out. Jolie seems to believe that the Christian Serbs have the blood of murder and rape on their hands. However, in one scene, she shows how Muslim cruelties in the past gave the Serbs a reason for the atrocities they have committed. She clearly shows how each side justifies their actions. When a Serb soldier sees his comrade fall he is devastated; when he shoots a Muslim, he is delighted. Both are the faces of war. We were quite taken with the story and thought the acting was outstanding. Critics have been lukewarm about the movie although they acknowledge that Jolie shows promise as a filmmaker. The *Variety* critic thought that the movie "seems to spring less from artistic conviction than from an over-earnest humanitarian impulse." I have a feeling that he, and other critics, might have had a different impression if the writer/director had not been such a public figure. Although Roger Ebert found the movie to be moving and involving, he thought that the melodrama of the love story reduced it "to a minor key." I have to disagree with him on that. We thought the poignant melodrama made the horrors-of-war story more accessible. The ending was violent and sudden and Gary and I had different interpretations of it. We would like to hear other reactions to this movie, so if you see it, please email **MovieViews**. **GRADE B+**

IN THE LAND OF WOMEN: We thoroughly enjoyed this film! Critics who didn't like it called it "lame," and said it had "fakey-cute dialogue." We definitely do not agree. The movie is character-driven and we liked all the characters. The pace is slow and nothing particularly dramatic happens, but Carter (Adam Brody) deals with being dumped by his girlfriend and with his Grandmother's (Olympia Dukakis) deteriorating health; Sarah (Meg Ryan) deals with a serious health issue; and Sarah's daughter, Lucy (Kristen Stewart) deals with typical teenage angst. I liked Brody on the TV series, *The O.C*. He has an easy, natural charm and comes across as sincere and extremely likeable. He also has excellent comic timing and can throw away a line with the best of them. Kristen Stewart (she played Jodie Foster's daughter in *The Panic Room*), is believable as a teen who has issues with her mother. We thought Meg Ryan was very good. And she looked good, too. OK, she probably had a bit too much filler put in her lips, and it's sad to see that adorable girl from *When Harry Met Sally* playing the mother of a teenager, but life goes on. A very pleasant way to spend an afternoon out of the Phoenix heat. **GRADE B**

IN THE LOOP: (2009 release seen on DVD) This British comedy draws on non-specific events to create a world that is terrifyingly familiar: The US President and UK Prime Minister fancy a war, but not everyone agrees that war is a good thing. Several U.S. officials don't think so and neither does Simon, the British Secretary of State for International Development. But when he makes an innocent remark about the war, forces begin to work in Britain and in the U.S. A secret War Committee is discovered, and the Brits and the Americans stumble their way to war. The dialogue is fast and profane, and it can be difficult to decipher some of the British accents. I thought the movie was both funny and disturbing. However, we agree that our readers may not like it, especially those with conservative tendencies. Those with a more liberal bent might enjoy it. **THUMBS SIDWAYS**

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON: (2007 release seen on DVD) On July 21, 1969, Neil Armstrong set foot of the moon saying, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." This is a fascinating and ultimately thrilling look at the Apollo moon missions from the astronauts--the only living men who have seen the earth from another world-- who talk about their experiences. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH: Paul Haggis has some impressive writing credits both for TV and film. He made a name for himself as a director with 2004's Oscar-winning *Crash*. Here he is both director and screenwriter and does well on both counts. The story-telling is straightforward and cerebral. It doesn't rely on overwrought emotion or on explosions and car crashes. It is cast perfectly with Tommy Lee Jones playing an ex-Military policeman investigating the disappearance of his son who recently returned from a combat stint in Iraq. Jones doesn't have to do much to totally inhabit his character, and you can read volumes in his quiet care-worn face. Charlize Theron is a local police detective who gets involved in the investigation. She is equally good at projecting thoughtful emotion without ever over-doing. Watching these two at work is like going to an acting class. Haggis has given his two main characters depth by showing glimpses of what makes them tick. Jones, with clean white shirts and military corners on his motel bed, seems always ready to come to attention. Theron's character, a single mother with a young son, is hassled by her colleagues who accuse her of sleeping her way into the job. Susan Sarandon is effective in a couple of scenes as the mother of the missing soldier. The movie plays like a police procedural, but it also has a lot to say about what was called "battle fatigue" in WWII and "post-traumatic stress syndrome" these days. While we won't remember this film as one of the great ones, it is well-worth seeing. **GRADE B**

INCENDIES: (2010 film released in the US in 2011) "Death is never the end of the story. It always leaves traces." When Nawal dies, her will leaves traces that send her twin children, Jeanne and Simon, on a mission to find their father who they thought was dead and the brother they never knew they had. Simon at first resists because he sees his mother's request to deliver envelopes to their father and brother as proof that she was crazy. Jeanne journeys alone to the Middle East and begins to discover a story of never-ending war, deep-rooted hatred, and enduring love. We see their mother's tragic story through flashback scenes and, when Simon joins Jeanne in her quest, we discover the climax of their powerful and emotional history. *Incendies* is the French word for "destruction by fire". The English translation for the film's title is *Scorched*. It is based on the French play of the same name. It is no surprise that the film was nominated for a 2010 Oscar for Best Foreign Picture. It is a French-Canadian film with subtitles, but that should not keep you from seeing this outstanding movie. The acting is impressive and the emotional impact is devastating. We both give this film a high grade. **GRADE A**

INCEPTION: As we've mentioned before, science fiction is not our favorite genre. When we've liked a SciFi film, it's because we can make some sense out of the fantasy. That was difficult in this film. There was a lot of SciFi babble about shared dreams, manipulating people in a dream world to divulge their secrets (extraction), or the possibility of implanting an idea in the dreamer (inception), but the babble seemed merely an excuse for some fantastic CGI tricks. There were enough gun battles, explosions and destructions to please those who like that sort of thing. There were even buildings that folded up, but it never really made sense to us. Consequently, it was rather tedious. Gary couldn't take it and left half way through to go out to the car where he enjoyed the new Lee Child book a lot more than he did the movie. I did stay to the end. The special effects were, indeed, spectacular but, except for some quiet scenes between Leo DiCaprio and his dead wife (Marion Cotillard), there wasn't much that engaged me. One of the ideas in the film is that time in a dream moves faster: An hour in a dream would be like 10 hours awake. And that's about how long this movie felt. Gary commented that some SciFi is difficult to understand; some is impossible to understand; and some isn't worth the effort to understand. For him, this film falls in the last category. I expect it will please hard core SciFi fans. The critics have praised the film and I do believe it is remarkable—just not our cup of tea. One critic said that it would take several viewings to truly understand it. Since Gary couldn't even take one viewing, I doubt we'll give it a second look. We will be anxious to see what our readers think of this one. I have to give *Inception* a "C" for creativity alone. **GRADE C**

THE INCREDIBLE BURT WONDERSTONE: (2013) For most critics this film was not so incredible, but a few did like it. It is a film Barbara and I would have skipped if it weren't for three things: a cast that included Steve Carell, Steve Buscemi, Jim Carrey, Olivia Wilde, Alan Arkin, and James Gandolfini, plus two of my favorite things: magic and Vegas. Burt Wonderstone (Steve Carell) and Anton Marvelton (Steve Buscemi) honed their magic skills as kids and as adults ruled the Las Vegas strip for years. But as the years pass, they gradually lose their love of magic while their affection for each other morphs into loathing. The act grows stale and the audiences grow thin. Cutthroat competition from guerilla street magician Steve Gray, brilliantly played by Jim Carrey, gathers a following and makes their act look tame. For us the film is a mixed bag. As one critic wrote, "it is a kind of semi-bad, semi-inspired comedy." Both Barb and I would have given the film higher marks if it were not for an ill-conceived ending that was neither creative nor funny for us. I can't bring this short review to a close without mentioning the performance of Alan Arkin. He can add to the interest of any scene and his presence is often enough to take me to the theater. Too bad the writers couldn't come up with a more palatable ending. **GRADE C+**

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH: This film is, arguably, the most important film you will have the opportunity to see in your lifetime. Many people who voted against Gore in the 2000 presidential election will find reasons to not see this brilliant documentary about the consequences of global warming, and, I suspect, so will many who did vote for him. A film of Al Gore lecturing us about a global disaster in the making doesn't sound very entertaining, but, surprisingly it is both entertaining and informative. Gore comes off as far more relaxed and warm than he did during his presidential bid. Director Davis Guggenheim does an excellent job of bringing to life what is essentially a slide show presentation—a very polished and persuasive slide show presentation. Global warming is, indeed, an

"inconvenient truth." Even though the consequences of ignoring the problem are unthinkable, it will be ignored by most. Or worse, minimized by people who would like to think the jury is still out on global warming. As a retired educator, I was deeply impressed by the quality of this film. The film premiered at Sundance Film Festival where it received a standing ovation. If you see only one film this year, I hope you will make it **An Inconvenient Truth. GRADE A**

THE INCREDIBLES: I must say up front that we don't care for most animated features. We saw this one because it got such good reviews, but I can see why people like the movie. It's very funny. My favorite bit was seeing Mr. Incredible (Craig T. Nelson) and his wife, Elastigirl (Holly Hunter), arguing about which freeway exit to take on their way to saving the city from destruction. The idea of all the world's superheros being put in witness protection and prevented from using their super powers is a clever one. Living a normal life as an insurance adjuster, husband, and father of three budding superheroes, Mr. Incredible puts on weight and is bored to distraction. He goes out secretly at night with his buddy, Frozone (Samual L. Jackson), to save citizens in trouble. The animation is terrific and so are the characters. It has all the elements of a James Bond movie, but Gary thought it was more fun. He liked it much better than he expected to. We both were especially amused by Edna "E: Mode, the superhero's costume designer. I don't think this movie is a good as **Shrek**, but I enjoyed it. **GRADE B**

INDIANA JONES AND THE KINGDOM OF THE CRYSTAL SKULL: We didn't expect this to be as good as the first one, and it isn't. But I suppose we aren't as good as we were 24 years ago either. We did like the actors—it was great to see Karen Allen again, and Harrison Ford was amusing as an aging Jones. We also liked Shia LeBoeuf as a younger version of Jones. The time period is 1957, and LeBoeuf makes his entrance on a motorcycle looking exactly like Marlon Brando in **The Wild One**. Cate Blanchett is Irina Spalco, a villainous Russian scientist forcing Jones to help her find the crystal skull. Don't ask me why she wants it—it's very convoluted. (Apparently the Russian Communists aren't happy with this film, and plan to ban it.) The film is as well made as the first two, but we were not engaged by the story or the action. Actually, we found it rather boring. Oh, there were a few good moments and a couple of exciting close calls, but not enough to make this a good movie for us. I thought it deserved a C, but Gary thinks we should add a + because Spielberg does know how to make an action movie. (But it isn't nearly as good as **Iron Man**.) **GRADE C+**

INDIGNATION: (2016) Based on a 2008 Philip Roth novel with the same title, **Indignation** takes a look at the other side of the wholesome 1950's. Roth has written many books but is arguably best known for two that were made into movies: **Portnoy's Complaint** and **Goodby Columbus**. This film is set in 1951 when young men not enrolled in college could be drafted to fight in the Korean War. I am the right age to remember the period well. Be warned that there are no car chases, explosions, or zombies in this film. Any explosions in Philip Roth's books are usually quieter but potentially powerful. The main character, Marcus Messner, is effectively played by Logan Lerman who is young but has an impressive filmography. Marcus is a brilliant working class Jewish boy from New Jersey who travels on a scholarship to a small, conservative liberal arts college in the mid-west, thus exempting him from being drafted into the Korean War. There he meets and grows infatuated with a beautiful classmate, Olivia. As you might expect, this is a coming-of-age film and there are moral messages. "Small actions can lead to dire consequences." **Indignation** brings this aphorism convincingly home. The most interesting and important relationships in this intelligent and thought-provoking film are between Marcus and the College Dean and between Marcus and the beautiful, but troubled Olivia. Barbara and I agreed as we left the theater that we liked the movie a lot and it was certainly one of the better films we have seen this year. We both give it high marks though mine is a little higher than hers. **GRADE A-/B+**

INEQUALITY FOR ALL: The star of this film is Robert Reich. If you like your movie stars to be extraordinarily bright, passionate, articulate with a good sense of humor, and measure 4' 10", then Robert Reich is your man. Reich is a former Rhodes Scholar, a former professor at Harvard and is currently an economics professor at Berkeley. A genetic disorder that left him small all his life in no way diminished his intellectual prowess. He served in the administrations of Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter and was Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton from 1993 to 1997. As Barbara and I were leaving this eye-opening documentary, I commented that a person could learn more about economics in this hour and a half movie than in a full semester college course. Reich effectively argues on behalf of the American middle class, the real job creators in the economy. Reich as well as Barbara and I grew up in middle class homes and with a realistic dream of upward mobility. Unfortunately, in the past thirty years we have seen incomes in the middle class stagnate and the upward mobility dream shatter for most. The dream has turned into a myth. The income of the top 1% rose by 31% from 2009 to 2012, while the income of the bottom 40% fell by 6%. Reich uses humor and a wide array of facts to show the widening income gap and the history of America's rich/poor divide. In the film you will meet people at both ends of the spectrum. Reich knows there will always be a significant divide between rich and poor, but the width of that chasm is significant. He also believes in free markets, but points out that all free markets have rules. The important question is who benefits from them. He is diminutive in size, but his message is large. I wish everyone would see this enlightening, educational, and entertaining film. I realize that is as realistic as wishing for an endorsement from Fox News, but I remain hopeful. **GRADE A**

THE INFILTRATOR: (2016) Bran Cranston returns to the world of drugs, but this time as an undercover cop. The movie is set in 1985 in Florida where most of the illegal drugs from Columbia entered the U.S. The time period is maintained mostly by the facial hair on both the good and the bad guys: mustaches, beards and bushy sideburns abound. **The Infiltrator** illustrates how undercover operatives sometimes become friends of the very people they are hunting. This is a serviceable movie and is based on the real life story of Robert Mazur who wrote a book about his experiences titled, **The Infiltrator: My Secret Life Inside the Dirty Banks Behind Pablo Escobar's Medellin Cartel**. **The Infiltrator** held our attention because of the performances of Cranston, Diane Kruger and John Leguizamo, and we thought that Benjamin Bratt was perfectly cast as a sophisticated and likeable drug kingpin. However, it's nothing that we haven't seen before— **Eastern Promises** (2007), **The Departed** (2006) and **Donnie Brasco** (1997) come to mind. If you missed Cranston's performance as L.B.J. in the HBO movie **All The Way**, we urge you to catch this remarkable performance. **GRADE B**

INFINITELY POLAR BEAR: (2015) This is a deeply personal autobiographical film written and directed by Maya Forbes, a woman who was cared for in her childhood by her bipolar father. The strange title reflects a small child's misheard version of her father's bipolar diagnosis. It is a story of a mixed-race family in the 1970's trying to cope with a father's manic-depressive behavior while he works to rebuild a relationship with his two daughters and win back the trust of his wife. In the leading role playing the father is Mark Ruffalo

giving his usual brilliant performance. Playing his estranged wife is the beautiful and talented Zoe Saldana. Interestingly, the older of the two daughters is played by Maya Forbes own daughter and she does a terrific job. This low budget indie film was very well received at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival and received 80% on the Rotten Tomatoes' Tomatometer. Because of the outstanding acting and heartwarming elements of the film, Barbara and I recommend seeing it. **GRADE B+**

INFAMOUS: This is another version of the Truman Capote/*In Cold Blood* story, and we think it is every bit as good as the 2005 film, *Capote*, with Phillip Seymour Hoffman. Different, but equally engrossing and, I think, more accessible because British actor Toby Jones injects more humor into his interpretation of Capote. He is excellent and has the advantage of looking and sounding very much like the real thing. Here we see more of Capote interacting with his society friends: Babe Paley (Sigourney Weaver), Slim Keith (Hope Davis), and Diana Vreeland (Juliet Stevenson). Their conversations demonstrate why the flamboyant Capote was such a popular dinner guest. Also, I was more taken with the growing friendship between the writer and the killer, Perry Smith. Daniel Craig (the new James Bond) gives a powerful and memorable performance as Smith. The scenes between the two men are tense, sometimes violent, and quite moving. Sandra Bullock plays Nelle Harper Lee and proves once again what a good actress she is when she's not appearing in films like *Miss Congeniality*. Gwyneth Paltrow has a cameo appearance as Peggy Lee. In the opening scene she sings "What Is This Thing Called Love," and manages to capture the essence of the celebrated singer. Jeff Daniels has a nice turn as Alvin Dewey, the Sheriff of Holcomb, Kansas. The cast is uniformly wonderful. It isn't often that we are able to see two exceptional films on the same subject, and we recommend both of them. They are based on different books, which may account for most of their differences. *Infamous* is based on George Plimpton's book and *Capote* was based on a book by Gerald Clarke. **GRADE B+**

THE INFORMANT: Matt Damon gives an outstanding performance as a corporate informer and is the major reason to see this film. The additional 30 pounds and the goofy hairdo only add to his believability as Mark Whitacre. Damon narrates throughout, and his narration was a highlight for me. Mark Whitacre was an executive in the agricultural company Archer Daniels Midland, a.k.a. A.D.M. In 1992, while the FBI was investigating a baseless case of corporate espionage against ADM, Whitacre told them that he and other executives were involved in a multinational conspiracy to control the price of corn-based lysine, an amino acid that is a necessary building block for all protein in the body. Subsequently, Whitacre became an FBI mole at ADM. He wore a wire to meetings and even convinced ADM's foreign collaborators to hold their price-fixing meetings in the U.S., where the FBI could video the proceedings. As a result of Whitacre's cooperation, ADM had to ultimately settle for more than \$100 million, and several of the company's executives spent three years in jail. Unfortunately, the informant was also a thief. He was stealing millions at the same time he was acting as an informant. Whitacre, the man who made the biggest antitrust case the FBI had prosecuted up to that time possible, was convicted of fraud. He was sentenced to over nine years in prison—three times longer than the price-fixing executives' sentences. Whitacre was released a little early after FBI agents called him "an American hero" and is now an executive in a high-tech start-up in California. The film is based on a serious book, but director Steven Soderberg adds some needed humor to the story along with sound track that some might find as nutty as Whitacre. Gary enjoyed this one a bit more than I did and gives it a B+. I say B. **GRADE B+/B**

INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS: This WWII movie has that blend of humor and bloody violence we've come to expect from Quentin Tarantino. Brad Pitt supplies both as Lt. Aldo Raine, the leader of a small group of Jewish/American soldiers who, disguised as civilians, go behind enemy lines in France. They have one task: to kill as many Nazi's as they can. That's their business, and, as Raine says, "Business is booming." They're called "The Basterds." As usual, Tarantino weaves several stories together. In addition to "The Basterds," he tells the story of Col. Hans Landa, a German officer who has the job of locating and killing all the Jews in France. Landa, known as "The Hangman," is also very good at his job. The Col. is introduced in the first tension-filled scene of the film. I should point out that none of the stories is true. They are all products of Tarantino's fertile imagination. Col. Landa is played by an Austrian actor named Christoph Waltz who steals every scene he's in. He walked away with the best-actor win at the Cannes festival this year for his *Inglourious Basterds* role. Diane Kruger appears as a German movie star who is also a British agent, and Mélanie Laurent is lovely as a young woman who escapes from Col. Landa and lives to get her revenge. Tarantino loves to pepper his films with film references, and that's always fun. His biggest problem is a lack of restraint. The film's running time is 2 hours and 32 minutes, and some scenes, although interesting, seem too long. Our local reviewer put it this way: "And Tarantino's typical lack of restraint bears the usual inconsistent results." We won't remember this as one of our favorite Tarantino films, but, unless you have a problem with graphic violence, we think it's worth seeing for the performances of Pitt (Loved his accent) and Waltz. Gary says B-; I say B. **GRADE B/B-**

INGRID GOES WEST: (2017) This insightful modern day stalker fantasy is part comedy, part tragedy, but more importantly a satirical look at social media. In his first full-length feature, director and co-writer Matt Spicer examines the false intimacy of social media and the dangers of living life totally through it. Aubrey Plaza plays the title role and also produced the film. Ingrid is a troubled young woman with a history of social-media stalking. Plaza creates a sometimes sympathetic character who is insecure and desperate to be liked. After inheriting some money, she moves to Los Angeles to find Taylor Sloane (Elizabeth Olsen) a California Instagram star she found through social media that seems to have all the characteristics she lacks. Plaza and Olsen are terrific in their roles and both are very believable. I won't speak for Barbara, but I am pretty sure *Ingrid Goes West* will not make my Top Ten of 2017 list. Still it isn't bad and if you are looking a satirical and sometimes scathing takedown of social media obsession, this may be a film you want to see. Barbara liked the film a little better than I. **GRADE B-/B**

INNOCENCE: This Australian film has a very unusual story and two fine performances. Claire (Julia Blake) and Andreas (Charles "Bud" Tingwell) were lovers when they were young, but events separated them. Now, 48 years later, they become reacquainted and the love and passion they once shared is rekindled. Andreas is a widower, but Claire is married. Theirs is a very real and passionate love affair--something we are not used to seeing in people of a "certain age." The director effectively uses flashback scenes to contrast the youthful and aging passion. Ebert loved this film calling it "the most passionate and tender love story in many years, so touching because it is not about a story, not about stars, not about a plot, not about sex, not about nudity, but about love itself. True, timeless, undefeated love." We, too, wanted to love this movie, but instead we merely liked it. The film will probably not have wide release--it was only in one theater in all of Phoenix. It might be one that you will want to put on your video list. **GRADE B**

INSIDE JOB: This film is billed a documentary, but I would call it an educational film. The title makes it sound like a "heist" film and I am sure that is no accident for in a tragic way it is. It is a comprehensive analysis of the 2008 global financial crisis which leads to the worst recession since the Great Depression, and nearly caused global financial collapse. Since the film blames both Republicans and Democrats, it will likely offend a lot of people. There isn't a lot of optimism as film maker Charles Ferguson methodically exposes a banking world run wild in an atmosphere where money brokers with no regulations to restrain them intentionally defraud the ordinary American investor. As a result millions lose their jobs and homes while the people responsible use their vast newfound wealth to buy more political influence and even corrupt academia. Surprisingly, this film was rated "A" by both critics and viewers and Barbara and I have to agree on that grade. **GRADE A**

INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS: (2013) The trailer for this one didn't look appealing, but the fact that it was written and directed by the Coen brothers took us to the theatre. We are fans of some of their movies, notably *Blood Simple*, their first feature, *Fargo*, their 1996 hit and their Oscar-winning *No Country For Old Men*. But some of their movies, like this one, have not engaged us. This movie follows a week in the life of a sixties folk singer, Llewyn Davis, played with weary resignation by Oscar Isaac. Davis is self-absorbed and only slightly more depressed than we were upon exiting the theatre. Our local critic said that Davis's uncomfortable journey was "worth the trouble," but for us it was not. Davis, whose partner recently took a header off the George Washington Bridge, is trying to make it as a solo act. He's good, but not good enough to be special. He spends his days looking for a gig and looking for people willing to let him crash on their couch. Several critics have referred to the movie's dark humor, but there wasn't enough humor to alleviate the literal and emotional cold of Davis's winter journey from one bad decision to the next. John Goodman's strange character provided some interest, and we always appreciate Carey Mulligan. She and Justin Timberlake provided a nice rendition of that popular sixties folk song, *500 Miles*. Fans of folk music will appreciate that the songs included are presented as complete performances, and Isaac acquires himself well. In fact, the actor does an outstanding job of playing an unlikeable loser. Apparently that, and the unrelenting atmosphere of the movie were enough for the glowing reviews from many critics. Alas, not from us. **GRADE C-/D+**

INSIDE MAN: This is the most beautifully-crafted and entertaining heist movie we've seen in years. With a cast headlined by Denzel Washington, Clive Owen, Jodi Foster, and Christopher Plummer, you expect quality acting, and you get it—in spades. The surprise is a clever script that keeps you guessing every step of the way. It's a heist movie with interesting characters, sharp dialogue, and a uniquely satisfying conclusion. The big three—Washington, Owen & Foster—are first rate, but the supporting characters are also excellent. I won't get into plot details because that would spoil it for you. It's enough to know that Owen is a most unusual bank robber, Washington is the hostage negotiator, Plummer is the head of the Wall Street bank conglomerate, and Foster is the woman he hires to make sure that certain secrets are not revealed. Foster's role is a beaut and she fires up the screen every time she appears. Spike Lee paces the film perfectly, photographs it beautifully, and then stands back and lets his actors do their thing. Here's what our local reviewer said:

Spike Lee's 'Inside Man' takes one of the most familiar film premises and turns it into something dazzling. This rattling bank-heist thriller is urgent, witty and unpredictable. It's about as much fun as a movie can be.

We couldn't agree more. **GRADE A-**

INSIDE OUT: (2015) Barbara and I usually avoid animated feature films, but occasionally we make an exception. *Shrek* and *Up* immediately come to mind as examples. *Inside Out* opened widely in mid-June, 2015, and has received nearly universal critical acclaim. It grossed \$90 million in its first weekend, a record for an opening weekend of an original film. Produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures, the movie gives us a creative look at the way emotions work in the brain of an 11-year-old girl. Having lived through that turbulent year, Barb had more to identify with than I. A girl named Riley is born in Minnesota, and her primary emotion, Joy, appears early in her young life. As she grows older, other anthropomorphized emotions, fear, anger, disgust, and sadness appear. Things go reasonably well until her life is turned on end when the family moves to San Francisco. The cast of voices for the animated characters are all excellent, but "Anger" is so perfectly cast that I must give it special attention. In his stand-up comedy material Lewis Black's trademark is "anger." It is hard to imagine anyone else playing "Anger," and he does not disappoint. The filmmakers are operating on two levels, one for fun loving kids and one for thoughtful adults. I feel too far removed to evaluate how the film worked with kids, but it worked well for adults. As we left the theater, Barbara said the movie was delightful and she loved it. I thought it was well made and highly original, but rate it slightly below her. **GRADE B+/A-**

INSOMNIA: It's worth going to this film just to see Al Pacino's remarkable face, ravaged by age, sleeplessness and his personal demons. He is a study in what fine acting is all about. Pacino's character, Will Dormer, is a celebrated Los Angeles detective who has come to Nightmute, Alaska, to assist in a murder investigation. Back in L.A. he is facing the specter of an Internal Affairs investigation that could turn up irregularities in some of his cases. Nightmute is in the "land of the midnight sun," and Dormer finds it impossible to sleep in the half-light of an Alaskan summer night. (It's summer, but everyone still wears down jackets!) It would spoil it for you if I gave you an outline of the plot, so I'll just say that there are some exiting moments and you won't have any trouble staying awake for this one. Robin Williams is effective as a murderous creep, and Hilary Swank is very good as an eager young detective thrilled to be working with the legendary Dormer. Martin Donovan is Hap, Dormer's partner, and Maura Tierney has an incidental role. Christopher Nolan, who two years ago directed *Memento*, gives *Insomnia* a bleak and distinctive style. **GRADE B+**

INSTRUCTIONS NOT INCLUDED: This is a sweet, funny, family drama with a tearjerker ending. The reception of critics has been lukewarm but audiences have been far more enthusiastic. The movie packed theaters in California and Texas during the opening weekend and took in ten million dollars. It competed favorably with a block buster like *The Butler* even though it showed in only about 1/10 as many theaters. The male lead and also director of the film is a Mexican actor, Eugenio Derbez, whose shows have been a TV staple in Mexico for years. Though starting and ending in Acapulco, Mexico, the story is mostly set in L.A. There is some English spoken but mostly the film is in Spanish with English subtitles. Derbez plays Valentin who's playboy life style is shattered when a former one-night-stand shows up on his doorstep with his baby and then, after borrowing \$10 for cab fare, takes off leaving him with his newfound daughter, Maggie. Clearly, his life will never be the same. He traces Maggie's birth mom to L.A. and literally falls into a much needed job as a Hollywood stuntman. For the next six years Maggie, brilliantly played by Loreto Peralta, and Valentin mature together. As you might guess, his life is shaken again when the errant birth mom shows up unannounced after six years absence. By the end of

the third act the writers use an overused but still effective technique to moisten your eyes and force you to reach for a handkerchief. This is a low budget independent film that will probably see limited release in most of the United States. It is predictable and a little trite, but Barbara and I still enjoyed it. **GRADE B-**

THE INSULT: (2017) Barbara and I see a number of foreign language films each year and are often underwhelmed. But occasionally we are rewarded with a riveting film which makes us glad we didn't give up on the genre. *The Insult* was one of five films nominated for this year's Best Foreign Language Film Oscar, and we feel it is good enough to win the award. Set in Lebanon the story focuses on Christian-Palestinian tensions and how one event and a few poorly chosen words can escalate, spiraling out of control. Tony, a Lebanese Christian, and Yasser, a Palestinian refugee, become symbols for the opposing sides of the political divide that has created a powder-keg culture. It is a thought provoking film that offers insight into Middle Eastern politics. The acting is fantastic and the pacing superb. Barb and I agree with the critics on this one. **GRADE A**

THE INTERN: (2015) This is the kind of movie that critics pan and audiences enjoy. Our local critic began his review this way: "*The Intern*" is idiotic, unrealistic, Boomer-wish fulfillment that has no business working on any level. I quite enjoyed it." Gary and I also quite enjoyed it. 70-year-old widower Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro) has taken the job of senior intern at an online fashion site, founded and run by Jules Ostin, played by Anne Hathaway. Everyone who works there is young and dresses causally. Ben wears a suit and tie because that's how he feels comfortable. He is assigned to be a personal intern for Ms. Ostin, and, as they get to know each other, she begins to depend on him. He not only helps her with the business but becomes her confidant on personal problems. I won't spell these out, because it will spoil the movie for you. I will say that DeNiro and Hathaway are terrific and it is their chemistry that carries this very old-fashioned and somewhat corny movie. Walking out of the theatre, I overheard an audience member say, "That De Niro can do anything!" And once again, the *Taxi Driver* proves he can do light comedy, and do it well. *Queen of the Earth* was the movie we saw just before *The Intern*, and it seems we prefer old-fashioned and corny movies that charm us to pretentious movies that puzzle us. Consequently, we rate this movie higher than it probably deserves. **GRADE B+**

THE INTERNATIONAL: This old-fashioned thriller doesn't rely entirely on special effects. Clive Owen and Naomi Watts spend considerable time trying to figure out why an International bank would be buying and selling missiles. Interesting that in today's world, banks and bankers qualify as super-villains. As in most thrillers, there are some events that could never happen in real life. The shoot-out at the Guggenheim is one example. There must have been hundreds of bullets fired and remarkably few found their mark. It is a spectacular scene, though. The ramps of the Guggenheim provide a terrific set for the gun battle. Not to worry, though. You won't see any bullet holes in the real museum. The scene was shot on an enormous interior set. Owen is believable as an Interpol agent determined to bring down the bank, and he and Watts make a good team. Armin Mueller-Stahl, who usually plays a good guy, is consummately evil in this movie, and Brian F. O'Byrne, from TV's *The Brotherhood*, is very cool as a killer-consultant. The plot is fairly easy to follow and the ending is, I suspect, very close to reality. For me, the real star of the film is the architecture. The bank's Luxembourg headquarters is beautiful and the Italian arms company that appears in one scene is spectacular. And then, of course, there's the Guggenheim. We also get a scene in Istanbul at a gorgeous mosque. We are both Clive Owen fans ever since we first saw him in *The Croupier*, so we enjoyed watching him go after a villainous bank. **GRADE B**

THE INTERPRETER: For the first 2/3 of this film we thought it was a taut, well-written and well-acted thriller, but then it fell apart. We thought the ending was especially implausible. Nicole Kidman is Silvia Broome, an American born woman who has lived most of her life in Africa. She is an interpreter at the United Nations. One night, returning late to retrieve some personal items, she overhears a death threat against an African head of state, spoken in a rare dialect few people other than Silvia can understand. Sean Penn is the Secret Service agent assigned to protect foreign dignitaries. Catherine Keener is his assistant. Penn must determine if the threat is credible. To do so, he must investigate Silvia's background. The threatened leader, Zuwanie, is intended to represent Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, also once hailed as a liberator, now using starvation as a political tool. Pollack effectively uses fast cuts and overlapping scenes to maintain the tension. Because, for us, the film didn't hold up all the way to the end, we give this one a B-. **GRADE B-**

THE INTERNSHIP: (2013) Vince Vaughn wrote the screenplay for this comedy and is listed as one of the producers. He also stars in it. Without the undeniable charm of Vaughn and his co-star, Owen Wilson, this movie wouldn't amount to much. Because of them, we enjoyed it except for a scene in the middle of the movie when Vaughn and Wilson take their intern team to a club. The message of the scene seemed to be that getting drunk is a good way to bond team members. It made us uncomfortable. But, the ending of the movie, though rather cornball, saved *The Internship* for us. Many critics decried the movie as a two-hour commercial for Google, but that didn't bother us at all. We appreciate Google as the best answer to our failing memories. The IMDB summarizes it this way: *Two salesmen whose careers have been torpedoed by the digital age find their way into a coveted internship at Google, where they must compete with a group of young, tech-savvy geniuses for a shot at employment.* We liked the fact that it put connecting with real people back into the internet equation. Vaughn and Wilson proved that tech isn't everything and that people still matter. It's always nice to see Rose Byrne on screen. John Goodman has a small role as the pair's former employer. Two veterans from *The Daily Show* also appear. Aasif Mandvi is a Google employee and Rob Riggle appears toward the end as a man who sells motorized wheelchairs. The film was shot on the Google campus and it looks like a fun place to work if you're still in your twenties or very young at heart. **GRADE C+**

INTERSTELLAR: (2014) Both Gary and I were disappointed in Christopher Nolan's epic space movie. The ideas were big: In a future where climate change has reduced the Earth to a nothing-but-corn-growing-dusty-wasteland, NASA still exists, although secretly and underground. They have dispatched scientists through a worm hole to a distant galaxy to find a planet that will support human life. Now they must send another team to the planet which offers the best chance for human survival. So, we have intergalactic space travel, manipulation of the time-space continuum and worm holes. As I said, big ideas. Unfortunately, it also raises a lot of questions: Who has funded NASA all these years, why haven't scientists come up with some sort of manufactured food source (Soylent Green, anyone?), and why did Nolan take 169 minutes to tell the story? He could have cut out at least twenty minutes by reducing the amount of time we see Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway sitting in their space ship while it shakes alarmingly. (See accompanying picture.) Nolan has injected some heart into this space odyssey by having McConaughey leave his young son and daughter, perhaps forever. The family scenes are some of the best in the movie. The daughter, Murphy, is ten years old, but by the time the space travelers even

think about returning to Earth (lots of space-time mumbo jumbo here), she and her father are the same age. Jessica Chastain plays the grown-up Murphy who has become a NASA scientist. Perhaps the space and worm-hole travel would have been more spectacular if we had seen it at the IMAX. We did see it at the Cine Capri, Phoenix's largest movie screen, but for us it didn't seem as spectacular as the space walk in *Gravity*. The spirit of exploration and discovery may make the movie worth seeing, but the mostly bewildering scientific intrigue wasn't enough to thrill us. Or to keep Gary awake. I managed to stay alert, so I'll add a plus to Gary's grade of C. **GRADE C+/C**

INTO THE WILD: (2007 film seen on Video) Sean Penn directs this story of a young man who gives up everything to live a life of solitude in Alaska. The film is based a true story brought to life in a book by best-selling author Jon Krakauer. After graduating college, Christopher McCandless rebels against what he sees as the phony values of his parents and strikes out on an odyssey that will ultimately take him to the beautiful, but unforgiving terrain of Alaska. Emile Hirsch is outstanding in his portrayal of Christopher. **THUMBS UP**

INTO THE WOODS: (2014) This is a film adaptation of a Stephen Sondheim Broadway musical by the same name and directed by Rob Marshall who also directed one of my favorite film musicals, *Chicago*. That was enough to get me to the theater, but I wasn't expecting to love it. After all it was a Disney Studio release and based on children's stories. Barbara was more optimistic. As it turned out, I liked it a lot more than expected. *Into the Woods* is a creative twist on several beloved Grimm fairy tales, first the playful interweaving the familiar stories and later extending them into darker material better suited to adult audiences. There were no weak links in the all-star cast. Meryl Streep was, of course, fantastic playing the ever present witch with her magical powers. Emily Blunt, who has never sung on screen before, and Anna Kendrick who has were both impressive as were Tracey Ullman and Christine Baranski. Among the males, James Corden stood out. He is a British actor who is taking over Craig Ferguson's job as late-night host on CBS. There was even a part for Johnny Depp playing a zoot-suited Big Bad Wolf. Everyone seems to be having fun making this twisted version of the stories we all grew up with. We are left with the message, "Be careful what you wish for." Painful lessons may await those who go *Into the Woods*. **GRADE B**

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY: "Those Coen brothers have a weird sense of humor." That was Gary's comment after a hilarious scene involving an asthmatic hit man. He's right. The brothers also have cornered the market on quirky. This film is very quirky and, at times, weirdly funny. My problem with *Intolerable Cruelty* is that there are no sympathetic characters. George Clooney is Miles Massey, a barracuda of a divorce lawyer. Catherine Zeta-Jones, looking very beautiful, is Marilyn Rexroth, a gold-digger who has carried marrying for money to an art form. As you might expect, they meet when Marilyn is divorcing her rich husband (Edward Hermann) who is represented by Miles. Miles is instantly smitten with Marilyn, and falling in love changes him dramatically. Naturally, being a Coen brothers' movie, the course of love is anything but smooth. Cedric The Entertainer, Geoffrey Rush and Billy Bob Thornton also appear. The movie is based on a story by Robert Ramsey and Matthew Stone and they collaborated with Ethan and Joel Coen on the screenplay. Maybe that's the problem. I think I like the movies that the brothers write all by themselves better than this one. I can't go higher than B-, but Gary liked it a well enough to give it a B. **GRADE B/B-**

THE INTOUCHABLES: (2011 release) This may not be a great movie, but it certainly is an enjoyable and entertaining one. I can't understand why some critics were so nasty about it. The *New Yorker* review called it "disastrously condescending" and said that the film "is an embarrassment." Roger Ebert thought that it was "a simplistic reduction of racial stereotypes," but he admitted that the charm of the two leads accounted for its overwhelming success in France. We heartily agree with the last part: François Cluzet as Philippe, a wealthy quadriplegic, and Omar Sy as Driss, a street black from the projects who becomes Philippe's caregiver, are delightful. Both have extensive film histories, although Cluzet is the better-known of the two. We praised his performance in a 2006 French film, *Tell No One*. Yes, the story is a bit predictable. We expect that Driss will loosen up Philippe--he even introduces him to marijuana. And we also expect that Driss will learn from Philippe at the same time. But watching the two men develop a friendship is definitely worth the 112 minute running time. Not all the critics were negative. Our local reviewer, Bill Goodykoontz, gave it a favorable review and the website, Rotten Tomatoes, gave it 77% on their "tomatometer," while their audiences have given it a 90% rating. We give it a solid B. **GRADE B**

INTRODUCING DOROTHY DANDRIDGE: (1999 release seen on Video) Gary says his thumb is way up for this one. Halle Barry won an Emmy for her portrayal of Dorothy Dandridge in this biopic that was an HBO original. It is available now on videotape and we definitely recommend it. Barry is terrific. Dandridge was nominated for an Oscar for her role as Carmen in Otto Preminger's *Carmen Jones*, and she starred again with Sidney Potier in *Porgy and Bess*. She was the first black movie star/sex symbol and that is never an easy thing to be. We think you will enjoy learning more about her. **THUMBS UP**

THE INVENTION OF LYING: Ricky Gervais has created a world in which everyone tells the truth. Well, they don't actually have a word for truth, every one just says what *is*; and they seem compelled to say what ever is on their minds as well. Gervais is a screen writer for films that consist of people sitting in a chair and reading real stories from history—stories that everyone knows. He has been assigned the 13th Century, and since the Black Plague doesn't make for exciting reading, he's losing his job. He's also finally got a date with a girl (Jennifer Garner) he's long had a crush on, but she informs him that he's way out of her league and she wouldn't consider having children with him because they'd all be chubby with pug noses. On top of all that, his mother is in a old folks home. Life is not very good until Mark discovers a talent that no one else on earth seems to have: He can tell lies, and everyone believes him. He comforts his dying mother by inventing a happy afterlife and becomes rich and successful by inventing a story that becomes the best film ever made. The funniest scenes in the film are when Mark invents "the man in the sky", but I suspect those scenes will bother some people. Gervais, Garner, and a host of familiar faces are all very good and we both thought the concept was wonderfully creative. Gary liked parts of the film, but other parts left him uninvolved, so he doesn't grade the film as high as I do. Gervais makes me laugh and I stayed involved throughout. **GRADE B/C**

INVICTUS: Sports have the power to unite people. Antagonisms and resentments are forgotten when people cheer for "their" team. This is something Nelson Mandela knew to be true. After 27 years imprisonment, he could forgive his captors. Now, as President, he needed to convince his black countrymen to forgive the cruelties and indignities of apartheid. At the same time, he needed to alleviate the fears of his white countrymen. He used his country's rugby team to do both. It wasn't easy. The green and gold Springboks were

seen by many as the symbol of apartheid. The black population always cheered for the opposing team, and young black boys played soccer rather than rugby. Plus, the Springboks were not a very good team. First, Mandela convinced the National Sports Organization to keep the Springboks and their colors. Next, he inspired the captain of the Springboks, Francois Pienaar, to lead his underdog team to victory in the 1995 Rugby World Cup. I left the theatre with two thoughts: I don't understand Rugby (Gary says he saw more Rugby than he cared for); and South Africa was incredibly lucky to have Nelson Mandela as their President. Who better to play this brilliant leader whose compassion is almost God-like than Morgan Freeman? He brings such dignity and humanity to the role that he almost becomes Mandela in our eyes. Matt Damon is outstanding and suitably muscular as Pienaar, and the scenes of his visit to the prison where Mandela lived for so long are very moving. Mandela was inspired by the poem, *Invictus*, by a 19th Century poet, hence the title of the film. Although we wouldn't rank this as the best of director Clint Eastwood's many inspirational film, it's not far behind. Sports, race relations, politics and Morgan Freeman. What's not to like? **GRADE B+**

INVINCIBLE: This movie is a combination of *Rocky*, *The Rookie*, and *Rudy*. The title doesn't start with an "R," but it has the same plot line: an unlikely person triumphs. It's set in Philadelphia (*Rocky*); The hero is too old to be starting a sports career (*The Rookie*); and it's about football (*Rudy*). It isn't the best football movie ever made, but it is about football, so of course I liked it. Plus, it's a true story, which adds to its appeal. When Dick Vermeil (Greg Kinnear) took over the Philadelphia Eagles in the 1976, they hadn't had a winning season in years. He started by holding unprecedented open tryouts. Vince Papale (Mark Wahlberg) was a part-time school teacher, part-time bartender and full-time Eagles fan. He had played only high school football, but was persuaded by friends to go the tryouts. He wound up playing for the Eagles for three years. (Actually, Papale had played two years in the World Football League, but that isn't mentioned in the movie.) The film shows us the brutality and the excitement of professional football. Wahlberg plays the part in his characteristic understated way. Kinnear, in spite of a shaggy 70's hairpiece, is convincing as Vermeil, who, according to the photos I've seen, had a rather shaggy do himself in the 70s. We very much liked Elizabeth Banks as Papale's girlfriend. This is a perfect movie for football season. **GRADE B+**

THE INVISIBLE MAN: 2020 (*Amazon rental*) I asked Gary at the end of the movie, what he thought. He replied, "I thought Elizabeth Moss was terrific, but it's a genre that's never going to win me over." I agree that Moss was terrific in this remake of the H.G. Wells' classic 1897 science-fiction novel. The movie opens with Cecilia (Moss) fleeing a toxic relationship with Adrian. When she learns that her abusive and controlling ex has taken his own life and has left her his fortune, she suspects his death was a hoax. She is correct, but no one believes her. Adrian is an optic genius, and Cecilia believes that he has figured out a way to become invisible. One caveat if you are thinking of renting this film: It is often dark, and that doesn't do well in a lighted room. Also, the many creeks and footsteps, which are supposed to frighten, are barely heard without surround sound. One critic said, "Writer-director Leigh Whannell has refashioned "The Invisible Man" as a bracingly modern #MeToo allegory that, despite its brutal craft, rings hollow." However, I did like Cecilia saying "surprise" at the end of the film and added a silent, "You go girl!" *The Invisible Man* cost only \$7 million to make and has grossed \$132 million (and still counting) so it is a rousing success. But, in the end, I have to agree with Gary: The genre didn't win me over. It will be a long time before I see another horror movie. **GRADE B-**

IRIS: Watching a brilliant and vibrant woman succumb to the horror of Alzheimer's disease is not my idea of a pleasant afternoon's entertainment. However, in *IRIS*, the emphasis is on the love story between Iris Murdoch and her husband, literary critic John Bayley. The strong performances from Judi Dench and Jim Broadbent as the older couple, and Kate Winslett and Hugh Bonneville as the younger Iris and John make the movie much more than a maudlin tearjerker. Talking about the movie, Dench said, "You don't come away thinking about the disease. It's the love affair people will remember, the extraordinary uniqueness of these two people." She's right. John Bayley wrote the screenplay, based on his two books, "Iris and Her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire" and "Elegy for Iris," which related their life together and Murdoch's gradual dissolution into Alzheimer's disease. Both Dench and Broadbent have been nominated for Oscars. Roger Ebert disliked the movie, not for itself, but because "Alzheimer's is so sad that perhaps I simply refused to accept a film about it." He also said that this was a film he did not want to see about Iris Murdoch, a writer he greatly admired. We thought the movie was very sad, but extremely well done. The past and present are beautifully interwoven and clearly present a film that was made with great affection for the characters. **GRADE B+**

THE IRISHMAN: (2019--on *Netflix*) *Netflix* paid \$200 Million for this movie. Gary and I can't understand why they would pay that much for what is a boring movie. Apparently, the critics and audiences don't agree with us because it got 96% and 86%, respectively, from *Rotten Tomatoes*. But watching it in two sittings on *Netflix* (it is, after all, 209 minutes long) it literally put us to sleep. We expected more from Martin Scorsese and his stars: Robert De Niro, Al Pacino and Joe Pesci in what amounts, for us, as *Goodfellows* revisited. This biographical crime drama follows truck driver-turned-hitman Frank Sheeran (De Niro) from his days of boosting stolen meat to an eventual gig as Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa's bodyguard. Now older, the WWII veteran reflects on his past years working for the Bufalino crime family his most memorable hits and, in particular, considers his involvement with his good friend Jimmy Hoffa's disappearance in 1975. The makeup artist had a difficult time de-aging De Niro and Pacino. He explained, "The process doesn't use animation, it actually records the faces of actors with every nuance of their performance and replaces them with the younger CGI faces." The result is that De Niro and Pesci do look younger but they don't resemble the actors in their younger years, but simply with their old faces looking a bit younger. They both age as the film wears on. Pacino, who used the de-aging process in all his scenes, was barely recognizable. People who are young enough not to remember the actors in their younger years wouldn't have a problem with this, but we did. We can't give the movie higher than a C. **GRADE C**

THE IRON LADY: (2011) Gary said he left the theater "humming the makeup." He's right. The makeup deserves an A and Meryl Streep's performance deserves an A+. Too bad there wasn't a better script to go along with them. We expected more political history from the eleven years that Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of England. What we got was the camera following an aging Thatcher around her house as she remembered the past and talked to the hallucination of her dead husband. It is true that Mrs. Thatcher is suffering from dementia, but it seemed cruel for the movie to spend so much time showing a strong woman in decline. There is one scene that we particularly liked. Thatcher is meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State over the Falkland Islands War. Our official tries to persuade her that she should back away from the war and seek a conciliatory solution, since the islands are small and so very far away. She responded that the U.S. didn't do that when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and Hawaii was so very far away. We would have

liked more scenes like that one. But we cannot say enough about Streep. She is a phenomenon. She completely inhabits the character of Thatcher, a woman whose politics the actress, by all accounts, dislikes. And yet, she became Margaret Thatcher, and she is so good that regardless of how you felt about the politician, you will feel sympathy for the woman. **GRADE B-** for the movie; **GRADE A+** for Meryl Streep's performance.

IRON MAN: This is the kind of superhero movie I like. It has a terrific actor in the lead role, the script has clever dialogue and a healthy dash of humor, and the technology & special effects are impressive. A buff Robert Downey, Jr. stars as Peter Stark, a weapons inventor & manufacturer who develops a conscience when he discovers that the weapons he has built to protect his country are being used against it. We especially enjoyed the first 3/4 of the film, as Stark invents his way out of an Afghanistan cave/prison and takes the technology back to his fabulous Malibu home to develop it for good. Jeff Bridges, almost unrecognizable with a bald head and heavy beard, makes for a great villain. Gwyneth Paltrow provides some nice sexual tension as Stark's competent assistant, Pepper Potts. Terence Howard appears as an Air Force officer who is Stark's best friend, although he isn't asked to do much here. I expect we will see more of him in the inevitable **Iron Man 2**. I'm actually looking forward to the next one, even though I'm sure I won't like it as much as this one. Gary and I enjoyed the film and applaud Jon Favreau for successfully pulling off his first directing foray into the superhero genre. As A.O. Scott put it in his review, Favreau "wears the genre paradigm as a light cloak rather than a suit of iron." I say A; Gary says A-. **GRADE A/A-**

IRON MAN 2: Neither Barbara nor I are terribly fond of this genre, but since we both liked the very creative first **Iron Man** so well we felt we had to give this one a try. As a rule, sequels are not as good as the original film and **Iron Man 2** is no exception. As you would expect, it is a polished film and the technical effects are fantastic. But the surprises were pretty much used up in the original version. If you want a successful sequel, put in at least a half-dozen major characters and subplots and fill them with well-known actors. Robert Downey, Jr. returns to his role of billionaire inventor Tony Stark and he has an even cooler Iron Man armored suit. Other major roles are filled by the well known faces of Gwyneth Paltrow, Don Cheadle, Mickey Rourke, Sam Rockwell, Samuel L. Jackson, and Scarlett Johansson. Rourke is unforgettable as Whiplash, a man on a mission with his crackling electric whips. Tony Stark is under pressure from the government to turn over his technology to the military. A small but very funny role of Senator Stern is played by comedian Garry Shandling. The fight sequences were a little long for us, but if you like the superhero genre, you won't want to miss this one. **GRADE B-**

IS ANYBODY THERE?: This is a gentle British film starring the wonderful Michael Caine, or "Sir Michael" since he was knighted by the Queen in the year 2000. Co-starring with Caine is a talented young British actor, Bill Milner, who starred in another gentle British film, **Son of Rambo**. Milner plays Edward, a troubled ten-year-old living with his parents who have turned their house into a retirement home filled with a variety of eccentric elderly tenants. Rosemary Harris is a delight playing one of those tenants. I'm afraid this film will not reach a wide audience since it deals with the unpopular subject of aging and death. Edward has, understandably, become obsessed with ghosts and the possible after life of residents. His life takes a turn for the better when a former magician (Caine), shows up in an aging camper painted like a circus wagon. Perhaps it is our decades of love for Michael Caine that won us over, but both Barbara and I think this film deserves an audience. **GRADE B**

ISLE OF DOGS: (2018) Before reading further try this exercise: Say "Isle of Dogs" quickly followed with "I love dogs." **Isle of dogs...I love dogs.** I am not sure the similarity means anything, but this film is probably not designed for cat lovers. The film is written and directed by Wes Anderson, a man who has found a place in Hollywood with his somewhat whimsical creativity. Set in or near Japan in what is described as the near future, a thuggish totalitarian dictator uses an outbreak of snout fever to justify the banishment of all dogs to an offshore island trash dump. A young boy journeys to the island to retrieve his dog Spots and ultimately to rescue the other dogs from an almost certain fate. The most outstanding feature in this film is the cast of well-known actors who provide voices for all the animated characters. The voice cast includes Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Bill Murray, Scarlett Johansson, Tilda Swinton, Bob Balaban, Jeff Goldblum, Harvey Keitel, F. Murray Abraham, Live Schreiber, Greta Gerwig, and Yoko Ono. Frances McDormand provides Japanese to English translations. As we left the theater, I told Barbara I was convinced that the film was a lot more fun to make than it was to sit through. There is no question that Anderson is creative and that dogs, even animated ones, are cute, but the story is thin and at times we both had difficulty staying awake. The movie has been praised by many critics and our local critic, Bill Goodykoontz, gave it 4 ½ out of 5 stars. We aren't as enthusiastic. **GRADE C**

IT AIN'T OVER: 2022 (We saw it in a local theater) This fast-moving 98 minute documentary received a 98% Critics score on Rotten Tomatoes and 96% Audience Score. I have to agree with what Billy Crystal says in the film, that Yogi Berra is "the most overlooked superstar in the history of baseball. He might have become more famous off the baseball field than on it, but there's no denying that he was a great player. The film persuasively makes the case for his incredible achievements both on and off Major League baseball diamonds. Berra is one of only six players to win the league's MVP award three times, and the only player in history with a whopping ten World Series rings from his play with the Yankees. He added to his ring collection when he became a successful manager and coach. **It Ain't Over** is an emotional and uplifting documentary about an often misunderstood American icon. Friends, family and former players help in telling the story of a beloved New York Yankee legend who became famous to later generations for his amusing quips known as "Yogisms." This film's title is a shortened version of one of them. Others include: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." "Baseball is 90 percent mental; the other half is physical." "No one goes to that restaurant anymore. It's too crowded." I found the film riveting from start to finish. Barbara and I agree on a high grade for charming movie. **GRADE A**

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY: We didn't much care for the first half of this movie, but the second half was better. We did enjoy watching the three generations of the Douglas family do their thing. We especially liked Diana Douglas, Kirk's ex-wife. She is a lovely woman and we were touched by the relationship between Evelyn and Michell Gromberg (Diana and Kirk Douglas). Bernadette Peters was interesting as Alex's (Michael Douglas) wife, and Rory Culkin, who plays the younger grandson appears to be as talented as his brothers. (Just how many of these Culkins are there?) The script verges on soap opera, but there are a couple of good scenes. Gary can't go higher than a C, but I would give it a C+. **GRADE C+/C**

THE ITALIAN: (2007 release seen on DVD) This Russian film is about a 6-year-old orphan searching for his mother. It was Russia's entry for Oscar consideration last year. The film takes its title from the nickname Vanya acquires when a childless couple from Italy visits the orphanage and wants to adopt him. At first Vanya is excited, but soon he begins to worry that his mother might come looking for him after he leaves for Italy. He runs away from the orphanage to find his mother and for the second half of the film, we watch a child in peril and marvel at his courage and ingenuity. The young actor is most impressive. The film is in Russian with easy-to-read subtitles. **THUMBS UP**

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS: This pleasant Danish comedy was shot in the Dogma style, which means it was shot on video, on location, and used only music available at the locations. Some Dogma films are shot only with available light, but I don't think that's true of this film. The action takes place outside of Copenhagen and introduces us to a group of people whose lives intermingle in interesting ways. Eventually, they all sign up for a course in Beginning Italian. All of them have difficulties in their lives, and they find solace in their Italian class and their classmates.. The movie ends with a group trip to Venice. We enjoyed watching these people get to know each other. The film is in Danish with English subtitles. **GRADE B-**

THE ITALIAN JOB: We can't resist a good crime caper movie and this is a clever one. A remake of a 1969 film that starred Michael Caine, this one kicks off the same way--with a Venice gold heist. From there, it follows the typical formula of betrayal and revenge, but it does so in a very stylish way. Charlie Croker (Mark Wahlberg) has learned all he knows about planning a heist from John Bridger (Donald Sutherland looking extremely good). When Bridger is killed, Charlie becomes single-minded in his pursuit of the killer. He is aided in this effort by Bridger's daughter, Stella (Charlize Theron), who has learned all she knows about safe cracking from her dad. Seth Green, Jason Statham, and rapper Mos Def round out the crew. Edward Norton also stars and he is, as always, terrific. The pace is fast, the car chases are exciting, there are some laughs along the way, and everything combines to make for an entertaining afternoon at the movies. **GRADE B/B+**

IT'S A DISASTER: (2012) This is a dark end-of-the-world comedy and Barbara and I liked it. No, I mean we *REALLY* liked it. But be warned that we both prefer subtle humor and witty dialogue to broad comedy, sight gags, pratfalls, and bathroom jokes. A stellar ensemble cast of eight narcissistic couples get together for their monthly "couples brunch" for the airing of domestic grievances. Early in the film we learn the city has been the victim a terrorist attack and they have about three hours before enduring slow, agonizing deaths by tasteless, odorless VX nerve gas. It doesn't sound like the stuff of comedy and as our local reviewer, Bill Goodykoontz, points out, "It takes guts to call your movie *It's a Disaster*. Far from a disaster, this small independent film will probably not see wide distribution but is among the best films we have seen in many months. The cast includes fine work by relatively unknowns, but include a few names you may recognize: Julia Stiles, David Cross, and America Ferrera. It would be bad manners to give away a film's jokes, but in this case there isn't much to give away. The jokes are never knock-out punch lines, but quirky and witty jabs that never let up. For me this was a clever movie from start to finish. Barbara liked it a lot, but would not be as generous as I. **GRADE A/B+**

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (Recorded from TV) After watching *A Christmas Story*, we simply had to watch this Christmas classic. We hadn't watched this 1946 movie for many years and decided to give it look for old time's sake. We thought we would fast-forward through it, but we were so caught up the story that we didn't fast-forward at all. Sure, it's corny and old fashioned, but the actors are so good—Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed and all—that you don't mind. We watched the original version in glorious black and white. The copyright to the movie ran out in 1993, and that led to the rediscovery of Frank Capra's once-forgotten film. There is an inferior and garish colorized version that became a matter of a Congressional hearing. Stewart told Congress, "I tried to look at the colorized version, but I had to switch it off--it made me feel sick." (from a Roger Ebert 1999 review) The movie worked its magic for us and at the end, when Clarence finally gets his wings, even Gary had to ask for a Kleenex. **GRADE A**

IT'S COMPLICATED: Jane (Meryl Streep) and Jake (Alec Baldwin) have been divorced for ten years, but the spark between them has never been completely extinguished. Jane has built a successful life for herself, but Jake's marriage to the younger woman he left Jane for is not going as well as he hoped. Meeting at their son's graduation in New York, they spend a drunken night together —the beginning of a complicated affair. It becomes even more complicated when Jane develops feelings for Adam (Steve Martin), the architect who is managing the addition she is putting on her multi-million dollar property near Santa Barbara. (I couldn't figure out why she need a new kitchen. I loved the kitchen she had.) John Krasinski plays the finance of Jane oldest, and his wry comments and reactions greatly improved the last half of the film. We always enjoy watching Streep and she is excellent here, but, although Baldwin was amusing and handled the physical comedy well, I just never bought he and Streep as a couple with any spark between them. I also didn't buy the reactions of Jane's three grown children when they learned of the affair. I did like the reaction of Martin's character. He and Streep looked good together. I enjoyed the two scenes with Jane and her girlfriends and was disappointed when we never saw them again. They just disappeared from her life. Perhaps the director felt that, at almost two hours, the film was long enough, but I would have liked to see more of them. We thought it was enjoyable, but can't give it more than a B. **GRADE B**

IT'S KIND OF A FUNNY STORY: It is not hilarious, but it is "kind of a funny story." Also kind of entertaining. The story is set mostly in a psychiatric ward which has led some critics to dub the film *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest Lite*. Watching the movie does bring to mind the 1975 Academy Award winner, but only because both films have psychiatrists, nurses and patients. This is a kind of charming dramedy about 16-year-old Craig (Keir Gilchrist) who is stressed out on life and contemplates jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. Instead, he gets himself committed for a minimum of five days to a psych ward. Predictably, he encounters many interesting characters. The most memorable of these Bobby played by Zach Galifianakis. His name is difficult to pronounce and impossible for me to remember, but he has the ability to make a supporting role seem like the lead. Zach got his big break in *The Hangover* and now may be the fastest rising star in Hollywood. This film should establish him as more than a bearded funny guy. *It's Kind Of A Funny Story* will be seen by many as a cutesy coming of age yarn, but Barbara and I found it sufficiently charming to give it an above grade. **GRADE B**

I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG: (2008 release seen on DVD) This film is wonderful and heartbreaking, and Kristin Scott Thomas's performance is stunning. She is Juliette, recently released from 15 years in prison for the murder of her six-year-old son. Juliette has returned to her home town and is living with her younger sister, Lea, and Lea's family. The two sisters have not been in contact for the

past 15 years, and it is difficult for them to connect. Juliette offers no explanations and asks for no sympathy as she endeavors to exist in the present. As you watch Juliette go through the difficult process of learning to live again, you see all her conflicting emotion etched on her lovely face. This one is going to stay with me for a long time. It is in French with English subtitles. I am so glad we rented this DVD and urge our readers to do the same. You will see a marvelous performance! **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**