

Movie Titles that begin with "R"

Rabbit Hole * Rabbit-Proof Fence * Race * Rachel Getting Married * Radio * The Railway Man * Raise Hell: The Life and Times of Molly Ivins * Raising Helen * Raising Victor Vargas * Ratatouille * Ray * RBG * The Reader * Ready Player One * Real Steel * Real Women Have Curves * The Recruit * Red * Red Dragon * Red Eye * Red Sparrow * Red Sorghum * Red Tails * The Ref * Reign Over Me * Reindeer Games * Religulous * Remember The Titans * Rendition * Renoir * Rent * The Reports on Sarah & Saleem * Requiem For A Dream * The Rescue * Rescue Dawn * The Return * Return To Me * Revolutionary Road * Richard Jewell * Ricki and the Flash * Ride With The Devil * The Rider * Riding In Cars With Boys * Rifkin's Festival * Ripley's Game * Rita Moreno: Just A Girl Who Decided To Go For It * The Road To Perdition * Robot and Frank * Rock of Ages * Rocket Science * Rocketman * Rocknrolla * Rodger Dodger * Role Models * Roma * The Rookie * Room * Rosewater * A Royal Affair * The Royal Tenenbaums * RRR * Ruby Sparks * Rudderless * Rules Don't Apply * Rules of Engagement * Rumor Has It * Run * Runaway Jury * The Rundown * Rush * Rust and Bone

RABBIT HOLE: Losing a child must be the worst thing that can happen to any parent. Perhaps the next worst thing is living with the knowledge that you caused the death of another, no matter how accidental. In Rabbit Hole, we first meet Becca (Nicole Kidman) and Howie (Aaron Eckhart) whose 4-year-old son, their only child, was killed 8 months ago. The child ran out into the street after his dog and was hit by a car. Both parents are still grieving, but they handle their grief in very different ways--so differently that they cannot seem to comfort each other. They attend a support group, but find little solace there. By chance, Becca sees Jason (Miles Teller), the teenager who was driving the car, and seeks him out finding some sort of comfort in talking with him. The scenes between the two of them are some of the best in the film. They are quiet but intensely emotional. Most critics have hailed Kidman's performance as a career high for her, and I agree. She is marvelous. And young Teller, whose filmography is slim, is very effective. I'm not surprised to see that he has two films coming out in 2011. Dianne Weist as Becca's mother and Tammy Blanchard as her pregnant younger sister are both excellent. We saw the play here in Phoenix last year and were impressed with it. We were glad to see that the screenplay was written by David Lindsay-Abaire, the author of the play. He did a beautiful job translating the stage version to film, as did director John Cameron Mitchell. Gary has trouble believing Eckhart in any role he plays, and that probably interfered with his emotional involvement in the film. I, on the other hand, was completely involved in the emotion, so for me, the movie gets an A. Gary settled on a B+. **GRADE A/B+**

RABBIT-PROOF FENCE: Official policy between 1910 and 1970 in Australia allowed half-caste Aborigine children to be forcibly removed from their families and incarcerated "for their own good." Those with skin light enough were sent to "regular" schools. Those with darker skin were trained and educated to become servants for white families. The story told in this movie is of three young girls who were stolen from their mothers and sent to the Moore River Native Settlement, located 1200 miles from their home. Once there, they were not allowed to use their own language--something our country is guilty of in our past treatment of Native Americans. **Rabbit-Proof Fence** is a true story, adapted from a book by Doris Pilkington, relating the experiences of her mother, Molly, her aunt Daisy and their cousin Gracie. Evelyn Sampi, a young girl who never acted before, is amazing in the role of Molly. The three girls ran away from Moore River and walked all the way home. It took them more than three months and they were pursued all the way by local police and by a tracker used by the government to hunt down runaways. Molly used Australia's rabbit-proof fence to guide their way and cleverly hid their tracks to avoid capture. Kenneth Branagh plays A.O. Neville who was the chief protector of the Aborigines in 1931. He administered the relocation policies and believed that in order to assimilate half-caste children into mainstream society it was necessary to "breed the Aborigine out of them." The only thing that distinguishes him from Hitler is that he didn't send them to gas chambers. Some people believe that this relocation policy qualifies as genocide, but the government of Prime Minister John Howard refuses to give an official apology. The incredible journey of these three young girls is exciting, touching, and beautifully photographed. We think it deserves a **GRADE B**

RACE: (2016) "Ain't no black and white, there's only fast and slow." These are the words of Jesse Owens as he describes the freedom he feels during a race. **Race** is the first movie about the famous athlete who won an unprecedented 4 gold medals and set world records in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Owens was born in 1913 and died in Tucson, Arizona in 1980. His family participated in the making of the movie and had final script approval. They actually rejected certain scenes to make sure the film was accurate. The result is a movie that faithfully recounts the track star's achievements, but doesn't quite soar to the heights of those achievements. **Race** benefits greatly from the performances of Stephen James as Owens and Jason Sudeikis as Larry Snyder, who coached Owens at Ohio State. They are both excellent and their friendship is heartwarming. The history of that time is fascinating. Many in this country believed that the Olympics should be boycotted in solidarity with the oppressed people of Germany. Jeremy Irons is good as Avery Brundage who was instrumental in convincing the Nazis to hide their agenda from view for the games. At his urging, the Olympic Committee voted to participate in the Berlin games. At the same time, pressure was put on Owens by the NAACP and others to refuse to participate because of the Nazi attitude toward people of color. In actuality, the attitude in the US in the 1930s wasn't much better. The final scene shows Owens and his wife going to a banquet in his honor, but having to enter the hotel through the service entrance. The high point of the Olympics, for me, was the unique sportsmanship of a German track star, who, although Owens beat him in the Broad Jump event, linked arms and joined the American on his triumphal jog around the stadium track. The movie probably deserves a grade of B, but we enjoyed it enough to give it a B+. **GRADE B+**

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED: It is hard for me to believe, but I walked out of the theater liking a wedding film a little better than Barbara did. Actress Anne Hathaway is brilliant in her portrayal of a recovering drug addict returning home from a treatment facility to attend her sister Rachel's wedding. This film will certainly help Hathaway break away from her "goody-two-shoes" image in **The Princess Diaries** (2001) and **Ella Enchanted** (2004). Shaky handheld cameras* give us a close-up view of two multicultural families coming together in marriage. There are moments of pure joy, but there are also gut wrenching moments exposing raw nerves left over from an unthinkable family tragedy. Well directed by Jonathan Demme (**Silence of the Lambs**), the film has a quality that reminded me of Robert Altman's early films (**Mash** (1970) and **Nashville** (1975)). A talented supporting cast that included Debra Winger, Bill Irwin, Rosemarie DeWitt and a whole host of diverse actors playing very natural uninhibited eccentrics at an unorthodox wedding. At one

point near the end of the film I was leaning toward an A-, but a far too long scene at a wild party following the wedding ceremony, lowered it to a B+. That scene and one or two others bothered Barb enough that she says B. **GRADE B+/B**

RADIO: This is a "heart warming, feel-good" movie. The problem is that many critics loathe "heart warming, feel-good" films even if they are exceptionally well done as I think this film is. Barbara passed the job of reviewing this one to me because I liked it a little better than she. The movie was inspired by a true story about James Robert Kennedy (nicknamed Radio), an illiterate mentally retarded young African-American. The role is beautifully played by Cuba Gooding Jr. Radio is taken under the wing of the high-school football coach played by Ed Harris. The story follows the predictable growth of Radio under the tutelage of the coach. If you have a tendency to cry in movies, bring a box of tissues for this one. The screen play was written by Mike Rich who also wrote the screenplays for *Finding Forrester* and *The Rookie*. The film was inspired by real events reported in Gary Smith's 1996 Sports Illustrated article "Someone to Lean On." Barbara gives *Radio* a B, but I say B+. I will close with a quote from Roger Ebert who says, *Radio is a treasure. Others may find it too slow or sunny or innocent. You know who you are.* (Barb's note: I enjoyed seeing Debra Winger as the coach's wife. It wasn't much of a role, but she brings something nice to it. Hope to see more of her.) **GRADE B+/B**

THE RAILWAY MAN: (2013) Eric Lomax, a British soldier, was one of thousands of Allied prisoners of war forced to work on the construction of the Thai/Burma railway during WW2. The 1957 movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai* gives a fictional account of what those prisoners went through. Colin Firth plays Lomax in this movie based on Lomax's real life struggles. When the radio that Lomax built so that the prisoners could listen to war news was discovered by the Japanese, he was subjected to horrific torture. (Although Dick Cheney would contend that it wasn't torture but merely "enhanced interrogation.") His prisoner of war experiences left him with extreme PTSD. While refusing to talk about what happened to him, he relives it over and over. Years after the war, he falls in love and marries a woman who is played in the movie by Nicole Kidman. Without revealing too much of the story, Lomax learns that the Japanese interpreter who tortured him is still alive and is actually taking tourists through the old prison camp, now a museum. He journeys to Thailand to confront his former captor. The actor selected to play the young Eric Lomax was a great choice—he really did look like a very young Colin Firth. Firth, looking wonderful, once again demonstrates his exceptional acting ability. Lomax was a brave young soldier, but you come away from this movie wondering if perhaps it is forgiveness that requires the most courage. **GRADE B+**

RAISE HELL: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOLLY IVINS (2019) Barbara and I loved this fast-paced documentary and agree that there were more laughs in this film than in almost any comedy we can remember. Molly Ivins was a savagely funny flamboyant syndicated columnist who stood six feet tall and had a great ear-to-ear grin. Twice nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, she was liked and feared on both sides of the political aisle. The Dallas Times Herald took a poll on its best-loved and most-hated columnists. She won both titles. Here is a sample of her wit: When David Letterman asked Ivins what she thought of former vice president Dan Quayle she quickly replied that "he was dumber than advertised. If you put that man's brain in a bumblebee, it would fly backwards." When Ivins broke into the news world in the early 1970's, women were usually exiled to write about food and fashion. Instead, she quickly cracked the "old boy's club" of male reporters. She could carouse with the best of them and often did. It becomes clear, Molly Ivins believed in democracy. She felt this country belonged to all of us, with politicians, even the best of them, simply "the people we hire to drive the bus." Her brand of writing has all but disappeared from contemporary journalism. We can only wistfully fantasize what she might say about politics today. I liked this film so much that I am breaking with our tradition of giving the best movies we see an A. **GRADE A+**

RAISING HELEN: Kate Hudson is adorable and she has the world's greatest smile. Too bad the script for *Raising Helen* doesn't match her charm. The movie, directed by Garry Marshall, was written by a committee (four different writers) and it plays like it. Some of the scenes work, some don't. Some of the scenes present honest emotions, some are completely contrived. The plot is a familiar one: Successful career woman (Hudson) assumes mother responsibilities for her sister's three children when their mother and father are killed in an auto accident. The difference in this film is that Helen isn't the only sister. Jenny (Joan Cusack) is the responsible sister. She's Supermom. We don't really learn of the real sister dynamics until near the end of the film, but I thought it was one of the better plot elements. Cusack does have one terrific scene, and John Corbett, who is Pastor Dan, has some nice scenes with Hudson. We did enjoy seeing Helen Mirren as Helen's boss. The three kids are typical sitcom stuff: cute little girl who can't tie her shoes, young boy who won't talk about his parents, and the nubile teenager teetering on the brink of womanhood. The kids acquit themselves admirably, but there's nothing new here. Hudson's charm makes it a pleasant enough way to pass the time if you don't have anything better to do. **GRADE C+**

RAISING VICTOR VARGAS: Victor is an Hispanic teenager living in New York's East Side and he is a boy looking for a girlfriend. When he finds the girl of his dreams, she initially rebuffs his attentions, but he persists. This teenage love story is unique because it presents Hispanic young people who are not doing anything illegal—just trying to grow up. The hand held camera technique used throughout does make the story seem real, but it also gets a bit annoying. The actors are very good. Victor is played by Victor Rasuk, and his real-life brother, Silvestre, plays his younger brother in the movie. The two boys and their sister are being raised by their grandmother, played realistically by Altagracia Guzman. Judy Marte is Judy Ramirez, the object of Victor's affections. MovieViewer Bill W., Scottsdale, AZ saw the film and told us he thought it was OK. We feel the same way. **Grade C+**

RATATOUILLE: It's hard to make rats appealing. Mice, maybe, but rats? They do a pretty good job with the lead rat, Remy, mostly because he's colored blue and walks upright. His family and pack mates, though, are brown and when you see a hundred of them running around the kitchen, it's sort of YUCK! However, the story of a rat who can read and dream of becoming a famous chef is cute enough. Plus, I've read that the film's version of a restaurant kitchen is quite accurate. The animation is outstanding, though, and the film earns points with us by having Peter O'Toole voice Anton Ego, the supercilious critic. We thought that for a kids' movie, the story was a bit above their heads, but the director put in a lot of chases (a lot!), and the kids in our audience seemed to enjoy them. As you know, we usually avoid animated films, but we went to this one because it's gotten such high marks from the critics. In our opinion, this movie can't compare with the original *Shrek*, or with *The Lion King*, but it is lively, beautifully animated and entertaining enough to warrant a B. **GRADE BRAY:** Jamie Foxx gives a brilliant and nuanced performance as Ray Charles in this biopic. He is certain to get an Oscar nod. This film is a straightforward biography of the man who is called "the genius of soul." The story is told in a mostly linear fashion with some flashbacks to the young Ray Charles Robinson. The film doesn't sugarcoat the musician's addiction to heroin or his

philandering ways, but those blots on his character do nothing to detract from the magic of his music. It would be worth seeing the movie just to hear those wonderful Ray Charles songs, sung by the master, himself. Although Foxx is only lip-synching the songs, he so embodies Charles' soul and his physical characteristics that you believe you are seeing the real Ray Charles. Taylor Hackford both wrote and directed this film and he manages to make the 2 and 1/2 hours running time seem far shorter. The flashback scenes help explain how Charles learned to cope with his blindness. Sharon Warren plays Aretha Robinson and she is memorable! The scenes between her and the young Ray are incredibly moving. Warren's filmography consists only of this film, but given her outstanding performance here, we should be seeing a lot more of her. Kerry Washington plays the singer's faithful wife, Della Bea Robinson. Frank Sinatra once said of Ray Charles that he was the only true genius in the music field. This film gives you a wonderful chance to see the genius and hear his music. Don't miss it. **GRADE A**

RAY: Jamie Foxx gives a brilliant and nuanced performance as Ray Charles in this biopic. He is certain to get an Oscar nod. This film is a straightforward biography of the man who is called "the genius of soul." The story is told in a mostly linear fashion with some flashbacks to the young Ray Charles Robinson. The film doesn't sugarcoat the musician's addiction to heroin or his philandering ways, but those blots on his character do nothing to detract from the magic of his music. It would be worth seeing the movie just to hear those wonderful Ray Charles songs, sung by the master, himself. Although Foxx is only lip-synching the songs, he so embodies Charles' soul and his physical characteristics that you believe you are seeing the real Ray Charles. Taylor Hackford both wrote and directed this film and he manages to make the 2 and 1/2 hours running time seem far shorter. The flashback scenes help explain how Charles learned to cope with his blindness. Sharon Warren plays Aretha Robinson and she is memorable! The scenes between her and the young Ray are incredibly moving. Warren's filmography consists only of this film, but given her outstanding performance here, we should be seeing a lot more of her. Kerry Washington plays the singer's faithful wife, Della Bea Robinson. Frank Sinatra once said of Ray Charles that he was the only true genius in the music field. This film gives you a wonderful chance to see the genius and hear his music. Don't miss it. **GRADE A**

RBG: (2018) It is no surprise that Ruth Bader Ginsburg has become a symbol of feminism. She didn't set out to revolutionize the law, but the treatment Ginsburg received as a woman in law school certainly played a part. One of only nine women at Harvard Law School in 1956, Ginsburg and her female classmates were asked by the dean why they were occupying seats that would otherwise be filled by men. During the 1970s, she served as the director of the Women's Rights Project of the ACLU for which she argued six landmark cases on gender equality before the U.S. Supreme Court. She won five of them. Never a rabble-rouser, Ginsburg patiently tried to persuade the all male Court that discrimination against women exists and that it hurts everyone. As a Supreme Court Justice (appointed by President Clinton in 1993), she has been a passionate defender of equal rights for everyone. In addition, she had a happy marriage to Martin D. Ginsburg, whom she met when both were studying law. Marty, as she affectionately calls him, was unique for the 1950s: he wasn't intimidated by her intelligence. In fact, it was one of the reasons why he loved her. He gave up a lucrative law practice in New York and followed her to D.C. when she was appointed to the court. He was gregarious and outgoing while she was shy and not a fan of small talk, but their differences worked. Plus, she didn't give him any advice on cooking, and he didn't give her any advice on the law. **RBG** is a revelatory documentary exploring Ginsburg's exceptional life and career. When the movie ended, it received enthusiastic applause from our theatre audience, all of whom were undoubtedly liberals. We enthusiastically joined in the applause. **GRADE A**

"RBG is one of those films that's least likely to be seen
by the people who need to see it most"
Bill Goodykoontz, *AZ Republic*

THE READER: Remarkable storytelling and superb acting make this a standout film for me. James Berardinelli of *Reel Views* said that this was a film worth seeing for those who enjoy complexity and moral ambiguity, and I guess that describes us. We were both moved by this screen adaptation of a semi-autobiographical novel. However, it is not a feel-good movie but rather a serious story told in a low key manner, and I suspect few will see it. That's too bad because they will miss one of the best performances of the year. Kate Winslet is brilliant as Hanna Schmitz, a 35-year-old German woman, who seduces a 15-year-old boy, not merely for the sex, but also because she wants him to read out loud to her. David Kross is equally impressive as Michael, the lustful young boy. When Hanna suddenly and inexplicably vanishes from his life, Michael is devastated. Nine years later, as a law student, David discovers that Hanna had worked as a guard at Auschwitz and is on trial for war crimes. The story begins 20 years after Hanna's trial and we meet a grown-up David, played by the always excellent Ralph Fiennes. The story switches back and forth in time but never to the detriment of the narrative. This film and ***The Boy In The Striped Pajamas*** each offer a unique look at the most appalling atrocity of the 20th Century. The fact that in ***The Reader*** you actually feel some sympathy for Hanna does in no way lessen the appalling nature of her crime. It is entirely to Winslet's credit that you understand and feel sympathy for the woman she portrays. One of the most powerful scenes in the film comes at the very end, and Lina Olin, playing a Holocaust survivor, deserves the credit for the scene's emotional impact. The film was nominated for 4 Golden Globes and both reviewers on TV's *At The Movies* put it on their 10-Best Lists. Barb--A; Gary--A- **GRADE A/A-**

READY PLAYER ONE: (2018) How can you not see a Steven Spielberg film? That was the rhetorical question that took us to the theater in spite of our reservations. As we left the still echoing theater, Barbara speculated that she may have sustained brain damage from the shockwaves resonating from the epic battles and seemingly constant explosions. Set in the year 2045, people can escape the harsh reality and squalor of their lives by immersing themselves in a hi-tech world of virtual reality called the OASIS where they go anywhere, and can be or do anything guided by their imaginations. When the creator of OASIS dies, a competitive game is announced. The first person to solve a series of hidden challenges in the game will inherit ownership of the OASIS. One of the best parts of ***Ready Player One*** is noticing references to old movies and pop culture. Another is the underlying message that we should never lose our grip on reality. I can't say we enjoyed the movie, but had it not been for Spielberg's skillful hand we could have hated it. **GRADE C**

REAL STEEL: This is a classic underdog fight tale combined with some father-son angst. It reminded us a bit of ***The Champ*** (1979,) as well as every other fight film ever made. As such, the story is probably worth about a C-. In fact, I normally would have avoided it because I don't care much for fight movies, but, the fighters in ***Real Steel*** are fantastic nine foot tall robots. They're the reason we went and the reason we enjoyed it as much as we did. The robots are awesome, and scarily life-like. The final championship fight between

Zeus and Atom is all you could hope for in a fight movie. Of course, having Hugh Jackman as the father doesn't hurt. The film is set in the near future, where robot boxing has become a top sport. (If that really happens, I think I could become a fight fan.) Jackman's Charlie is a former boxer and a struggling fight promoter who has been searching for a winning robot. When his son's mother dies, Jackman has to come to terms with being a dad. His son, Max, is played by Dakota Goyo who has quite a filmography for a 12-year-old. He even performed as a stunt actor in three TV shows. In *Real Steel* he plays a precocious robot engineer who discovers Atom in a junkyard and is convinced he can be a robot champion. Evangeline Lilly (from TV's *Lost*) provides a modicum of love interest, but the movie is really a threesome—father, son and robot. We saw Jackman interviewed recently and he mentioned that Sugar Ray Leonard trained him so that his fight movies would look authentic. Leonard did his job well, because Jackman looks like a boxer. We can give this one a grade of B mostly because of the robots. And, for my part, Hugh Jackman. **GRADE B**

REAL WOMEN HAVE CURVES: The strength of this independent film is in the remarkably unaffected performances of America Ferrera as Ana, and Lupe Ontiveros as Carmen, Ana's old-fashioned mother. Ontiveros has been in dozens of film, usually playing maids, but here she plays a fully realized character. The women in this film do have curves--generous ones--and they are more real than most of the women we see in typical Hollywood films. The relationship between mother and daughter is completely credible and there are no stereotypes here. Ana has just graduated from High School. She is a good student, and her teacher (George Lopez) encourages her to go to college. Much as she would like to do so, her mother is determined that she should go to work in her sister's clothing factory, lose weight, and find a husband--in that order. But Ana is that rare full-figured young woman who truly likes herself. "You're fat too," she tells her mother, "why should I listen to you?" "But I'm married," responds her mother. The film was produced by HBO and won the audience award at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. Our local critic said this "*warm, funny family drama brims with genuine characters that you could meet on any street. Even better, they act like real people instead of fictional constructs.*" We don't often agree with him, but he had it right this time. **GRADE B**

THE RECRUIT: The story is a bit weak but Colin Farrell is well worth the price of admission. What a hunk! (Although I could do without the five o'clock shadow.) We were first impressed with him in the independent film, *Tigerland*, and if he makes good career choices, it looks like he will be a big star. In this film, Farrell is James Clayton, a whiz at computers who is recruited by the CIA. Walter Burke (Al Pacino) is his recruiter, and he tells Clayton from the beginning that "nothing is as it seems." That's the key phrase for the plot of this movie. Clayton gets his training at CIA headquarters in Langley, VA in a facility called "The Farm." There he falls in love with fellow recruit, Layla (Bridget Moynahan). The training scenes are interesting and Farrell and Moynahan make an appealing couple. And, of course, Pacino is always fun to watch. He has some great bits in this movie. But, while we thought the setup was good, we couldn't buy the finale. That's a typical problem with these CIA/Spook plots: the intrigue is purposely convoluted so you won't notice how silly it is. Still, the acting is first rate, and I'd probably pay to see Farrell read the telephone book. So we give this one a **GRADE B**

RED: We probably would have skipped this one if it weren't for the actors involved: Bruce Willis, Morgan Freeman, Helen Mirren, John Malkovich, Brian Cox and Mary-Louise Parker. It even has a 93-year-old Ernest Borgnine looking remarkably fit. Spy thrillers have a problem today—they can't use the Russians as antagonists anymore and it's not politically correct to use Arab extremists, so many resort to home-grown evil-doers. And that is the case here. The bad guys are upper CIA operatives and the Vice President of the U.S. who has connections to an important defense contractor (Richard Dreyfuss). Willis is a retired black ops CIA operative who is considered "R.E.D.," i.e. retired extremely dangerous. When he is visited by a wet team (assassins, that is) he easily dispatches them all and goes on the run, enlisting the aid of former colleagues Freeman, Mirren and Malkovich. Cox is an old Russian adversary who becomes part of the team, and Parker is simply a girl that Willis likes. We enjoyed Karl Urban as the CIA agent dispatched to eliminate Willis and his crew. There are so many gun battles and car explosions that Gary thinks it is a spoof of thriller/spy movies, but I think the noise is just par for the genre. It's based on a graphic novel, so that explain why it seems so over-the-top. It is fun to see the Queen firing a high-tech weapon and it's always amusing to watch Willis vanquish the bad guys, but this isn't a really good movie. It's not bad, either. And those of us who qualify as "older folks" will get a kick out of seniors kicking butt. But we can't go higher than B-. **GRADE B-**

RED DRAGON: This is the best serial killer-thriller since *The Silence Of The Lambs*. It's not surprising that both screenplays were written by Ted Tall, because both screenplays are excellent. *Red Dragon* predates the events in *Silence*, and introduces us to Hannibal Lecter before he was in custody. We meet Will Graham (Edward Norton), the FBI agent who captured Lecter, almost dying in the process. Now retired, Graham has agreed to help the FBI track a killer called "the tooth fairy" who has killed two entire families. Graham goes to Lecter for help. The scenes between the two of them are the best in the film. Anthony Hopkins certainly makes a delicious villain--an evil man with a sense of humor. Ralph Fiennes plays Francis Dolarhyde--the "tooth fairy"--with great sincerity and is able to arouse a modicum of sympathy. He is every bit as evil as Lecter, but he suffered monstrous things as a boy, and we almost understand his obsession. Emily Watson is a blind woman who befriends Dolarhyde and Mary-Louise Parker is Graham's wife, Molly. Philip Seymour Hoffman is wonderful as a slimy tabloid reporter. This film is much less gory than *Hannibal*. As Roger Ebert said in his review, "*Red Dragon* is all atmosphere and apprehension." We think this one deserves a **GRADE A**

RED EYE: This is an exciting and capable thriller by director Wes Craven. Rachel McAdams (*The Notebook, Wedding Crashers*) is the heroine in peril and she acts with convincing realism. Cillian Murphy (*Batman Begins*) is good villain because he looks, on the surface, like a nice guy, but there is a darkness lurking behind his eyes. The two meet in an airport and find themselves seated next to each other on their flight. This proximity turns out not to be an accident. McAdams is the concierge of a luxury Miami Hotel, and Murphy wants her to put the visiting Homeland Security Chief in a particular suite so that he can be assassinated. If McAdams refuses, her father will be killed. At no time during this film did we think, "Oh come on....that couldn't happen." Craven manages to keep the tension alive without going over the top. We are quite taken with young McAdams. She is not just a very pretty face: She is able to bring both intelligence and a sense of humor to all her roles. We expect big things from her. We saw this with grandson Nathan and we all agreed it was worth a B+. **GRADE B+**

RED SPARROW: (2018) When Russian Ballerina Dominika has a career-ending injury, her uncle steps in to offer his support to her and her ailing mother. The support is in the form of blackmail—she could either go to "Sparrow School," which offers unique spy-training, or refuse his help and become destitute. It's no surprise that she picks the school. Once there, she is taught to determine what

men want, and to use her body to manipulate them. (There were also young men at the school, but the film largely ignored them.) Jennifer Lawrence is Dominika, and she is something to behold. Gary commented that Hollywood took one of its best actresses and surrounded her with a mediocre script. It's difficult to take your eyes off Lawrence. She is a stunning presence onscreen. We were aware of this when we first saw her in 2010's *Winter's Bone*, and she has never failed to captivate us. This story--not so much. Her first mission as a Sparrow is to gain the trust of a C.I.A. agent who has been handling a mole in the Russian Intelligence Service. She is to do whatever is required to entice him to reveal the name of the mole. But instead, she falls in love with Max, who is played by Joel Edgerton. That's where the plot breaks down for me, because I never bought the love affair. To me, there was no chemistry between the two of them, and it wasn't the fault of Lawrence. The plot was also a bit confusing, and friends Diane & Lee agreed. That we all stayed engaged through the movie was entirely due to the presence of Jennifer Lawrence. Jeremy Irons, Ciarán Hinds, and Matthias Schoenaerts play credible Russian baddies, and Charlotte Rampling is excellent as the matron of the Sparrow School. We can only give this film a B- **Red Sparrow** got a 46% from professional critics on *Rotten Tomatoes*, with audiences liking it a bit better. **GRADE B-**

RED SORGHUM: A reader saw this 1987 Chinese film at a foreign film festival and recommended it highly. We were able to get it on video at our local Blockbusters. The film was directed by Zhang Yimou who also directed *Ju Dou*. In *Red Sorghum*, he tells us about his grandparents: How they met and married and how they dealt with the Japanese occupation. Chinese films are always visually beautiful, but often the dialogue loses something in the translation. If you appreciate the beauty of Chinese movies, you will like this one. **THUMBS UP**

RED TAILS: 2012) Because of lukewarm reviews, this was not high on Barbara's and my list of films to see. The historical significance was enough to overcome our reticence. African-American pilots who were trained in an experimental program at Tuskegee and placed in segregated units were reluctantly given a chance to prove themselves in WWII. This is an old fashioned air combat film with many weaknesses. Not the least of these is Cuba Gooding Jr.'s ubiquitous pipe and the cliché gorged script which needed a few more rewrites. Even the outstanding acting of Terrence Howard and a motivated ensemble cast couldn't rescue this overdue effort. It wasn't terrible. It just wasn't what I had hoped for and certainly wasn't a worthy tribute to the heroic exploits of the Tuskegee Airmen. You have to be as old as I am to remember the depth of prejudice in the 1940's. "Negroes" were considered unfit for military service because of supposed inherent character and intellectual weaknesses. Although we haven't seen it, I am told there was a 1995 HBO film titled *Tuskegee Airmen* with Laurence Fishburne and John Lithgow effectively dealing with the same subject. A true story as inspiring as this one cries for a better effort. **GRADE C**

THE REF: (1994 release seen on video) If you can imagine O'Henry's short story, *The Ransom of Red Chief*, combined with Albee's play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolff*, then you have a good idea of what this movie is like. Dennis Leary stars as Gus, a burglar who kidnaps an upper middle class couple. He forces them to take him to their house so he can hide from a police roadblock. Judy Davis and Kevin Spacey are Caroline and Lloyd, a couple who cannot say three words to each other without starting an argument. It doesn't take long for their bickering to drive Gus crazy! And it doesn't take long for us to realize that the burglar is actually the nicest person in this movie. All of this happens at Christmastime, on a night when Caroline and Gus are expecting their son to arrive home from college, and five relatives to come for a Holiday dinner. Gus winds up posing as Caroline and Lloyd's marriage therapist, and he is actually rather good at it. Friends Joanna and Carl recommended this film. It is Joanna's favorite holiday movie. Ted Demme directed with a sure hand. We suggest you try this film for a different kind of Christmas movie. **THUMBS UP**

REIGN OVER ME: Both Gary and I have liked Adam Sandler in his more serious roles. We enjoyed *Spanglish* and also liked the unique *Punch Drunk Love*. This new Sandler movie is no exception. We liked it, although it has received some harsh criticism from a few reviewers. I think some critics simply can't accept Sandler when he steps out of his happy Gilmore persona. In *Reign Over Me*, Sandler plays Charlie Fineman, a man whose wife and three daughters were on one of the planes that hit the World Trade Center on September 11th. Charlie is so devastated that even several years later he cannot bear to think about them. He does everything he can to keep from thinking: he never watches TV but plays a video game to the point of obsession and always wears headphones. The old rock music he listens to keeps him from remembering. He spends most nights tooling around the New York streets on a motorized scooter. When he bumps into his old college roommate, Alan (Don Cheadle), Charlie doesn't remember him at first. They were together in dental school. Charlie has given up his career, but Alan is a successful dentist with a lovely wife (Jada Pinkett Smith) and two daughters. Alan and Charlie renew their friendship and the movie centers on how Alan tries to help Charlie. There is a lot of gentle humor and some very sad moments as well. Sandler and Cheadle are both excellent and their scenes together are the strength of the movie. The writing is not as good when it comes to some of the other characters. Also, there are times when Sandler's diction is so slurred that he is difficult to understand. The film was written and directed by Mike Binder who appears as Charlie's accountant. **GRADE B**

REINDEER GAMES: When the twists in a crime caper plot take ten or fifteen minutes to explain, the movie loses all its momentum. Gary thinks this was a script that shouldn't have been written. The cast sounds good: Ben Affleck, looking like his usual handsome self, Gary Sinise as an over the top villain, and Charlize Theron, mostly looking confused. Even Theron's nude scene did nothing for the film because there isn't much there. Affleck is an ex-con who gets trapped into helping with a robbery. He had so many chances to get away from the bad guys, that he had to be an idiot to hang around until the end of the movie. In fact, making the movie at all wasn't a very bright move. **GRADE: D-**

RELIGULOUS: If comedian and talk show host Bill Maher is someone you tend to quickly move past as you scan TV channels, I'm guessing there is no danger you are likely to see this documentary. Maher was raised a Catholic, but in this film he makes it clear that he is an agnostic who delights in exposing to harsh light the irrationality of organized religions including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Scientology, and Mormonism. He is especially hard on TV evangelism. I find Maher to be smart, quick and funny, and I found the movie entertaining. Barbara and I saw the *Religulous* on a Saturday afternoon and were a little surprised to find ourselves in a nearly full theater. Laughter and audience reaction was frequent and there was even applause after the hour and forty-minute globe trotting movie ended. Barb and I enjoyed the film and laughed frequently. **GRADE B**

REMEMBER THE TITANS: What can I say? It's manipulative, predictable, and melodramatic. BUT, it's football and it has Denzel Washington. I loved it! It does glorify violence on the football field, but only on the field. It preaches understanding everywhere else. And, it is a true story. The film gives an easy answer to race relations. Field a winning football team made up of black and white players, and the black and white fans will come together. I guess it worked in Alexandria Virginia in 1971, although I suspect it wasn't as easy as the movie makes it seem. But, Disney wanted a feel good movie, and they got one. Washington is Coach Boone, a black man who is brought in to lead the football team in a newly integrated high school. Will Patton is Coach Yoast, who is demoted to assistant coach when Boone is brought in. Yoast wants to quit, but when his white players refuse to go out for football without him, he swallows his pride and works as a defensive coach under Boone. I really don't think this is an "A" movie, so I had to give it a B+. Gary didn't feel as guilty as I did for liking it, and he gave it an A-. **GRADE: B+/A-**

RENDITION: Barbara and I were especially looking forward to this film based on the trailers and the relevancy of the subject matter. *Rendition* as a legal term simply means "handing over." This film deals with what has come to be known as "extraordinary rendition," or by its critics, "Torture by Proxy." The practice, introduced in Clinton's Administration and arguably carried to extremes since 9/11, refers to the transfer of suspected terrorists to countries known to employ harsh interrogation techniques. The story was quite gripping and I was preparing to give the film a higher grade until near the end when a time-line surprise was, in my opinion, clumsily handled. The intertwining of stories in a non-linear fashion has worked quite well in films like *Crash*, *Babel*, and *Syriana*, but, in this film, it was confusing and distracting. The cast is lead by well known names like Reese Witherspoon, Jake Gyllenhaal, Meryl Streep, Peter Sarsgaard and Alan Arkin. Witherspoon plays the American wife of an Egyptian-born chemical engineer who disappears on a flight from South Africa to Washington D. C. Streep plays a seasoned D.C. power broker who sends suspected terrorists to foreign prisons and is convinced that she has saved thousands of lives using techniques many would find abhorrent. Gyllenhaal plays a CIA analyst who gradually comes to question the validity of the unorthodox interrogation techniques and to believe in the innocence of the man being held. Roger Ebert gave this movie an "A," but the majority rate it no higher than "C." Our rating falls between. **Grade B**

RENOIR: Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) Renoir was a celebrated French Impressionist painter and the film is set near the French Riviera in the summer of 1915. Barbara and I went expecting beautiful photography with warm colors like those used in most of his paintings. Our expectations were met. We also expected it would be slow. It was. So slow that for many, sitting through this 1 hr. 51 min. subtitled film will resemble watching paint dry. The dialogue, sparsely sprinkled, occasionally gave a quick glimpse into the thoughts of the painter. We see Renoir in his 74th year when painful arthritis is so severe that brushes have to be tied to his twisted hands for him to work. But his eyes and mind remain sharp and his work is energized by the arrival of what will be his last model, Andrée. With her youthful beauty and perfect skin, she beguiles Renoir but irritates the staff of full figured house maids, many of whom were former Renoir models who care for the aging painter. Andrée admires the old artist, but is sexually attracted to his son, Jean Renoir, a wounded war veteran who later became a beloved French film director and actor who made more than forty films from the silent era to the end of the 1960s. In researching this film I ran across an interesting bit of film trivia: convicted French art forger Guy Ribes appears in the film — at least his hands do — mimicking the brushstrokes of the master as Renoir gradually completes his paintings. Ribes was imprisoned for three years for producing phony Picassos, Chagalls and Renoirs; now he's a kind of movie star. As you might expect, critics were more impressed with *Renoir* than were viewers. If you love the paintings of Renoir or the films of his son, I think there is a good chance you might enjoy or, at least, sit through this slow-moving tribute to a great artist. But a part of me wants to say that your time would be better spent on the computer gazing at a few images of Renoir's gorgeous paintings and reading a short biography. **GRADE C+**

RENT: This is the film version of Jonathan Larson's rock 'n' roll updating of the opera, *La Bohème*. A.O. Scott (N.Y. Times) said in his review that the film's director, Chris Columbus "has taken a source that is fiercely and jealously loved by its core fans and refrained from messing it up." I never saw the stage version so I can't comment on the comparison between the two, but I did enjoy this film. I've been told by many who did see the play version that it was almost impossible to understand the lyrics. That's not a problem in the movie version, but on the way out of the theater I heard a man tell his daughter that the stage version was much more intense. The rock music, with the exception of a couple of numbers, was not memorable for this first-time listener. I did like the acting and the enthusiasm of the singers and dancers. Rosario Dawson (Mimi) and Tracie Thoms (Joanne) are newcomers to the cast. The rest—Taye Diggs, Jesse L. Martin, Anthony Rapp, Idina Menzel and Adam Pascal—reprise their Broadway roles. Gary and I both thought that Wilson Jermaine Heredia was outstanding as Angel, the transvestite with a heart of gold. Dawson was incredibly sexy in her dance number and her final scene was very touching. The heavy AIDS message almost made the film seem dated and for me there were a few slow moments. I don't think this film musical will go down as a great one, but it is a solid B. **GRADE B**

THE REPORTS ON SARAH & SALEEM: (2019) "Oh what a tangled web we weave / When first we practice to deceive." Sir Walter Scott was right in 1808 when he wrote that couplet, and it could be the tagline for this movie. Sarah is an Israeli café owner who has a husband in the army and an adorable little girl. Saleem, a Palestinian with a pregnant wife, delivers bread to Sarah's café. They both live in Jerusalem. We don't know how their affair began, but it is intensely sexual. They both seem happy in their marriages, but they meet regularly for sex in the back of Saleem's delivery van. When they are in a bar behind the wall and a stranger is aggressive with Sarah, Saleem reacts with violence. That incident begins the tangled web that ensnares them both. The Palestinian and Israeli military police get involved, and the political and personal repercussions of the affair ensure that life will never be the same for Sarah and Saleem. We thought the acting was outstanding, and, after a fairly slow start the movie built to a satisfying ending. The Palestinian film is "inspired by a true story." Gary said on the way home that if you want to fool around, it's best not to cross a political line, especially the Israeli-Palestinian one. **GRADE B**

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM: This film deserves an A for the stunning filmmaking techniques used to tell the story of four people and their slide into the depths of drug addiction. Darren Aronofsky, who previously made the hallucinatory "Pi," uses a split-screen to show several things happening at once, frequently uses fast-motion to tell his story, and is fond of extreme clasps. Roger Ebert, commenting on the films riveting final sequence said, "In a virtuoso closing sequence, he (Aronofsky) cuts between all four major characters as they careen toward their final destinations." However, because the story is so unrelentingly grim, we feel the average moviegoer will want to avoid it. Unless you like an ugly story combined with creative filmmaking in which case, you should rush out to see it. Ellyn Burstyn will

no doubt get an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Sara Goldfarb, an aging widow who wants to lose weight so that she will look good on TV. She visits a doctor who specializes in prescribing uppers for the weight loss coupled with downers so that she can sleep at night. Her ultimate mental breakdown is frightening. We also watch Sara's son, Harry (Jared Leto), his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), and his friend Tyrone (Marlon Wayans) start out as happy users, become mildly successful dealers and wind up as desperate junkies. Their stories are equally frightening. This film should be shown in schools to warn children against the horrors of addiction. It would be a lot more convincing than *Reefer Madness* ever was. However, it's R rating, richly deserved because of the film's sex, nudity, and language, means you'll never see it in a school classroom. I expect that not many of you will see it either. **GRADE: A/C**

THE RESCUE: 2021 (We saw this film at a local theater, but it will soon be available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video.) Prepare to be emotionally moved by this real-life nail-biting thriller. *The Rescue* is an inspiring, emotionally intense documentary about the 2018 rescue of a boys' soccer team in Thailand. The story began on June 23, 2018 when 12 young soccer players and their 25-year-old coach were trapped for weeks in a flooded cave. They did not realize that a fast-approaching monsoon season was about to get an early start. Sudden rains dumped six inches of rain per hour on the area. Rising floodwaters trapped the boys and their coach deep in the cave's passageways. *The Rescue* builds phenomenal tension even when most people watching the documentary already know how it all ends. The story was covered internationally, and it was the perfect human interest story, with tension over the boys' fates rising along with the level of the flood water. The cave system, over 6 miles long, posed many challenges to rescue efforts, and waiting for the flood waters to recede was not an option since the team had neither food nor warm clothing. The story of the film was not that they survived, but how the rescue was carried out, and the many obstacles facing the rescue team. An international team involving 5,000 people, including over 100 divers from multiple countries was involved in the effort to get the boys to safety. It is a powerful documentary that received 97% from critics and 100% audience score. Both Barbara and I needed Kleenex to make it through the final frames of this dazzling struggle. **GRADE A**

RESCUE DAWN: Barbara and I are both in awe of the powerful acting skills of Christian Bale. If you saw the film, you will remember him as the emaciated lead in *The Machinist*. Here Bale plays Dieter Dengler, a US Navy pilot who was shot down over Laos in 1966 and held in a jungle prison. Director Werner Herzog ("Grizzly Man") must be fascinated, if not obsessed, with the story. This is his second film about Dieter and both have gotten high marks from the critics. The first film was a documentary, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. Herzog keeps the action so realistic in *Rescue Dawn* that it almost plays like a documentary. As you might expect, the movie takes us through the horrors of being a prisoner of war. Through strength of will, resourcefulness, and incredible luck Dieter manages a barefoot escape through the Laos jungle. Steve Zahn is equally good as a fellow prisoner who escapes with Dieter. Zahn proves here that he can excel in drama as well as comedy. Knowing it is a true story may make us more sympathetic, but we think the film is well above average and deserves to be seen. **GRADE B+**

THE RETURN: (2003/2020 on *Acorn*, which is only available for *Amazon Prime* members.) We watched this movie because we are big Julie Walters fans. Walters plays a former alcoholic who returns home after ten years in prison for the murder of her husband. She has a son, but is prevented from seeing him as a condition of her parole. As her recollection of the murder returns, she thinks that perhaps someone else killed her husband. Gary and I like Walters, but the movie, which was originally shown on TV in the UK, was less impressive. **GRADE B-**

RETURN TO ME: The moment you see Grace (Minnie Driver) in the hospital desperate for a heart transplant, and Bob (David Duchovny) bringing his wife into the emergency room, you know how this movie will end. But, after all, it is a love story, and they are almost always predictable. The supporting characters add a lot of interest to this film directed by Bonnie Hunt. Hunt plays Grace's best friend and James Belushi-nice to see him again-is her husband. It's fun to see them try to manage their five children. Carroll O'Connor plays Marty, Grace's doting grandfather, and Robert Loggia is the chef in Marty's Irish-Italian restaurant. Ebert commented that this movie could have been made in the 1950s and he's right: Can you imagine two people in this day and age who fall in love without ever making love? There is a definite sweetness to this film, and for that, I give it a B. Gary is a bit less enthusiastic and gives it a B-. **GRADE: B/B-**

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD: April Wheeler (Kate Winslett) and I share some common history. We were both married in the 1950s, had two children and a house in the suburbs. We both tried Community Theater to add some excitement to our lives. April's venture into amateur acting was unsuccessful. I was luckier. The difference: April is bored and unhappy; I was a little bit bored, but happy. The Wheelers, April and Frank (Leonardo DiCaprio), do not consider themselves "typical." They believe they are "special." However, they are living a typical life in a Connecticut suburb and April has difficulty coming to terms with that. When her plans to add adventure to their lives with a move to Paris are thwarted by an unexpected pregnancy, she spins out of control. Winslett and DiCaprio are excellent in this gloomy film. Kathy Bates plays the realtor who sold the Wheelers their "perfect" house, and she persuades them to meet her son, John, memorably played by Michael Shannon. John is on furlough from a mental institution and while his interpersonal skills are lacking, he sees right through the Wheelers' façade of happiness. Shannon received a well-deserved Oscar nomination for his role. *Revolutionary Road* is directed by Sam Mendes and you may remember his *American Beauty* (1999), another film of suburban desperation. The screenplay is drawn from the 1961 novel by Richard Yates, who has been called the voice of the postwar Age of Anxiety. Roger Ebert writes, "This film is so good it is devastating." We can agree that the film is both good and devastating, but we think many people will find it mostly depressing. Those of us who remember the 1950s will appreciate the attention to period detail in the furnishings and costuming. We will also be able to identify with the suburban angst of the film, but we may not want to be engulfed by it. The acting and the look of the film deserve an A, but for enjoyment alone we have to grade the film at B-. **GRADE B-**

RICHARD JEWELL: (2019) Clint Eastwood tells the sobering story of Richard Jewell, the hero of the 1996 Olympic bombing at Centennial Park in Atlanta. The city was hosting the event, and Richard Jewell was hired as a security guard. When he saw a backpack left unattended, he sounded the alarm. When bomb experts identified its contents as a pipe bomb, Jewell, along with others, did his best to protect the crowd. Two people died and more than 100 people were injured, but it is believed that Jewell's actions saved many lives and prevented scores of other injuries. He was immediately hailed as a hero, but his hero-status was short-lived. The FBI considered Jewell a perfect candidate for the bomber with a hero-complex. He fit the profile: an overweight white man who lived with his

mother and had a checkered past as a law enforcement-wannabe. One of the FBI agents (Jon Hamm) lets slip to a reporter (Olivia Wilde) that they were "looking into" Jewell as the bomber, the media frenzy began, along with the ruination of Jewell's life. It wasn't until 2005 that the real bombing culprit confessed, but the villains in this movie are the FBI and the Media. Richard Jewell died two years later of heart-failure. He was 44. Paul Walter Hauser plays Jewell with a sweet sincerity that is believable. Kathy Bates got a Golden Globe nomination for her performance as Jewell's distraught mother, and she was brilliant. The always remarkable Sam Rockwell plays Jewell's lawyer and friend. Our local critic took issue with the quid pro quo between the reporter and the FBI agent, but aside from that "poetic license" the screenwriter stuck close to the real story. Billy Ray based his screenplay largely on Marie Brenner's 1997 *Vanity Fair* profile of Richard Jewell, titled "American Nightmare: The Ballad of Richard Jewell." Eastwood, in spite of being almost 90, has not lost a step as a story-teller extraordinaire. Gary thinks the movie deserves an A. I don't think Eastwood should have besmirched the reporter's reputation, especially since she's dead and can't defend herself. For that, I downgrade the movie to a B. **GRADE A/B**

RICKI & THE FLASH: (2015) Actor Meryl Streep, a three-time Academy Award winner, is the real life mother of Mamie Gummer. In this movie they play fictional mother and daughter. Kevin Kline who won an Oscar for his supporting role in *A Fish Called Wanda* plays the long-suffering ex-husband and Gummer plays Julie, a hostile daughter. It is hard to imagine Streep could be less than believable and wonderful in any role she plays and once again she does not disappoint. She plays Ricki, an aging hard-rocking singer/guitarist who has spent her life focused on her dream of stardom. She returns home to help her daughter who is depressed and in crisis after being dumped by her husband. It sounds like a film that could devolve into melodrama, but it focuses on a woman trying to reconnect with her adult children and create new relationships. It isn't a bad film, but both Barbara and I were hoping for better. There was an abundance of talent attached to the film both on and off screen. It was written by Academy Award winning author Diablo Cody probably best known for *Juno* and directed by Academy Award winning Director Jonathan Demme best known for *Silence of the Lambs*. We never doubted Streep could be effective as a lead singer, but it was nice to have Rick Springfield, a well-known musician, as a backup. Audra McDonald who has won a record six Tony Awards plays a small but important role. I liked the film a bit better than Barbara, but wish it had risen to our expectations. **GRADE B-/B**

RIDE WITH THE DEVIL: (1999 release seen on Video) This coming of age movie, set in Missouri during the Civil War, was directed by Ang Lee. Tobey Maquire is excellent as a teenager whose sympathies are with the South. He and a friend (Skeet Ulrich) join a band of confederate fighters who are not part of the regular army. There are several battle scenes, but this is much more than a war movie. Jeffrey Wright, as a freed slave who joins the southern bushwackers, creates a memorable and sympathetic character. We both really liked this one. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

THE RIDER: (2018) Based on a loosely fictionalized true story, this powerful and gritty drama almost qualifies as a documentary. Beijing-born and American-educated writer/director Chloé Zhao uses untrained actors to tell the movie's fact-based modern western tale. The story is deceptively simple. A young South Dakota rodeo rider must make life changing choices after suffering a serious head injury that left him with a metal plate in his skull. To play the lead, Zhao picked Brady Jandreau, himself the rodeo rider whom the story is about. This was his first screen role. Members of the Jandreau family, with their friends and neighbors, play supporting roles. Amazingly, focusing her lens on someone who is a horse-rider and trainer with no acting history actually works. Zhao wasn't the first filmmaker to use untrained actors in major roles, but in my opinion, she is the most successful. The independent film has received high praise from critics scoring 96% on *Rotten Tomatoes* and winning the Art Cinema Award at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival. Barbara and I were emotionally overwhelmed by this beautiful film shot in the dusty plains of South Dakota where young cowboys learn to ride before they learn to crawl. We came away with a better understanding of a life we knew little or nothing about. We look forward to Zhao's next film. **GRADE A**

RIDING IN CARS WITH BOYS: The strength of this movie is the script. Based on the book by Beverly Donofrio, it avoids all the typical Hollywood sentimental cliches and shows us real people trying their best to live their lives. It is a story about the "job" of parenting and how easy it is to love your children, but how hard it can be to do right by them. Drew Barrymore plays Beverly from the age of 15 to 35, and she is believable at every point. Beverly's parents (James Wood and Lorraine Bracco) love their daughter, but when she gets pregnant at 15, they seem more concerned with how she has disgraced them than with how they can help her. Beverly is a dutiful mother to her son, Jason, but her life hasn't turned out well, and she blames her son for much of the misery in her life. Jason, in turn, blames Beverly for being a self-involved, bad mother. Adam Garcia plays the grown-up Jason and he is very good. All the acting is top rate but the best character in the movie is Raymond (Steve Zahn), the loser that fathers Beverly's son. When they first meet, Raymond tells Beverly that she shouldn't get involved with him because he won't be good for her. He was right, and she should have listened to him. Instead, she marries him despite her own misgivings. She does it to appease her parents who want her to do the "right" thing. Zahn creates an amazing character: Raymond is a junkie who can't live without his daily fix. But, we also believe that he loves Beverly and Jason, and we feel sympathy for him. In the end, Raymond is the only one who admits responsibility for his actions. The film was directed by Penny Marshall who was able to soften Barrymore's mannerisms and help her turn in a fine performance. Gary, who usually doesn't care for Barrymore, was so impressed with her performance that he gave the film an A-. I can't quite put it in the "A" category, and settled on a grade of B. **GRADE B/A-**

RIFKIN'S FESTIVAL: 2020 (Prime Video a 4.99 rental) Save the money and don't see this Woody Allen film! Gary and I are afraid Allen's lost it. I can't believe that the same man who wrote and directed *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *Match Point* (2005) and *Annie Hall* (1977). Movie Views reader Art S. IN didn't like the movie either, but we differ in that we like Wallace Shawn, who played the "Woody Allen part. We saw him in *My Dinner with Andre*, a very strange yet fascinating movie, and we are watching him now in *Young Sheldon* on TV. But he doesn't have what Woody did—making even the most innocuous line funny. In this film, Mort Rifkin, a retired film studies professor, accompanies his publicist wife Sue (Gina Gershon) to the San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain. He goes not for the films, but because he's worried that Sue's fascination with her young buzzed-about film director client, Philippe, might be more than professional. Mort's mood lightens when he meets Dr. Jo Rojas and he has a mild, very mild, flirtation with her. While at the Film Festival, Mort has dreams--in black and white--in the manner of Fellini and Bergman, directors he inordinately idolized when he taught his film class. He even plays chess with Death, à la *The Seventh Seal*, a film by Ingmar Bergman that has become a classic. Even in

Mort's dreams he's a pretentious twit. We laughed once, and that's not good for a movie billed as a comedy. **GRADE C-** (but only because it's Woody and we remember when he was better.)

RIPLEY'S GAME: (2002 release seen on Video) John Malkovich plays the middle-aged Tom Ripley with a calm and smiling menace. He gets a neighbor involved in a murder for hire. Lots of killing involved and some wonderfully sly comments by Malkovich. The movie held our attention, but we can't recommend it very highly. **MARGINAL THUMBS UP**

RITA MORENO: JUST A GIRL WHO DECIDED TO GO FOR IT: (2021) Critics loved this documentary (as did Barbara and I) earning 98% on the Tomatometer. The documentary is rich in archival clips, but mostly it's just rich in her. The 89-year-old is tons of fun. She is open and honest about her romances (including with Marlon Brando), her experiences with racism and sexism both inside and outside the entertainment industry, her suicide attempt, her politics and much more. She has done it all, seen it all and now has the documentary to prove it. Moreno has received all of the most prestigious awards in show business, including the Oscar, the Tony, two Emmys, and a Grammy. She was also recipient of the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award and a Presidential Medal of Freedom. She is brash and self-effacing, thoughtful and charismatic, and has such a commanding presence on camera that every time she speaks you find yourself hanging on to every word. Rita Moreno wears many hats, and she wears them all well. She is best known for her Oscar-winning turn as Anita in **West Side Story**, but were you aware that she played Tuptim, the young Burmese concubine in the 1956 film **The King and I** and that she also had a role in the 1952 movie **Singin' in the Rain**? Or that she won an Emmy for **The Muppet Show**? Her career has spanned over 70 years and she is still acting. She is also still an activist for the women's rights movement. Part of the challenge with creating a documentary about someone like Moreno is, how do you fit a life as big and bold and full of heartbreak, setbacks, and triumphs as hers into a 90-minute documentary? We think they did a marvelous job and sincerely hope our readers have an opportunity to see this delightful and enlightening film. **GRADE A**

THE ROAD TO PERDITION: This movie asks the question, can a mob hit man be a good father? Apparently he can, as long as he is Tom Hanks. Hanks is Michael Sullivan, an enforcer who works for the Rock Island, Illinois mob boss, John Rooney (Paul Newman). One of the problems with this movie is that we know very little about Sullivan. We only know that Rooney has been like a father to him; that Rooney has provided a home for Sullivan and his wife and two sons. Sullivan's older son, Michael Jr. (Tyler Hoechlin) is curious about what his father does for a living, and one night he hides in the car when his father goes on a "visit" with Rooney's son, Conner (Daniel Craig). Conner is a loose cannon, and the visit turns ugly. Because Michael Jr. has witnessed it, he becomes a threat to the Rooney organization, and Sullivan must do whatever he can to protect the boy. That whatever involves a lot of killing. Along the way, they must also elude a hired killer played effectively by Jude Law. It is difficult to see Hanks in the role of a hit man no matter how well he acts the part--it just doesn't seem right. When the movie ended, Gary said, "I thought the story was beautifully told, but it was a story I didn't want to hear." Sam Mendes has made an exquisite film--the mood of 1931 is perfectly evoked and the camera work is outstanding. It is impossible to fault the acting: Hanks, Newman, Hoechlin, Law and Craig are excellent. I wouldn't be surprised to see some Oscar nominations from this movie. Some critics have compared this film to **The Godfather**, but **Road** lacks the scope of that masterpiece. And, we don't get to know these people as well as we got to know the Corleones. We did, however, think that the ending was particularly effective and good enough to bring the film's grade up to a **GRADE B+**

ROBOT AND FRANK: (2012) In one of the first frames we are told this movie is set in the "near future." It is a quirky buddy plot, a heist film, an absurdist comedy, a moving drama, a touching portrait of old age, or depending on your focus, a blend of all of the above. Frank Langella plays Frank, a retired cat burglar whose memory is slipping fast — he keeps trying to go to dinner at a place that closed down years ago. Speaking as one whose cerebral retrieval system has been largely replaced by Google, I can identify with this. In lieu of placing him in a nursing home, his grown son buys Frank a highly developed humanoid robot to help with his physical and mental health. Frank must change his slovenly habits, eat better, and have structure in his day. Predictably, Frank hates the idea. What follows is a sometimes funny and a sometimes touching story. After a period of adjustment, the patient little helper has Frank eating healthier, more focused, and better connected to life. When Frank realizes that the five-foot-tall robot buddy possesses limitless memory, has excellent dexterity in its fingers, and an ability to figure out combination locks in seconds, Frank's focus becomes even sharper. Langella is fantastic and is ably assisted in supporting actors, including Susan Sarandon and Liv Tyler. First-time feature director Jake Schrier does an excellent job of moving the action along, but Barbara and I didn't quite buy into the surprise ending. Even so we think it is an unusual film you might enjoy. **GRADE B**

ROCK OF AGES: Musicals have certainly changed since I was in *The Music Man* many, many years ago! Musicals in the olden days were definitely not crotch and tongue obsessed as this one was. One thing that hasn't changed, however, are the stories. They still feature a fairly corny young love story along with an assortment of stock characters. The characters in this one, set in 1987 Los Angeles, are the conservative woman who hates rock and roll (Catherine Zeta Jones), the gruff but kindly owner of a rock and roll bar (Alec Baldwin), the older woman who counsels the ingénue (Mary J. Blige) and a slimy singer's agent (Paul Giamatti). It also has Russell Brand as Baldwin's assistant, Malin Ackerman as a reporter from *Rolling Stones*, and Bryan Cranston as a newly elected mayor of Los Angeles. Cranston and Jones provide the conflict as they try to clean up the Sunset Strip by closing Baldwin's rocker bar. (Yes, it's kind of a **Footloose** plotline.) *Rock of Ages* is fortunate to also have Tom Cruise as a rock star whose ego and eccentricities know no bounds. The man can rock! The young lovers are played by relative newcomers Julianne Hough and Diego Boneta. Both are adorable and immensely talented. Of course the story plays second fiddle to the almost non-stop musical production numbers, some of which were spectacular. I loved the music which features songs from Styx, Journey, Bon Jovi, Pat Benatar, Twisted Sister, Steve Perry, Poison, and other well-known rock bands. The Mariah Carey favorite "I Want to Know What Love Is," was well done by Cruise and Ackerman. I do have a question: Was anyone protesting Rock and Roll in 1987? In Los Angeles? I think not. **GRADE B**

My favorite line:

The young lovers are talking about how far they've fallen.
She says she's a stripper. He says he's in a Boy Band.
She says, "You win."

ROCKET SCIENCE: We went to see this Independent film because of some laudatory reviews, but we were disappointed. It's the story of a adolescent who stutters. He's bright, but hesitates to answer questions in class. When an attractive older girl approaches him with the idea of joining the debate team, he is baffled, but flattered. She claims to see potential in him, but in truth, she has her own agenda. What we liked: Reece Thompson as Hal, who's trying to find the answers to some of life's biggest questions, but hampered by his stuttering; the fact that it was not predictable and didn't follow the Hollywood formula; Maury Ginsberg as a counselor assigned to help two stuttering students—but he doesn't know much about stuttering. He wishes they were hyper-active because he knows a lot about that. What we didn't like: An exaggeration of how fast student debaters talk; teachers who call on Hal and put him in a public situation of ridicule; Our inability to discover the message, if any, in the film. According to the NY Times reviewer, "Hal's sense of helplessness and frustration is a metaphor of the confusion felt by every sensitive soul inside the bubble of adolescence." He goes on to suggest that whether or not you like the film may depend on your own high school experience. We didn't dislike the film, but we didn't love it either. On Yahoo Movies, *Rocket Science* got a B+ average rating from the critics and a C+ from viewers. Roger Ebert puts the film in the league with *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, so if you liked that movie, you may like this one. Although Thompson was splendid as Hal, and Anna Kendrick was good as the manipulative champion debater, but we still can't go higher than C for a grade. Gary is in the C-range. **GRADE C/C-**

ROCKETMAN: (2019) How does a sweet talented boy turn into a drug and alcohol addicted rock super-star? See *Rocketman* and you will learn how Elton John took the rock music world by storm and almost lost his life. The music is terrific and the fantasy element of the filming is perfect for depicting the shadows and brightness of super-stardom. The movie begins with Elton's childhood and covers his breakthrough years in the early seventies. It features most of his famous songs performed and sung by Taron Egerton. Egerton is a magnificent Elton John, singing and performing with reckless abandon. What's more, the actor is able to show both the joy and sorrow in the rock star's life. His life-long writing partner, Bernie Taupin, is sensitively played by Jamie Bell (*Billy Elliot*, 2000). Here is a quote from the *History Vs Hollywood* website: *The Rocketman true story confirms that Elton, born Reginald Kenneth Dwight, developed an early interest in piano and reportedly taught himself how to play. He performed "The Skater's Waltz" at the age of 3 after learning it by ear. It became clear that he was blessed with an incredible gift.* That gift plus his ability to put Taupin's wonderful lyrics to glorious melody, made Sir John an enduring phenomenon. There's was an inspired partnership that lasted a lifetime. The biopic was directed by Dexter Fletcher who also stepped in to complete *Bohemian Rhapsody* after director Bryan Singer was fired. I'd see any movie that Fletcher directs--especially if it's a musical. Over the closing credits we see photos of the real singer, and the one of him as a young boy looks remarkably like Matthew Illesley who plays the young Reggie. Gary appreciated the movie and he joins me in a grade of A. **GRADE A**

ROCKNROLLA: This is Guy Ritchie's third crime flick and I thought it was easier to understand than his two previous films, *Snatch* in 2000 and *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* in 1998) Gary, however, had a lot of difficulty with the accents. Ritchie's films have a unique visual style and he mixes humor with violence much like the Coen Brothers do. *Rocknrolla* is about a crooked London real estate deal and involves a wealthy Russian, his Mafia associates, and a number of local gangsters headed by Lenny Cole. A presumed dead rock star, a fabulous painting, and a group of hoodlums called The Wild Bunch are also in the mix. It's a complicated plot with several robberies, quite a few bloody fights and numerous murders. Everything comes together in the end, and we're left with the feeling that a sequel will be along in a year or two. Tom Wilkinson is brilliant as Lenny, a character completely different from the kind of man he usually plays. Lenny's right-hand man is Archie (Mark Strong), and he is the narrator of the story. Strong has been in several films that we've seen, but here he is a standout. We also liked Gerard Butler as One Two, a low-level gangster and member of The Wild Bunch. Thandie Newton appears as a bored accountant whose actions are responsible for a lot of the mayhem. Jeremy Piven and Ludacris, or Chris Bridges as he is credited here, are record promoters who get involved because of their relationship with Johnny Quid, the drugged out rocker whose reported death has spiked his record sales. It's fiercely stylish and exceedingly well acted, so I have to give it a B+. Gary abstains. **GRADE B+**

ROGER DODGER: (2003 release seen on video) Campbell Scott is terrific as Roger, a slick womanizer who thinks he is charming and cool but who actually is an incredible jerk. When his 16-year-old nephew, Nick, comes to New York and asks for some help with girls, Roger proceeds to give him lessons in womanizing. Everything he says is wrong, wrong, wrong. Fortunately, Nick's basic goodness keeps him from following Roger's advice. Elizabeth Berkley and Jennifer Beals play two young lovelies that Roger and Nick spend some time with. Isabella Rossellini is Roger's boss. Jesse Eisenberg is very good as Nick, but the movie belongs to Roger. The man may be clueless when it comes to women, but boy, can he talk! This movie is dialogue driven, and the dialogue is funny and smart. We give it an **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**.

ROLE MODELS: Comedies of the 21st Century are not like the comedies we grew up with. Today's comedies are often raunchy and filled with words that are forbidden in polite society. (Is there any polite society left?) But they can also be quite funny. *Role Models* is of the raunchy variety, but it does have some genuinely funny moments. The always watchable Paul Rudd and Seann William Scott, forever remembered as Stiffler from *American Pie*, work together giving "Say No To Drugs" speeches in schools while they hawk a poisonous energy drink called Minotaur. When Rudd's girlfriend (the lovely Elizabeth Banks) breaks up with him, he gets high on multiple Minotaurs and crashes the company truck. Avoiding jail time, the two are sentenced to 150 hours of community service playing "big brother" in a youth-mentoring program called "Sturdy Wings." Jane Lynch (*Best In Show*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*) is Gayle Sweeney, the program director, and she is terrific. In Stephen Holden's N.Y. Times review he says about Lynch: *With the ferocity of a drill instructor and the boundless confidence of a self-help guru who combines psychobabble clichés with embarrassingly explicit confessions, Ms. Lynch's Gayle redeems the movie from utter banality.* Rudd's "little brother," Augie, is played by Christopher Mintz-Plasse, the current go-to guy when a loveable geek is called for. Augie retreats from the real world into a live-action Middle Ages fantasy kingdom complete with knights and damsels and mock battles. This is another of those seemingly endless comedies about young men who act like arrested-adolescents, but there is a sweetness to the film that partly redeemed the silliness for me. I thought it was funnier than Gary did, so our grades are a bit different. **GRADE B-/C+**

ROMA: (2018) We saw this Oscar-Nominated film at home on *Netflix*. The smaller screen obviously affected our perception. (I can imagine that the black and white photography looked gorgeous on a big screen.) We were profoundly underwhelmed. Gary was

especially hard on the movie which is slow in the extreme. One critic called the technique used “magical realism.” It was stunningly realistic, but the magic was lost on us. Set in neighborhood of Mexico City in the 1970s it centers on a family and their maid, Cleo. Cleo has been with the family for years and the children love her. She returns that love, and, since we never see her real family, her employers and their children have become a second family for her. But, the class system, being what it is, provided a number of reminders that Cleo was a servant, and not a member of the family. The first hour of the movie apparently was designed to get us acquainted with the mother, grandmother, the children, and Cleo. The husband, whose sole action was parking a wide car in an impossibly narrow garage, was not a principle character, although his absence was significant. The second half provided some excitement. It included a brush fire, a still-birth and an almost-drowning. Michael Phillips of the *Chicago Tribune* said “a second viewing becomes a pleasurable necessity rather than a film-going luxury.” I can’t imagine watching it again, although to be fair, we should have been it in a theatre. Gary agrees with Richard Brody of the *New Yorker*, who said, “For all its worthy intentions, **Roma** is little more than the righteous affirmation of good intentions.” He is in the minority of critics, though. It got 96% on the critics’ Tomatometer, but only 75% from audiences. Some of the scenes were a bit “arty” for my taste, especially the man singing while everyone else frantically tried to put out the brush fire. However, I did begin to feel something for Cleo by the end, and that is to the film’s credit. **GRADE C+**

THE ROOKIE: *The Rookie* is a good solid family movie. I don’t mean that as a criticism. I say it so that you know going in you will see a film that couldn’t possibly offend anyone. It is a good film for kids, because it teaches the lesson of following your dreams. It is based on a real life event: It tells the story of Jim Morris, a Texas southpaw whose youthful big-league fantasies were dashed by a devastating arm and shoulder injury. At age 35, Morris threw a 98-mph fastball at a tryout camp and soon was playing pro ball for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. Dennis Quaid is perfect as Morris, even though he is about 10 years older than Morris was when he made it to the majors. The movie begins by showing us scenes of the young baseball-obsessed Jimmy (Trevor Morgan). An Army brat, he must move frequently. The family’s last move is to West Texas, where football is the game of choice, and the High School doesn’t even have a baseball team. When we see Morris grown-up, he is a High School science teacher and is coaching baseball in a program that he started three years earlier. He is also married and the father of three young children. The always excellent Rachel Griffiths plays his supportive wife. To inspire his baseball team to put more effort into their playing, Coach Morris agrees to a wager: If they manage to win the District Championship, he will try out for big league baseball. The team does win, and the coach does tryout, and the rest is history. Quaid never played baseball as a kid, but he manages to look good in the closeup shots. They shouldn’t, however, have shown him throwing from a distance, as they do when he is warming up in the bullpen. The movie’s leisurely pace at times made me impatient, but then I realized that I feel the same way at a baseball game. It’s no **Bull Durham**, but it’s a baseball movie that you will enjoy. John Lee Hancock directed from a screenplay by Mike Rich. **GRADE B**

ROOM: (2015) How can a mother possibly explain the world to a five-year old son who has spent his entire life in one small room? Yet, that is what Joy (Brie Larson) must do so that Jack (Jacob Tremblay) will be able to save them both. Kidnapped at 17 and repeatedly raped, Joy has given birth to a son while locked away in a shed in her captor’s back yard. The first part of the movie is spent with Joy and Jack in “Room,” the only world the young boy has ever known. It is necessarily claustrophobic for the viewer so that we can appreciate the vastness of the space outside. The second part shows the difficulty that both Jack and his beloved Ma have in adjusting to being outside. I suspect that Emma Donoghue, who wrote both the book and the screenplay, was influenced by the true story of Jaycee Dugard who was kidnapped in 1991 at age 11 and lived in captivity for 18 years. In Donoghue’s novel, the narrator is Jack, and in the movie we largely see the world—both the inside and the outside world—through Jack’s eyes. To say that Jacob Tremblay is remarkable is an understatement. Director Lenny Abrahamson credits Brie Larson with helping elicit Tremblay’s performance. Larson herself doesn’t see it that way. “I wouldn’t have been as good without him,” she says. “He’s a magic kid,” Tremblay and Larsen, who first impressed us in **Short Term 12** (2013), do indeed create magic. **Room** is a superb illustration of the triumph of the human spirit. Gary and I feel certain that this film will earn several Oscar nominations. **GRADE A**

(Jaycee Dugard has written a memoir of her experiences titled *A Stolen Life*.)

ROSEWATER: (2014) This is a real-life story nicely told by first-time director/writer Jon Stewart. Maziar Bahari is an Iranian national living in London. He was a journalist for Newsweek Magazine when he went to Iran to cover the 2009 election between incumbent Ahmadinejad running against three challengers. When Ahmadinejad won by a landslide, supporters of the most popular challenger felt certain that the election was rigged. Protestors took to the streets by the thousands, triggering protests around the world. When Bahari filmed a violent scene that included government police shooting at the crowd, he became a traitor to the Supreme Leader. He was subsequently arrested as a Western spy and spent 118 days in solitary confinement. The lonely cell and bad food were broken only when he was taken, always blindfolded, to be interrogated. Bahari subsequently wrote a book about his experience, titled *Rosewater*, and the movie is based on that book. Stewart is famous for his fake news show, *The Daily Show*, and one would expect that humor would abound in his first movie. But Stewart was serious about this story, only allowing a few moments of humor, mostly at the expense of the Iranian interrogator. Bahari was played by the excellent Gael Garcia Bernal, and the story of how the journalist was able to survive imprisonment without losing hope is an important one, especially since there are many more like him around the world. All-in-all, it was a very good start for Stewart’s filmmaking career. **GRADE B**

A ROYAL AFFAIR: This is a Danish film set in the late 1700s and based on a true slice of history that Barbara and I knew absolutely nothing about. We might have missed it had it not been for a glowing report from one of our Chicago readers, Holly V. I also learned that it may be Denmark’s entry for best foreign-language Oscar. A pretty young British princess makes a long journey to meet Christian VII, King of Denmark, a man she is already married to, but has never met. On their first meeting she finds he is seriously spoiled, eccentric, and quite possibly mentally ill. In spite of these impediments they manage to produce a male heir to the throne and it looks like her life is over. The story evolves into an intriguing love triangle between Caroline, the King, and a royal physician played by Mads Mikkelsen. With his easy manner and quiet sex appeal it is easy to understand why Mikkelsen is Denmark’s most popular leading man. First rate performances were given by the other actors, but none have names you are likely to recognize. Covering a little known chapter of European history, the film is not only educational but also engrossing. It may sound like Royal soap opera, but it was drama that changed the fate of a nation. You will also find that even though clothes and means of transportation have changed dramatically, political and philosophical arguments sound quite familiar. You may have trouble finding this one, but if you do, we think you will appreciate the effort. **GRADE B+**

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS: There is no doubt that Wes Anderson and Owen Wilson are good at creating quirky characters. The Tenenbaums define the word "quirky." Royal (Gene Hackman) is the patriarch. He has been a bad husband and a bad father and has been separated from Etheline (Angelica Huston) for many years. Royal and Etheline have three children: Chas (Ben Stiller) a business genius, Richie (Luke Wilson) an award-winning tennis player, and Margo (Gwyneth Paltrow) a notable playwright. Margo is an adopted child, something her father never let her forget: He would introduce her as "my adopted daughter." All three siblings are dysfunctional and depressed--and, need I say, quirky. Unfortunately, two hours of quirky does not make for an absorbing movie. Owen Wilson plays a childhood friend who acts like part of the family. The movie has a few funny scenes, but it badly needs a plot that can capture your attention. Our attention wandered frequently during this movie. Most critics seem to rave about *The Royal Tenenbaums*, but they must be seeing something we missed. One critic said, "*Tenenbaums* is a terrific film, but a challenging one. It think, in order to be seen at all, it has to be seen twice: first to be dazzled, then to be moved." I was bored the first time and I have no desire to sit through it again. **GRADE C**

RRR: 2022 (Streaming on Netflix) First you should know that this is a 3h 7m movie. It may not be for everybody, but it is creative and unusual. Set in and around Delhi in 1920, Indian film makers transform a straight-forward rescue mission into a rallying cry for revolution. I don't know a great deal about the hostile relationship between Great Britain and India, but according to this movie, it must have been terrible. The words "three hour historical fiction action epic" may strike fear into your heart as it almost did mine. But the three hours is a whirlwind of action, music, drama, heroics, excitement, philosophy, anti-colonial messaging, and even a bit of romantic comedy tossed in for good measure. But that eclectic mix of genres and ideas create a distinct style and story all its own that's unlike anything we have ever seen. To describe the action as "over the top" is so exaggerated an understatement as to be laughable. One critic described the film as having one foot in epic Hindu myth, one foot in delirious Bollywood-style excess, and one foot in high-octane digitized action choreography. If you choose to see the movie it would be worthwhile to remember that *RRR* is inspired by true events. The film begins with a mustache-twirling British governor and his wife stealing a young girl from the Gond tribe in rural India and taking her back to Delhi. We are soon introduced to the two main characters in the film, two real-life Indian revolutionaries who waged a righteous insurrection against British rule across India in the 1900s and have been celebrated as legends and martyrs in the century since. Jaw-dropping action with thrilling special effects fill this unique action-adventure movie. It scored 91% from critics on Tomatometer and 94% audience score. Barbara and I haven't seen many Indian films but this was one we are not likely to forget. **GRADE A**

RUBY SPARKS: Both Barbara and I were charmed by this refreshing and creative romantic-comedy-fantasy written by Zoe Kazan who also brought life to the movie in the title role. For twenty five years I taught Introductory Psychology courses in which I often mentioned that language (words) can shape reality. This film runs with that concept to places far beyond where my limited imagination permitted. Calvin, played by Paul Dano, is a young writer who achieved phenomenal success too early in his career and now finds it impossible to get his manual typewriter started again. A suggestion from his therapist and a vision in a dream inspires him and soon his words have created Ruby Sparks. Not only do his words create the girl of his dreams on paper, but he fears he is losing his mind when she shows up in his apartment. That theory falls when he learns that other people can also see her. When his perfect girlfriend develops a mind of her own, he discovers he can manipulate her personality with a few strokes on his trusty typewriter. It all sounds rather fanciful and it is, but it is also inspired and disarmingly sweet in the hands of directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris who also brought us the wonderful indie film, *Little Miss Sunshine*(2006). Engaging performances are supplied by a talented supporting cast that includes Antonio Banderas, Annette Bening, Steve Coogan, and Elliott Gould. Their roles are small but effective. To close with an interesting bit of trivia, Zoe Kazan is the granddaughter of film and theatre legend Elia Kazan. We hope you find this 104 minute indie film as delightful and we did. **GRADE A**

RUDDERLESS: (2014) Bill Crudup plays a father grieving over the death of his son in this movie directed by William H. Macy. Macy was also one of the writers. It's no surprise that Macy's wife, Felicity Huffman is also in the cast. Crudup plays Sam, a man in a downward spiral, who finds some CDs of songs his son wrote. Believing that he can get to know his son through the songs, he eventually forms a band with Quentin, played by Anton Yelchin. Quentin has his own issues and when he is confronted with the specifics of Sam's son's death, he is devastated. Most critics liked this movie, but those who gave it lower marks mentioned a twist toward the end. I think they weren't paying attention, because the writers made that so-called "twist" clear to anyone who was really listening—at least it was to Gary and me. Lawrence Fishburne appears as the owner of a music shop. This year we saw a play titled *Pluto*, by Steve Yockey, that dealt with a similar issue in a wonderfully creative way. *Rudderless* is not as creative, but we liked it well enough to give it a grade of B. **GRADE B**

RULES DON'T APPLY: (2016) Warren Beatty, who wrote, directed, produced and starred in the movie, insists it is not a biopic of Howard Hughes, but a fictional story. It is, however, set around some true events in the life of Hughes, an entrepreneur who first made a name for himself as a film producer, and then became an influential figure in the aviation industry. But his behavior in the last stages of his life was so outlandish and bizarre that it almost plays like fiction. Beatty chose this latter period of Hughes' life in which to set his love story. Marla, a young woman who came to Hollywood as a Hughes starlet, meets Frank, who works for the Hughes organization, when he is assigned as her driver. The attraction is immediate, but the moral attitudes of the fifties and a Hughes rule that drivers must not consort with the starlets, insure that the path of love doesn't run smoothly. We were both disappointed with the first half of the movie—I had difficulty concentrating—but the ending did save it a bit for us. Lily Collins is lovely as Marla, as is Annette Benning who plays her mother. The frustration of working for someone like Howard Hughes was painfully evident in Beatty's movie. I imagine he had great fun playing Hughes, but as an audience member, I was frequently as frustrated as those who had business dealings with the billionaire. It was the love story that made the movie somewhat satisfying for me. The Hughes part of the story seemed as erratic as he was. The supporting cast was excellent and included Matthew Broderick, Alec Baldwin, Candace Bergen, Martin Sheen, Steve Coogan and other familiar faces. Gary may have liked the movie slightly better than I did. **GRADE C+/B-**

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: You really want Col. Terry Childers (Samuel L. Jackson) to be innocent of the murders for which he is being court-martialed, but you aren't quite sure that he is. That niggling doubt adds tension to the story of a decorated combat veteran

who is sent on a so-called peace-keeping mission in Yemen. Tommy Lee Jones is Col. Hays Hodges. He agrees to defend his friend although he believes that Childers needs a better lawyer. Samuel Jackson said on an interview that this film is about friendship, and although I don't agree with him, I did find the friendship Childers and Hodges an interesting aspect of the story. I thought the government bad guy was too convenient a target, but I liked the fact that the trial avoided easy answers. Guy Pearce (**L. A. Confidential**) was the prosecuting attorney, and Ben Kingsley played a weakling ambassador. Gary liked it a + better than I did. We both thought Jackson and Jones were the outstanding. **GRADE: B/B+**

RUMOR HAS IT: This perfectly delightful romantic comedy has an all star cast. Everyone is good, but Shirley MacLaine as Grandma Catherine steals every scene she's in. I don't think there's another actress who can touch her when it comes to playing incredibly cool grandmothers. When Jennifer Aniston brings her boyfriend home for her sister's wedding, she discovers some disturbing secrets. It appears that her family may be the inspiration for the book and film "The Graduate." She learns that both her mother and her grandmother slept with the same man—Beau Burroughs. Aniston honed her comedy skills in TV's **Friends** and this film is perfect for her. Mark Ruffalo is convincing and sympathetic as her patient boyfriend, and Mena Suvari is adorable as Aniston's younger sister." Richard Jenkins, so good as the dead father on TV's **Six Feet Under**, is every bit as good as a live father in **Rumor Has It**. I don't like to overuse the word "perfect," but it certainly fits Kesin Costner as Beau Burroughs. This is an entertaining romp, expertly directed by Rob Reiner. Gary gives it an unequivocal "A" and I agree. **GRADE A**

RUN: (2020 on Hulu) This is a delightfully suspenseful hour and a half thriller now available on Hulu. It spotlights the relationship between mother (Sarah Paulson) and her daughter (Kiera Allen). It is Allen's feature film debut, and she rises to a role that is both physically and emotionally demanding. It is also a film that Barbara and I strongly recommend, but which out of respect for the viewers' enjoyment, little should be revealed. Reviews from one hundred six critics yielded a score of 91% on Rotten Tomatoes. Kiera Allen and Sarah Paulson are terrific together, so if you have access to Hulu, we recommend you hold any pesky questions until after the surprise ending. **GRADE B+**

RUNAWAY JURY: It's true that John Grisham's novels are formulaic potboilers, but they are pretty good reading and usually very good watching. We enjoyed this one, mostly because the actors are so wonderful. Gene Hackman is a terrific villain--such a charming snake! Dustin Hoffman is the attorney on the "good" side of this gun case, trying to get a gun manufacturer to take responsibility for its irresponsible sale of assault weapons. (The screenwriters even wrote a special scene just so these two actors could go at each other one-on-one.) In the Grisham novel, the plaintiff was suing a cigarette company, but, because **The Insider** already did a job on the cigarette industry, the filmmakers decided to change the case to one about guns. I won't relate the plot because it would take too long and wouldn't be fair to those of you who haven't read the book. It's enough to say that it's about jury tampering. The gun manufacturer has hired Rankin Fitch (Gene Hackman) to manipulate the jury, but Nicholas Easter (John Cusak) and his girlfriend Marlee (Rachel Weisz) have their own plans. Bruce Davison is one of the defense attorneys and Jeremy Piven is a jury consultant helping Dustin Hoffman. As you know, Cusak is one of my all-time favorite actors and we are both impressed with Rachel Weisz. Intelligence radiates from her beautiful face and she can play strong and vulnerable with equal credibility. (Weisz was the woman Hugh Grant fell in love with in **About A Boy**. She was also in this year's **Confidence** and **The Shape of Things**.) **GRADE B+**

THE RUNDOWN: Barbara didn't want to see this one, so I took grandson Nathan even though it is a genre I usually avoid. If you like action/comedy films, this may be the movie for you. It not only has "the Rock" as the action hero, but the genius of Christopher Walken brings the role of villain to a whole new level. In addition, Seann William Scott, who played Stiffler in the American Pie series, does a superb job of bringing a touch of comedy to the film. Capably filling out the cast with the obligatory female role is Rosario Dawson. **The Rundown** follows the usual formula for action films, but the individual performances elevate it to a level of B. Nathan says a B+. **GRADE B**

RUSH: Be warned that neither Barbara nor I are racing fans and we have never attended a Formula 1 event. Neither were we even aware of the dramatic events of 1976 on which this film is based. I feel sure that a love of racing would enhance enjoyment of the film, but director Ron Howard, a two-time Oscar winner for his directing skills, certainly made it exhilarating even for viewers with little-or-no interest in the sport. There is plenty of ear-splitting racing action, but the real meat of the movie for us was the rivalry between two racing legends, James Hunt and Niki Lauda. Hunt, a British playboy, loves the adrenalin rush of racing as well as the money and fame and female attention it showers on him. He is played by Chris Hemsworth who is best known for his portrayal of Thor. Lauda is more complex and sees racing as a form of business. He is willing to take chances, but is far more calculating than Hunt. Lauda is played by Daniel Bruhl, who has had small roles in Hollywood but has received far more recognition and critical acclaim in Europe. Both actors are excellent and I expect to see more of them. Why would people risk their lives by climbing into tiny racing cars that can quickly become flaming balls of death? The film never really answers that fascinating question and I am still not tempted to put "drive a fast racing car" on my "bucket list." The film is made better because it is based on real personalities and events. **GRADE B**

RUST AND BONE: (2012) We recorded this one from Cable. It stars Marion Cotillard and a Belgian actor we'd never seen before, Matthias Schoenaerts. It is in French with subtitles, although as with most foreign films, this one is low on dialogue. It prefers to communicate feelings and emotions visually. Schoenaerts is Alain, a single father who shows up with his 5-year-old son on his sister's doorstep out of work and needing a place to stay. Working as a bouncer, he meets Marie (Cotillard). Shortly after the meeting, Marie, who is an Orca Whale trainer, suffers an accident during a show at the French version of Sea World. She winds up with both legs amputated. Cotillard is wonderful at showing the emotions of someone who undergoes such a traumatic injury. After the accident, she and Alain become friends, and eventually, friends with benefits. Alain had been a prize fighter and he begins to make money as an ultimate fighter in fight-club type brawls. When Alain's current job causes a rift with his sister, he leaves without calling Marie. A terrible accident with his son changes the relationship between the two. Alain is man who loves to fight. He has a temper and isn't the best father, yet still you understand and sympathize with him. As Bill Goodykoontz, our local critic, said: *There is something about two broken people trying to create something whole between them that is endlessly appealing to movie audiences.* It did appeal to us. **GRADE B**