

Movie Titles that begin with X, Y & Z

Movie Titles that begin with X

XX/XY

XX/XY: (2002 Release seen on Video) This film has one great line: "There's no room for honesty in a healthy relationship." And "relationships" is what this 2002 film is all about. Three people have a rather unique relationship in their wild and crazy twenties. It does not end well. When they meet ten years later, we see the effect that the early relationship has on their adult lives. Both Gary and I were ready to bail out during the threesome's college days, but we were glad that we stayed for all of it. We thought the second half of the film was quite good. If you liked *Closer*, you might like this one.

Movie Titles that begin with "Y"

Y Tu Mama Tambien * The Year My Parents Went On Vacation * The Year Of The Dog * Yes * Yesterday 2019 & 2020 * Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg * You Can Count On Me * You Don't Know Jack * You Hurt My Feelings * You Kill Me * You, Me and DuPree * You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger * Young Adult * Young At Heart * The Young Victoria * Your Sister's Sister * Youth

Y TU MAMA TAMBIEN: If your Spanish is a little rusty, the title translates to *And Your Mama Too*. I went to this film with high expectations. Roger Ebert was highly complimentary and gave it four stars. The New York Times compared it to *Jules & Jim*, high praise. Holly V. from Carol Stream, IL liked it. I didn't dislike the film, but I didn't love it either. This is a "coming of age" story is about two teenage boys learning to cope with high levels of testosterone and low levels of confidence which plague most teen aged boys. They meet an "older woman" (six or seven years older than seventeen anyway) and embark on a madcap trip across Mexico looking for a dream beach. The sex is plentiful and graphic and might put off even some of our independent film lovers. But the maturity and wisdom of Luisa, the older woman, acts as a catalyst. Of course they all find far more than the beach and change in profound ways. This change and the serious ending raises the film above soft porn or a teen sex romp. C+ (Despite all the sex scenes, I had trouble staying awake in this one, so Gary did the reviewing. **GRADE C+**

THE YEAR MY PARENTS WENT ON VACATION: This Brazilian movie was released in 2006 but was just released here this year. It is a very sweet film. Although some might find it slow-moving, we thought it was effective story-telling. Mauro is a young boy living in Brazil in 1970. He is a dedicated football fan and is eagerly anticipating the World Cup. Suddenly, his parents bundle him up and take him to stay with his grandfather because, as they tell him, they are going on vacation. It's obvious to us that his father is in political danger, but Mauro is oblivious to anything but soccer. After a hurried call to the grandfather, Mauro's parents leave him at his grandfather's apartment building in a suburb of San Paolo. When no one answers his knock, the boy spends the day in the hallway. It is up to an elderly neighbor, Sholomo, to inform the boy that his grandfather died suddenly at about the same moment Mauro arrived in San Paolo. The actor playing Mauro is most appealing, and we were interested in how this resourceful youngster manages to survive among strangers—supportive strangers, as it turns out, but strangers never-the-less. The film is subtitled. **GRADE B**

THE YEAR OF THE DOG: I'm sorry to say that this is a dog of a movie. Fortunately, it doesn't last a year—it just seems like it. Mike White writes very strange films. His first, *Chuck and Buck* was about a man obsessed with his friend. We liked the film with Jennifer Anniston titled, *The Good Girl*, but it, too, was rather odd. This film, White's directorial debut, is about a lonely woman who, when her beloved pet dog dies, becomes obsessed with animals. Molly Shannon is good as Peggy, a 40-something single woman who has difficulty making connections with adults and only seems comfortable with children and animals. I think White may have felt the ending was upbeat: self-discovery through the love of animals. However, by the time the film ended, we had already tuned out. All the people in the film are obsessed: Peggy's brother and sister-in-law are obsessed with themselves and their children; Peggy's boss is obsessed with being on the top team at work; Peggy's neighbor (John C. Reilly) is obsessed with hunting; Peggy's best friend at work is obsessed with her boyfriend. All the performances are good, but there wasn't anyone in the film that we liked or cared about. We went to see it because it got some glowing reviews as a "bittersweet comedy." There were some amusing moments, and a couple of touching moments, but for us it was a downer. **GRADE C-**

YES: (2004 release seen on Video) This most unusual love story was written and directed by British filmmaker, Sally Potter. It tells of the a passionate love affair between an American woman (Joan Allen) and a Middle-Eastern man (Simon Abkarian). It deals with the conflicts of religion, politics and sexuality, and it does so in rhyme. It is written in iambic pentameter, the rhythm scheme of Shakespeare. This makes it a difficult movie to absorb, but one that I eventually found haunting. Fortunately, the actors are so skilled that they never sound like they are reciting rhyme. **QUALIFIED THUMBS UP**

YESTERDAY: (2019) What if sometime between yesterday and today the electricity were to suddenly go out around the world and when it comes back on, practically all human memory of the Beatles is suddenly erased? Writer Richard Curtis (*Love Actually*) and director Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*) take this science fiction fantasy and weave it into a Romantic Comedy starring Lily James and Himesh Patel. Professional critics gave *Yesterday* mixed reviews, but audience scores reflected greater enthusiasm. Patel (unrelated to Dev Patel and in his first starring role) plays Jack, a struggling singer-songwriter in a tiny English seaside town whose dreams of fame are rapidly fading. But after the worldwide blackout, he slowly discovers himself to be the only person on Earth who remembers The Beatles. Jack becomes a huge star by performing songs he didn't write and passing them off as his own. Lily James plays Ellie, who has been a close friend to Jack since childhood. She, of course plays an important part in the rom com side of the movie. *Yesterday* wants to be a feel-good movie, and for Barbara and me it succeeded. But for us it is more an entertaining film with a clever premise than a classic like *Love Actually*. **GRADE B**

YESTERDAY (2020 On Demand HBO) My daughter gave me an assignment the other day. It was to watch the movie *Yesterday*, one of her favorite films. It's about a world-wide phenomenon: the electricity went out and when it comes back on, practically all human memory of the Beatles is suddenly erased. Gary said, "That sounds familiar." He went to the **Movie Views Archive**, and low and behold, we saw it in 2019, and Gary reviewed it. I watched it again, and I did remember parts of it but some of it was totally new to me. (I'm really very old!) I did remember that the world's memory of Coca Cola was also erased along with cigarettes (no loss there) and Harry Potter. In Gary's original review he said that "*Yesterday* wants to be a feel-good movie, and for Barbara and me it succeeded." I think that without the Beatles music, the world would be a sadder place. I would grade the movie a bit higher than we originally did. **GRADE B+** (For Gary's review see above)

YOO-HOO, MRS GOLDBERG: Do you know the name Molly Goldberg? Or her creator, Gertrude Berg? Neither did Barbara or I before seeing this documentary, but I doubt we will ever forget this amazing woman. In the 1930's, 1940's and even into the mid-1950's Molly Goldberg was one of the most famous women in America...certainly the most famous in the entertainment industry. She was once voted the most admired woman in America, after Eleanor Roosevelt. She was the "Oprah" of her day. Her career started in radio in 1929, just after the Stock Market Crash. She wrote, produced, and starred in a delightful family comedy, "The Goldbergs." She even created and delivered the commercials which she seamlessly worked into the show. In the late 1940's Gertrude brought Molly to TV and laid the foundation for later shows like "I Love Lucy," "The Honeymooners," and "All in the Family." The film touches on larger issues like feminism and the blacklist. It educates and entertains and if you have an interest in entertainment history, you will want to watch for this wonderful film. **GRADE B+**

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME: This is a must see movie and one of the best films of the year. If Laura Linney doesn't get an Academy Award nomination for her work in this film there is no justice in Hollywood. Mark Ruffalo, who plays Linney's brother, should also be recognized. Linney did get a Golden Globe nomination, but Ruffalo did not. The movie is a labor of love for Kenneth Lonergan who wrote, directed and acted in this family drama. Sammy Precott (Linney) is a single mother living in the small town in which she grew up and is working as a loan officer in the local bank. Her mother and father were killed in an automobile accident when she was young, leaving Sammy and her younger brother, Terry, orphaned. Terry couldn't wait to get out of town, and has wandered from place to place, occasionally getting into trouble and never finding himself. Sammy is thrilled when Terry comes home for a visit, but the reality of living with her brother creates not a little stress. She is pleased when her 8-year-old son (Rory Culkin and Terry begin to form a relationship, but she questions some of their activities--playing pool in the local bar, for example. At the same time, Sammy is trying to adjust to a new boss, a manager who is driving everyone crazy. Matthew Broderick is letter-perfect as Brian, the obsessive-compulsive bank manager, and Culkin is equally natural playing Sammy's son, Rudy. This film has what you rarely get in a Hollywood movie--real people, not stereotypes, in real situations, who act with honest emotions. There is nothing contrived or consciously "dramatic" about the dialogue or the acting. This is Lonergan's first directing effort and he is skillful and subtle in the way he tells the story. And he is delightful as the Priest Sammy goes to for advice. If *YOU CAN COUNT ON ME* doesn't come to a theater near you, be sure to put it on your video list. **GRADE: A**

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK: There was a time when film actors and directors were reluctant to cross over the line and work in the TV industry. That line has been losing its significance for several years now and the HBO movie *You Don't Know Jack* illustrates the point well. Starring Al Pacino, Susan Sarandon, John Goodman, Brenda Vaccaro, and directed by Barry Levinson, this HBO biopic of Jack Kevorkian (Dr. Death) helps fill in the details of a man known to most through old newspaper headlines. Both Barbara and I are sympathetic to Kevorkian's cause. I have never understood the logic of denying a person the right to a quick and humane doctor assisted death. I have had two aunts who, at the end of their lives, in excruciating pain requested that doctor hasten their death by withholding food and water. Starving and dehydrating a patient to death is commonly practiced by doctors, but helping a patient die with dignity is against the law in all but three States. I doubt that this film will receive the attention given to the cries of "death panels" in recently debated insurance reform legislation, but open intelligent debate on this issue is badly needed. The title seems flippant for such a serious subject and I was hoping for an even better film, but it is certainly worth seeing. **GRADE B**

YOU HURT MY FEELINGS: 2023 (Available for \$5.99 RENTAL streaming on Prime Video) Starring Julia Louis-Dreyfus, this is an insightful comedy-drama. It is often laugh-out-loud funny, but it also taps into our everyday anxieties. Are our loved ones always sincere with us, or are they just saying what we want to hear? Dreyfus plays Beth, a novelist whose long standing marriage is suddenly upended when she overhears her husband give his honest reaction to her latest book. On a trip to a sporting-goods shop with her sister, Beth hears her husband admit that, actually, he doesn't think the book she's currently writing is very good. Beth's world shatters, destroying the bond of trust between her and her husband. The movie is well-written and well-directed. The dialog is witty. The situations are light, smart and funny. The depictions of human behavior are believable, even if they are sometimes exaggerated for comic effect. Critics loved *You Hurt My Feelings* giving it 94% from 215 critics on Rotten Tomatoes. Audiences were less enthusiastic with a score of 64%. It is a relatively short movie with a Runtime of 1h 33m. It earned the "Festival Favorite" award when it opened at the Sundance Film Festival early in 2023. White lies are tricky. Often they work well, but only as long as they are invisible. I was surprised that a film about trust, lies, and the things we say to the people we love most could be made into a charming, but thoughtful comedy. Both Barbara and I were delighted. **GRADE A**

We thank Holly V., IL for recommending this film in last month's **Reader's Views**.

YOU KILL ME: In an interview, Tea Leoni once said that it wasn't worth leaving her children for an ordinary role: she was only interested in out-of-the ordinary parts. Out-of-the ordinary certainly describes this film and all the characters in it. Ben Kingsley is Frank, an alcoholic hit man whose drinking is starting to interfere with his work. His Buffalo crime family sends him to San Francisco, where they have a friend who will keep an eye on him. They insist that he dry out. He obediently attends an AA meeting, but it's obvious his heart isn't in it. He also reluctantly takes a job in a funeral parlor, and it is there that he meets an intriguing woman, the wonderful Tea Leoni, who eventually becomes his girl friend. It goes without saying that Kingsley is terrific: he always is. He is ably supported by Bill Pullman as his local watchdog, Luke Wilson as his AA sponsor, Phillip Baker Hall as his uncle and the head of the Polish crime family, and Dennis Farina, as a Irish crime lord trying to muscle in on Polish territory. So, it's sort of a romantic/comedy/crime story. The dialogue is sharp and the comedy is witty, but definitely not ordinary. Variety said that the movie should appeal "to those who like their

humor (and love stories) quietly outrageous." Readers Diane and Lee U, AZ, saw this one, liked it, and recommended it to us. We're glad they did. **GRADE B**

YOU, ME AND DUPREE: Our local critic hated this movie. Apparently he doesn't like Owen Wilson and doesn't think Kate Hudson is much of an actress. If you, like us, think Wilson is funny and charming and that Hudson is adorable and charming, then, like us, you will find this movie a pleasant way to spend a hot afternoon. Granted, it's not a great movie. The plot is contrived and doesn't always make much sense. However, Matt Dillon and Hudson as newlyweds, Owen Wilson as their unwanted house guest, and Michael Douglas as Dillon's boss and Hudson's possessive father, bring it off with a fair degree of style. And you'll probably get a few laughs out of it. We took grandson Nathan with us and he thought it was funny. **GRADE B-**

YOU WILL MEET A TALL DARK STRANGER: (2010) Woody Allen has been cranking out films nearly every year since 1965. One always hopes for an *Annie Hall* or a *Midnight in Paris* with each release, but, of course, that is unrealistic. Possibly because he can cast about any actor with a phone call, Woody often makes ensemble pieces with an impressive lineup of actors. Who would turn down the opportunity to work with Woody? The outstanding stars here are Anthony Hopkins, Josh Brolin, Naomi Watts, and Antonio Banderas. The film opens with a voice over paraphrase of a quote from Macbeth. "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but ultimately signifying nothing." Life and love can make fools of anyone and Woody continues to give us variations on this theme. Though this may not be his strongest effort, we think for Woody Allen fans, it is worth a couple hours of your time. **GRADE C+**

YOUNG ADULT: This is the third movie this month about a depressed woman. No special effects here, no planets colliding, no scary cults, just a woman in midlife crisis. Charlize Theron's Mavis should be on top of the world: She left her small Minnesota town behind; she's living in a high-rise apartment in "Minneapolis," as it was called back home; and she's a published author. But Mavis lives alone in a cluttered apartment. Her only companion is a small yappy dog, and she spends most of her time on her laptop, ghost-writing a popular young adult book series. She can still look beautiful on those rare occasions when she bothers to fix herself up. She's one of those people who peaked in high school where, in her senior year, she was voted "best hair." And she's never gotten over her high school boyfriend, Buddy (Patrick Wilson). When Buddy sends her the announcement of his first child's birth, she decides to go back home and reclaim the man she believes is rightfully hers. Yes, she is delusional—and yes, she's still psychologically in high school. Needless to say, it doesn't work out well. The best scenes in the movie are those between Mavis and Matt (Patton Oswalt). Matt had the locker next to Mavis for four years, but she barely remembers him. She spent more time looking in her locker mirror than noticing the boy next to her. Oswalt is one of those dependable character actors you've seen many times. In *Young Adult* he gets the chance to show that he is more than just an amusing sidekick—much more. In 2003's *Monster*, Theron earned raves for her portrayal of convicted murderer Aileen Wuornos. In that film, makeup helped this gorgeous woman look unattractive; in *Young Adult* she has to do it with acting. That she succeeds is a testament to her not inconsiderable acting skills. Gary thought the movie was very well made and that Theron was outstanding. I am a bit weary of movies about depressed women, but I must give credit to both the acting, and the clever, realistic and unpredictable story. **GRADE B**

YOUNG AT HEART: Delightful! Heartwarming! Funny! Touching! All these words apply to this documentary about the Young at Heart Chorus from Northampton, MA. Comprised of senior citizens with an average age of 80, this chorus has delighted audiences worldwide with their versions of every one from James Brown to Coldplay. The chorus was started as a collective arts project in 1982 at a center for the elderly, but they have developed into a singing group with an international reputation. The chorus has made 12 tours of Australia, Europe and Canada and has serenaded Norwegian royalty. The documentary focuses on the two-month preparations for a 2006 concert in Northampton. A solid group of professional musicians accompany the chorus as they work to learn such songs as "Yes We Can Can," Sonic Youth's "Schizophrenia," and the Coldplay ballad "Fix You." As our local critic pointed out, the lyrics of these songs bring a very different message when sung by people in their so-called golden years. For instance, "Staying Alive" and The Ramones hit "I Wanna Be Sedated" definitely take on new meaning when the Young@Heart Chorus sings them. You will laugh, you will cry, and you will be entertained. **GRADE B+**

THE YOUNG VICTORIA: I like a good historical drama, especially when it's about British Royalty. And this is a good historical drama about an English queen that movies have largely ignored. Perhaps that's because she was happily married and reigned over England during a period when the country reached its zenith and became the foremost global power of the time. Not much conflict there. Victoria's reign, from 1837 until 1901, was the longest of any other British monarch before or since. As far as history knows, she and her Prince Albert were very much in love, a love that lasted until Albert died at the age of 42. After his death, she had his clothes laid out every morning for the next 39 years. *The Young Victoria* begins shortly before her uncle, King William, dies and she ascends to the throne. There is some political intrigue in the first years of her reign, intrigue that some critics found rather boring. The film centers on the love affair and ends shortly after the birth of Victoria and Albert's first child. (They went on to have eight more children.) Emily Blunt fought hard to get the role of the young queen and she deserves her Golden Globe nomination. Rupert Friend is Prince Albert and the two make an appealing couple. Miranda Richardson appears as Victoria's mother, and Jim Broadbent is King William. Paul Bettany is Lord Melbourne, a man who had great influence over Victoria until she came to rely on her husband. We both enjoyed the film and thought it was well-done. Gary isn't quite as enamored of historical drama, so he doesn't grade it quite as high as I did. **GRADE B+/B**

YOUR SISTER'S SISTER: (2011 release) Sisters and brothers, friends and lovers. These relationships can be complicated, and they are complicated in this film, but everyone handles the situations in ways that are delightful, unpredictable and totally believable. Lynn Shelton wrote and directed this movie and she is a talent. We learned that her third film, 2009's *Hump Day*, got good reviews and we immediately put it on our Netflix list. In *Your Sister's Sister*, Shelton manages dialogue and characters that are funny and smart and incredibly engaging. Of course, with Emily Blunt and Rosemarie DeWitt as the sisters you expect good things. They even look like sisters. Mark Duplass is terrific in this film. We saw two Duplass movies on the same day, and in both we were impressed with his likeable everyman looks and his easy-going charm. He is another talent that bears watching. Our local critic (Bill Goodykoontz) liked the way the movie "unfolds with frank, spontaneous ease, taking fascinating emotional corners and revealing more in those hairpin turns than on the straight-away." He ended his review by praising Shelton and her cast for making a film about the difficulties of love, friends

and family look so easy. I used to dread the summer movie season because of the blow-'em-up blockbusters that take over most theatres, but this summer has produced some wonderful independent films. I hope you get the chance to see some of them. **GRADE A**

YOUTH: (2015) This Felliniesque rumination on growing old was written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino who is known for oblique storytelling with partially obscure plots. That is certainly true of *Youth*. Despite the presence of the great Michael Caine, both Gary and I were inclined to ask, "What's it all about, Alfie?" Caine plays a retired orchestra conductor on holiday with his daughter and his film director and best friend--the equally awesome Harvey Keitel. They are staying in an expensive resort/spa in the Alps populated by some very weird characters. The alpine scenery is majestic and the cinematography throughout is compelling and beautiful. We were enchanted with the look of the first half of the movie and intrigued by the sometimes confusing scenes and dialogue. Eventually, however, the esoteric nature of the movie became irritating. One critic found it "pretentious and boring," and our local reviewer called it, "sometimes maddening while never offering easy answers." I will say this: we did talk about it on the way home and are still trying to figure out what actually happened and what was imagined. Rachel Weisz plays Caine's daughter and Paul Dano is interesting as an actor vacationing at the same resort. Jane Fonda makes a brief appearance that won her a Golden Globe nomination. The 82-year-old Michael Caine could be nominated for an Oscar, and, if he should win the statue, he would be the oldest actor to ever win an Oscar for Best Actor. (Christopher Plummer won Best Supporting Actor at 82 in 2010.) Ever since Caine first wowed us as Alfie in 1966, he has always delighted us with his performances. His performance in *Youth* is certainly Oscar-worthy and we wouldn't bet against him, but we can only give the movie a C. **GRADE C**

Movie Titles that begin with "Z"

Zathura * Zero Dark Thirty * Zero Motivation * Zodiac * The Zone of Interest * The Zookeeper's Wife * Zootopia

ZATHURA: In this film, two squabbling brothers—a 4th grader and a 1st grader—play an old board game and are plunged into a outer space adventure complete with a defective robot, a stranded astronaut, and voracious alien lizards called Zorgons. In the course of their adventure, they learn to appreciate each other. The movie is based on a book by Chris Van Allsburg who also wrote the book *Jumanji* which was made into a feature film in 1995. Jon Favreau directed the film. He also directed *Elf*, another appealing family film and I think he demonstrates a talent for making films that almost all ages can enjoy. I never saw *Jumani*, but most critics seem to think this is the better of the two movies. I know I enjoyed it and so did Nathan, although Nathan got a bit annoyed by the brothers incessant bickering. Some critics thought the special effects were not special enough, but I think they are completely appropriate for the intended audience and definitely frightening enough for younger kids. Tim Robbins appears in the early scenes as the boy's father, and Kristen Stewart is their older teen-aged sister. I was touched by the ending scenes, but then I'm easily touched by sentimentality involving kids. **GRADE B**

ZERO DARK THIRTY: (2012) Film director/producer Kathryn Bigelow and writer/producer Mark Boal have made another amazing film. In 2010 they worked together to bring us *Hurt Locker*, a film that won six Oscars including Best Picture. Barbara and I feel confident that this remarkable film will long be regarded as one of 2012s best, and it may bring the talented director and writer team even more Oscar nominations and winners. Jessica Chastain is nothing short of fantastic playing a woman whose name we may never know even though she was as much as, or more than, any single person responsible for finding and eliminating Osama bin Laden. This movie is actually a tribute to her. As the film opens the audience is told the movie is "based on firsthand accounts of actual events." *Zero Dark Thirty* has not been without controversy. Its severest critics argue that the film leaves the impression that torture of suspects, approved by the Bush Administration, played a key role in providing clues leading to the eventual success of the government's effort to find Osama bin Laden. To me Bigelow was merely giving us a glimpse of what happened in the early days of the long hunt. It seemed clear that most of the significant breaks came after torture was discontinued. Regardless, this is an impressive film dealing with a chapter in our history that should never be forgotten. From the opening we know how the movie ends, yet our interest never flags and we are on the edge of our seats for the stunningly photographed climax. Let us know what you think. **GRADE A** (The title of the movie is a military term for 30 minutes after midnight. Director Bigelow explains that "it refers also to the darkness and secrecy that cloaked the entire decade-long mission.")

ZERO MOTIVATION: (2014) I have zero motivation to write this review, but I will proceed in spite of it. (Gary hopes that the review won't be as boring as the movie was.) This Israeli film got fairly high praise from critics, according to *Rotten Tomatoes*, but we were extremely disappointed. Briefly, it's about a unit of female Israeli soldiers at a remote desert base who search for ways to alleviate their boredom. One young woman weeps copiously because she hates her posting and wants to be transferred to Tel Aviv where she thinks she will begin a real life. Another plays the computer game *Minesweeper* compulsively trying to post a record score. The commander of the small group of women recruits wants to excel so that she can win a promotion. All are relegated to traditional female roles as secretaries who serve coffee to the men. The female writer/director cast an interesting group of young women, but her movie is neither very interesting nor very funny. We really can't recommend it. A satisfactory ending only elevated our grade to a D. **GRADE D**

ZODIAC: This is a true-life crime movie about the search for a serial killer self-named Zodiac. Director David Fincher does an excellent job maintaining attention and interest for 2 hours and 36 minutes in spite of the fact that there are no gun fights, no car chases, remarkably little violence and the killer is never caught. He keeps the film visually interesting with some memorable camera techniques, and it keep it emotionally interesting by exploring the personalities of the men whose search for the Zodiac killer took over their lives. Mark Ruffalo is especially good as a detective, who, along with his partner (Anthony Edwards) works the case of a murdered cab driver in San Francisco. The San Francisco detectives soon learn that the killer has killed twice before in two separate Northern California counties. The jurisdictional problems cause difficulties for all the detectives working Zodiac cases. Robert Downey Jr. is outstanding as a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, the newspaper that receives a series of cryptic letters from Zodiac. We thought Jake Gyllenhaal was interesting and credible as Robert Graysmith, a young cartoonist for the paper who discovers the code used in Zodiac's

letters. Graysmith becomes so obsessed with finding the killer that he loses his wife and, eventually, his job. The film is based on Graysmith's book, *Zodiac Unmasked*. Chloe Sevigny appears as Graysmith's wife, and the ubiquitous Brian Cox appears as Melvin Belli. We decided on a grade of B+. **GRADE B+**

THE ZONE OF INTEREST: 2023 (We watched it on Max, but it's also available on Apple TV and Prime Video.) Will I ever learn not to take the critic's score on RT without taking into account the audience score? It was 93/78 and I'll bet that all 78% saw it in a movie theatre and were influenced by the movie's winning the Oscar for Best Foreign Movie! I looked up Art's review after watching, and he said, "*Not a movie I would wish on my worst enemy...*" I forgot that crucial sentence. Although, he goes on to say, "*the message is certainly one that we shouldn't ever forget.*" I say remember the message, forget the movie. The story: The commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, and his wife Hedwig, strive to build a dream life for their family in a house and garden next to the camp. The director and co-writer, Jonathan Glazer said in an interview, "*The story is less about the Nazis than the broader question of human nature, the thing in us that drives it all, the capacity for violence that we all have.*" It's a chilling thought, but neither I nor Gary got that from the movie. Rudolf Höss wrote in his autobiography, "My wife's garden was a paradise of flowers." This, from an article about the truth of the movie: *Rudolf's five children played with tortoises, cats and lizards at their villa near the Polish city of Krakow; in the summer, the siblings frolicked in a pool in their yard or swam in a nearby river. These peaceful domestic scenes masked a dark reality: Rudolf was the Nazi officer in charge of Auschwitz, the concentration and extermination camp where the Nazis killed an estimated 1.1 million people—most of them European Jews. Rudolf was directly responsible for these killings, which he oversaw as the camp's longest-serving commandant. And the peaceful villa with its floral garden? It stood just beyond the high walls surrounding the Höss home.* He wrote the autobiography while awaiting execution by hanging at Auschwitz, the site of his crimes, in front of a crowd that included former camp inmates. **The Zone of Interest** is slow, slow slow, showing happy scenes of idyllic family life punctuated by gun shots, screams and shouts from over the wall. On one occasion the screen turned red. Why?, I do not know. One critic on RT said, "*Presents a weird juxtaposition of mundane family issues against the Holocaust backdrop. It felt overly artistic—just because you can, doesn't mean you should. Artistically bold, but emotionally vacant.*" That about sums it up for us. If you see it, remember we warned you! **GRADE D**

THE ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE: (2017) The movie boasts another splendid performance by Jessica Chastain. The fact that the story is true is another point in the movie's favor. Dr. Jan Zabinski, a renowned zoologist, was the director of the Warsaw Zoo, which, by the 1930s had become one of Europe's largest zoos. His wife, Antonina, who was a respected author of children's books about animals, worked along beside him. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the bombing left much of the zoo destroyed. Those animals that were not killed by the bombs fled from burning cages and were subsequently killed. To save the zoo property, the Zabinskis convinced the German invaders that they could turn the zoo into a pig farm and feed the troops. Although not Jewish, the couple was not blind to the suffering of the Warsaw Jews under Nazi rule. As the Jewish population was forced into a ghetto and conditions became increasingly severe, the Zabinskis decided first to save a friend. Soon they were sheltering many people, some for only a few days, others for years. This part of the story is the focus of **The Zookeeper's Wife**. There have been many films about the Holocaust, but this is the first one I remember being centered in a bombed out zoo. Director Niki Caro (**McFarland, USA**) filmed the movie beautifully and the actors and the animals performed admirably. Chastain, as Antonina, was more than equal to the task of portraying a woman who, though she feared for the lives of her family, was resolute in her resolve to help those in need. No Holocaust movie is easy to watch, but we think this is one you'll want to see. **GRADE B+**

ZOOTOPIA: (2016) We temporarily suspended our distaste of animated films for **Zootopia**, which got high marks from both critics and audiences. I enjoyed the movie and marveled at the skill of the animators who used visual ingenuity to create engaging characters and an enchanting landscape. The movie is witty enough to keep adults interested and there is enough action to delight kids. The story is fairly simple: Judy Hopps, a bunny, has a dream of becoming a police officer in order to make the world a better place. Her parents would prefer she stay at home on their carrot farm, but Judy enrolls in the Police Academy, the first step in realizing her dream. Although through perseverance she rises to the top of her pledge class, when she gets to the Zootopia Police Department, she is assigned to handing out parking tickets. Zootopia is a huge city whose populace, both predator and prey, live together in harmony. That harmony is shattered when some predators seem to revert to their natural biological state and become aggressive. Is it biology or something more sinister? That is the problem that Judy and her friend, a fox named Nick Wilde, eventually solve. The message of the movie is sung by Shakira, the voice for a glamorous gazelle. The song, "*Try Everything*," is a modern version of that old maxim *If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*. But there is another message that has implications for our election year. It is this: *Beware of demagogues who try to unite the people against a common enemy in order to increase their power*. Perhaps all of voter age should see this creative and entertaining movie. A host of actors provided the voices. The list includes Ginnifer Goodwin (Judy), Jason Bateman (Nick), Idris Elba (Chief of Police), and J.K. Simons (Mayor Lionheart). Although we don't see many animated films, we have enjoyed **Shrek, Up**, and **Inside Out** and gave those films high grades. For **Zootopia**, we agreed on a grade of B. **GRADE B**