

Movie Titles that begin with "E"

80 For Brady * Eagle Eye * Earth * The East * East-West * Eastern Promises * Easy A * Easy Virtue * Eat, Pray, Love * The Edge of Seventeen 2016/2024 * Edge of Tomorrow * An Education * Eight Below * 80 for Brady * Eighth Grade * Elaine Stritch: Shoot Me * Elena * Elephant * Elephant Queen * Elf-2003/2024 * Elizabethtown * Elle * Elling * Elsa & Fred * Elvis * Elysium * Embrace of the Serpent * Emily * Emily the Criminal * The Emperor's Club * The Emperor's New Clothes * Emma * Empire Falls * Empire of Light * Empire of the Sun * Enchanted * The End of the Affair * The End of the Tour * End of Watch * Enemy * Enemy at the Gates * Enemy Of The State * Enola Homes * Enough Said * Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room * Equity * Erin Brokovich * Escape Fire * Eternal Daughter * Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind * Every Little Step (2009&2020) * Everybody Loves Somebody * Everybody Wants Some * Everybody's Fine * Everybody's Talking about Jamie * Everything Everywhere All At Once * Everything Must Go * Evolution * Ex Machina * Exporting Raymond * The Express * Extract * Extraordinary Measures * Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close * Eye In the Sky * The Eyes of Tammy Faye

80 FOR BRADY: 2023 (Available for streaming on Prime Video for \$19.99) The film was inspired by a real group of Tom Brady superfans who dubbed themselves the "Over 80 for Brady" club. It is a true story of four octogenarians whose devotion to each other is matched by their devotion to NFL quarterback Tom Brady. The film is produced by Tom Brady, who plays himself and has an engaging screen presence. Patriot Fans will likely love it. Brady haters, not so much. Few will argue with the inspired casting. The four octogenarians were played by four big screen legends: Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda, Sally Field and Rita Moreno. *80 for Brady* is a silly but good-natured film about the NFL and about friendship. Critics were generally quite critical, while audiences tended to like it. Barbara and I could understand the mixed evaluations. The first 75% of the movie were slow moving and left us feeling that the cast of brilliant actors deserved better. But the film has an exciting fourth quarter and elevated our evaluation. **GRADE C+/B-**

EAGLE EYE: Forty years ago in *2001 Space Odyssey* Stanley Kubrick introduced the film world to *Hal*, an extraordinary computer that developed a "mind of its own." In this film we are introduced to *Eagle Eye*, an extraordinary computer that develops a conscience and a plan to change the world using advanced futuristic technology. It is being promoted as an "action thriller" produced by Steven Spielberg with a cast headed by Shia LaBeouf and Michelle Monaghan and supported by Rosario Dawson, Billy Bob Thornton, and Michael Chiklis. I see it more as "science fiction" with wall to wall explosions, chases and crashes. Shia LaBeouf is Jerry Shaw, a drop out with a twin brother who dies in the opening minutes of the film. Incredible circumstances throw him together with Rachel, a single mom well played by Michelle Monaghan. The action starts with a bang and tries to keep you on the edge of your seat for the next two hours. It succeeded in this a little better with Barbara than with me. She grades the film B-, but I can't go higher than a C. **GRADE C/B-**

EARTH: *Earth* is an action film that has no car chases, no gun shots, no plot, and no dialog. What it does have is 90 minutes of breath taking photography narrated by the mellifluous voice of James Earl Jones. It is a nature documentary that will remind you what a beautiful and wonderfully diverse planet we all have for a home. It was appropriate that this family film opened on Earth Day with a G-rating. Some critics complain that the film was "defanged and declawed" for kiddy consumption, and it is true that the film makers have edited out most of the blood and carnage. Still there is plenty of predatory animal behavior captured in spectacular high definition, along with quite a few scenes that will bring a smile to your face. Slow motion and time lapse photography open up a world we seldom see. If you have the choice, it would be better to see this film on a large screen, but if you miss it in a theater, Barbara and I think it is worth renting for TV screen viewing. **GRADE B+**

THE EAST: (2013) "The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple." So said Oscar Wilde. This movie about corporate terrorists and the people who hunt them doesn't presume to offer any truths. It does expose some difficult moral questions. For example, is it a crime or is it justice to poison the executives of a pharmaceutical company that continues to market a drug that can poison its users? The movie title refers to the name of a group of environmental activists who take their revenge on corporations to the level of terrorism. Members live a communal life in an abandoned hotel, dining on food that has been discarded by others as a matter of principle. Brit Marlin, who co-wrote the screenplay with the director, Zal Batmanglij, is Sarah, an operative for an elite private intelligence firm run by Patricia Clarkson. Sarah is sent on an undercover mission to infiltrate The East. In so doing, she begins to witness first-hand how corporate greed can despoil our land and violate its people. When the group performs a "jam" that has the potential to harm others, Sarah asks, "If we hurt people, aren't we just as bad as they are?" The film doesn't answer the moral questions posed, but, as one reviewer said, "at least it asks those questions." The activist group is led by Alexander Skarsgård and Ellen Page is one of the members. The movie is smartly written and beautifully acted, and we were impressed with it and everyone in it. **GRADE B+**

EAST-WEST: (Seen on video) In 1946 the Soviet Government invited all citizens living in exile in Europe to return to their motherland. Alexi, a doctor, takes them up on their offer and persuades Marie, his French-born wife, to emigrate. With their young son, they arrive in the Soviet Union full of hope, but they never anticipated what life in Stalin's Russia would be like. It doesn't take long for Marie to bitterly regret leaving France. Catherine Deneuve plays a famous French actress who tries to help Marie escape. The running time of this film is 125 minutes, but it is time well spent. The dialogue is both French and Russian and there are English subtitles. **THUMBS UP**

EASTERN PROMISES: David Cronenberg has given us a 21st Century Godfather movie, only in this film the setting is London and the mobsters are Russian. Violent, grim and beautifully photographed, *Eastern Promises* has the most spectacular fight scene we have ever seen. It was intense, brutal and disturbingly real. Apparently, we weren't the only ones impressed. In his review of the film, Roger Ebert said, *At a time when movie "fight scenes" are as routine as the dances in musicals, Nikolai engages in a fight in this film that sets the same kind of standard that The French Connection set for chases. Years from now, it will be referred to as a benchmark.* Cronenberg has said that he is not interested in the mechanics of the mob, but the people who live in a "state of perpetual transgression." Cronenberg shows us that these mobsters have family parties and complicated father/son relationships. As with the Corleone family, the women exist only on the periphery. Viggo Mortensen so completely disappears into his role as Nikolai, a Russian mobster-in-training, that you will hardly recognize him at first. He is outstanding! Armin Mueller-Stahl is the head of the crime family.

Since we first saw him in 1990's **Avalon**, we have come to expect a brilliant performance from him and he doesn't disappoint here. Naomi Watts is Anna, a midwife working at a London Hospital. When a young Russian girl dies in childbirth, Anna's efforts to find relatives to take the baby bring her into contact with the mobsters. Steven Knight (**Dirty Pretty Things**, **Amazing Grace**) deserves credit for writing a story that is never predictable, even though we have seen many previous Mafia movies. The story is gripping, but it is not for the faint-hearted. Although the Russian accents may be difficult for some, they do heighten the moody atmosphere. **GRADE A-**

EASY A: Emma Stone is Olive, a high school student who is smart and pretty but, for some reason, is not noticed by her classmates at Ojai High School. When she lies about losing her virginity, the rumor mill works overtime and soon she has the reputation of being a slut. But she no longer fades into the woodwork. Because she has become notorious and noticed by the entire student body, Olive decides to play along with her underserved reputation. When she helps out a gay friend by pretending to have sex with him, she is soon approached by other boys who need a boost to their reputations. It's all a lie, but the lie takes over her life. The story is told by Olive as she records an online record of the events. At one point, Olive says that she wishes her life was like a 1980's movie by John Hughes, and **Easy A** did remind me of those iconic films. It's well-written, and, at its core, rather sweet. Stone is adorable and handles the humor easily. Patricia Clarkson and Stanley Tucci as Olive's unconventional parents are standouts. Gary thought they were probably the coolest movie parents ever. Thomas Hayden Church is Olive's favorite teacher and Lisa Kudrow is very funny as his wife and the school guidance counselor. Amanda Bynes has the unpleasant task of being the villain of the piece, but she plays her part with spirit. The fact that she is the leader of a group of proselytizing religious students may offend some, although we thought it was amusing. Yahoo users give this movie an average grade of A- and critics grades range from B- to A-. We think it's worth a B+. **GRADE B+**

EASY VIRTUE: This lackluster film is based on a Noel Coward play about an upper-crust British family appalled by the American floozie that the heir to the family estate marries. Well, most of the family is appalled. The father quite likes her. Coward, a playwright, composer, director, actor and singer was known for his wit and sense of style. This film is woefully lacking in wit and not too big in the style department either. The filmmakers do create a British Manor house and furnish it elaborately. They also dress everyone in the style of the late 1920s. In an attempt to introduce some lightness, they insert such tunes as *Let's Misbehave*, but it doesn't work. Sometimes, the songs even felt intrusive. The director needs to learn how to pace a film like this by studying the films of Frank Capra. He would have turned this into a very funny movie. Jessica Beal plays the American floozie as a modern liberated woman. Some critics felt she looked too modern, but I thought she was OK. Ben Barnes plays her husband like a spoiled mother's boy. I never could figure out what she sees in him. Kristin Scott Thomas plays Beal's haughty mother-in-law with chilly arrogance, and Colin Firth is her sympathetic father-in-law. (Beal & Firth's tango, pictured with this review, is one of the better scenes.) I expected a lot of witty lines from the always excellent Firth, but the screenwriters didn't oblige. We enjoyed the trailer for this film and were disappointed that the film never came to life for us. Gary Thompson of the Philadelphia Daily News began his review with these words: *Easy Virtue* "is a very strange adaptation of a 1924 Noel Coward play - strange, in that the filmmakers appear to have expunged all the funny parts. He got that right.

EAT, PRAY, LOVE: I never read the book by Liz Gilbert upon which this movie is based, but it is, apparently, about a woman who goes on a journey of self-discovery after a divorce and a subsequent failed relationship. The book was wildly popular, but I doubt that this rather boring movie will please the book's fans. It certainly didn't please us. The running time of over two hours seems twice that long. I will admit that the travelogue element, with scenes from Italy, India and Bali, was interesting, but the story just didn't work. Even Julia Roberts, who plays Gilbert in the film, couldn't bring the lackluster script to life. The only bright spot in the entire film was Richard Jenkins, whom Roberts meets at an ashram in India. When he tells the story of what brought him to India, you realize two things: 1. Jenkins is a terrific actor; 2. The rest of the movie suffers by comparison. (Although the toothless Balinese medicine man was sweetly amusing.) Gilbert discovers the joys of eating in Italy, the peace of praying in India, and in Bali she finally discovers love, in the person of Felipe, a divorced Brazilian played by Javier Bardem. Gary said he never bought Roberts as this conflicted woman, and he especially couldn't buy her romance with Bardem. I agree. Roberts is just too put-together-looking to be believable as a woman who doesn't know or like herself. And as much as I can appreciate Bardem's acting skills, he didn't do much for me in this film. (Guess I missed that pneumatic nail gun!) Because of Jenkins, and only Jenkins, we can go as high as C-. **GRADE C-**

THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN (2016): This well written coming-of-age movie received positive reviews from critics with an impressive 95% on Rotten Tomato's Tomatometer. **The Atlantic** touts it as an instant Teen Classic. The film was written, directed, and produced by Kelly Fremon Craig and features Hailee Steinfeld in the starring role. Steinfeld burst onto the Hollywood scene as a teen star when she earned an Oscar nomination in the Coen Brothers' **True Grit**. Nearly everyone knows that growing from a young girl into a young woman in today's modern world can be difficult. **The Edge of Seventeen** is a refreshing and amusing account of one girl's troubled journey as her best friend, actually *only* friend, starts dating her popular brother. This film should solidify Steinfeld's standing as a talented young actress. Barbara and I expect to see her continue to grow as her career unfolds. Important supporting roles are effectively played by Kyra Sedgwick as a well-meaning insecure mother and Woody Harrelson as a teacher and mentor. Only time will tell if this ultimately heartwarming film will become a classic like **Sixteen Candles** (1984), or **The Breakfast Club** (1985), but I think it is well above average as a coming-of-age dramedy. **GRADE A-**

THE EDGE OF SEVENTEEN: 2024 (A Prime rental for \$3.99) We saw this film before, but when my daughter, Martha, recommended the movie, neither Gary nor I could remember much about it. We decided to give it another look. We loved it this time around. It stars Hailee Steinfeld as Nadine, a junior in high school, and she is terrific as an awkward teenager who feels friendless and alone since her father died and her mother doesn't "understand" her. She has one friend whose she's known since grammar school, and when Krista (Haley Lu Richardson) starts dating her older brother, Darien (Blake Jenner), and her mother's clear favorite, she feels more alone than ever. (Kyra Sedgwick skillfully plays Nadine's mom.) Nadine does have a relationship with a cool teacher (Woody Harrelson), but Nadine is clueless when a boy that obviously likes her makes tentative conversation. However, Nadine comes of age in the end, recognizing that Darien has his own problems, and forming a friendship with the boy who likes her. The writer/director is Kelly Fremon Craig, who debuted with **The Edge of Seventeen**. She wrote the screen adaptation and directed the recent **Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret**. She is a filmmaker to watch. RT critic Ann Cohen says "Every decade has its cult teen movie. Thirty-two years ago, it was **Sixteen Candles**. For the '90s, it was **Clueless**. The early aughts had **Mean Girls**. Now we have **The Edge of Seventeen**." An

audience member said, *"Intensely enjoyable. Nice to know that Hailee Steinfeld's terrific turn in the 2010 True Grit wasn't a fluke."* We agree with 220 the RT critics who gave the movie a 94%. **GRADE A**

We thank **Martha C-B., AZ** for her recommendation to take a second look.

EDGE OF TOMORROW: (2014) Even the presence of Tom Cruise and Emily Blunt, both of whom are very good, couldn't keep Gary awake during the futuristic battle scenes. Those scenes did seem to go on forever. The only interesting thing about this Sci-Fi movie about alien beings conquering the planet, is the manipulation of the time element. When Cruise is forced into battle, he manages to kill one of the special aliens and this gives him the power to restart the day whenever he (Cruise) dies. In *Groundhog Day* fashion, he relives the D-Day of the future over and over again. It is all explained with pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo that makes no sense, but it does allow Cruise and Blunt some time to get acquainted. Emily Blunt got totally buffed-up for her role as a super-warrior, famous for defeating the aliens in a crucial battle. But now the aliens, octopus-like creatures, have taken over all of Europe and it is up to Tom Cruise to save the world. This is one of his better roles. As one critic put it, *he damps down his usual all-intensity-all-the-time MO. He's best here when his character seems the most scared.* And Blunt is one of our favorites. However, the two of them weren't enough to prevent Gary from grading this movie a "W" for worthless. I am a bit more charitable. **GRADE C/W**

AN EDUCATION: It is 1960ish London and Jenny is a bright, attractive school girl who is furiously studying so that she can enter Oxford next year. Schoolwork is hard and boring; her parents are uptight and boring, and the boys at school seem woefully immature. Is it any wonder she is attracted to a charming, sophisticated older man who introduces her to concerts, good restaurants, champagne, fun and Paris? There is more than one way to get an education, and an education is precisely what Jenny gets. The screenplay for this British import was written by Nick Hornby, who previously delighted us with *About A Boy* and *High Fidelity*. It is based on a memoir by British journalist Lynn Barber, who, when she was 16, had a two-year affair with an older man.* Roger Ebert tells us that "there are many scene-by-scene parallels between the book and the movie, and much closely adapted dialogue." The story isn't exactly new— young schoolgirl is seduced by sophisticated older man—but Carey Mulligan brings such charm to Jenny that the result seems new. . . and thoroughly delightful. Mulligan has been compared to Audrey Hepburn and she does have Hepburn's combination of sauciness and vulnerability. The scenes of her trip to Paris reminded me of Hepburn in *A Roman Holiday*. Peter Sarsgaard is David, Jenny's older suitor and Alfred Molina is her conventional father. Sarsgaard's portrayal of a charming, though ethically-flawed man is perfect, and Molina is the quintessential 1960's middle-class British father. We liked Olivia Williams as Miss Stubbs, Jenny's English teacher, and Emma Thompson makes a welcome, though brief, appearance as the headmistress of Jenny's school. I liked the headline that A.O. Scott gave to his review in the New York Times: *Beware of Strangers Bearing Champagne*. We both give this one a B+. **GRADE B+**

**Of her affair with an older man, Lynn Barber writes "My experience with Simon entirely cured my craving for sophistication. By the time I got to Oxford, I wanted nothing more than to meet kind, decent, straightforward boys my own age, no matter if they were gauche or virgins. I would marry one eventually and stay married all my life and for that, I suppose, I have Simon to thank."*

EIGHT BELOW: This Disney movie is good family entertainment: no sex, no bad words, no explosions. What it does have is some wonderful sled dogs. They're very brave and pretty good actors, too. When a research team in the Antarctic is forced to evacuate their outpost because of a major storm, there isn't room in the helicopter for the sled dogs. Their handler, Paul Walker, vows to return in a few days, but the weather makes that impossible and the dogs must survive on their own for several months. Bruce Greenwood plays a scientist searching for the remnants of a meteorite from Mercury. Jason Biggs provides some humor as the team's cartographer and Moon Bloodgood is the helicopter pilot. Her relationship with Paul Walker is a subplot. All the actors are appealing, but the dogs are the real stars. Director Frank Marshall, has more producer credits than directing credits, but he did direct *Arachnophobia* in 1990 and *Alive* in 1993. **GRADE B**

80 FOR BRADY: 2023 (Available for streaming on Prime Video for \$19.99) The film was inspired by a real group of Tom Brady superfans who dubbed themselves the "Over 80 for Brady" club. It is a true story of four octogenarians whose devotion to each other is matched by their devotion to NFL quarterback Tom Brady. The film is produced by Tom Brady, who plays himself and has an engaging screen presence. Patriot Fans will likely love it. Brady haters, not so much. Few will argue with the inspired casting. The four octogenarians were played by four big screen legends: Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda, Sally Field and Rita Moreno. *80 for Brady* is a silly but good-natured film about the NFL and about friendship. Critics were generally quite critical, while audiences tended to like it. Barbara and I could understand the mixed evaluations. The first 75% of the movie were slow moving and left us feeling that the cast of brilliant actors deserved better. But the film has an exciting fourth quarter and elevated our evaluation. **GRADE C+/B-**

EIGHTH GRADE: (2018) This movie plunges us into the day-to-day life of a 13-year-old girl, Kayla Day, brilliantly played by Elsie Fisher who made a place for herself as a child actress about eight years ago. Critics are nearly unanimous in their praise of her and of Writer/Director Bo Burnham's debut on the big screen. He portrays the trials, tribulations and compulsive worries of youth told with compassionate empathy. You may not remember how awkward and insecure adolescents can sometimes feel in eighth grade. Or you may think things have changed. Do you think social media mitigates or exacerbates those feelings? Every kid in this film lives in and around their phones and the internet. With her long, stringy-blond hair, acne-blotched face and big eyes, Kayla is trying to navigate the turbulent waters between Middle School and High School. She needs social media because she has no social life. Barbara and I were deeply impressed by this skillfully made independent film. Contributing to our enjoyment was Kayla's single father, played to perfection by Josh Hamilton, He loves his daughter, but is often baffled by her attempts to push him away and by her mood swings. This may be a difficult movie to find, but it is worth seeking out. **GRADE A-**

ELAINE STRITCH: SHOOT ME: (2013) She's 87 and she's still here! Elaine Stritch is a Broadway icon. After 65 years in New York, she's moving back to her home town, Detroit, to live out the last act of her life. Before she goes, though, she's got one more show to do. She can't always remember the words, but in her legendary black tights and long white blouse, she can still bring it. Formidable, indomitable, irascible, brutally honest—these are all words used to describe Stritch and her documentary. I would add "valiant" to that list. She has conquered Broadway and alcoholism and is determined to live out the end of her life with humor. It's probably true that if you've seen Stritch on stage the documentary will mean more to you. But everyone in their last act can learn a thing or two from this gallant and oh, so talented, woman. Gary and I saw Stritch in *Company*, on Broadway in 1970, and in London a few years later. We

have been fans ever since. This is the second documentary about the legendary star. In 2001 she appeared in a spectacular one-woman show called **Elaine Stritch At Liberty** which was later filmed as a TV documentary. We loved that movie and we loved this one. Is it any wonder that Rotten Tomatoes gives **Elaine Stritch: Shoot Me** 100% on their Tomatometer? **GRADE A**

**“I’ve got a certain amount of fame. I’ve got money.
Wish I could drive. Then I’d really be a menace.”**

ELENA: Subtitled foreign films are assiduously avoided by many, but Barbara and I often find them exhilarating and fulfilling. Sadly, I found **Elena** to be neither. Barbara was not swept away either, but she liked it considerably better than I. Most other critics would be closer to her grade than mine. I didn’t mind that it was a grim story about unsympathetic and unpleasant people. After all it is Russian and it is “film noir.” And let me say up front that performances are superb throughout the film. What irritated me most were the choices made by the director and film editor. If a person has to move a couple hundred yards from point A to point B, I don’t believe the camera needs to follow every step of the walk. To say the film uses dialogue sparingly is a painful understatement. Elena and Vladimir share a palatial Moscow apartment. We learn that Elena was his caregiver 10 years ago when Vladimir’s appendix burst, and she nursed him back to health. Eight years later her status was upgraded to spouse, though there isn’t much evidence of strong love. Vladimir, clearly a wealthy businessman, openly despises his wife’s freeloading son and family while being estranged from his own hedonistic daughter. He has a heart attack and is drafting a will unfavorable to his wife’s interests. Elena is pushed into an uncomfortable corner in which she must choose between love of family and loyalty to spouse. The movie slowly takes us through her desperate plan. This film is very Russian and very heavy, and did I mention, excruciatingly slow. It provides few thrills and no easy resolutions to the moral questions posed. My grade is not as forgiving as Barbara’s. **GRADE C-/B-**

(**Note from Barb:** What I liked about the movie was the director’s focus on the ordinary details of life. Even though extraordinary things were taking place, people continued to perform the mundane chores that make up our daily lives.)

ELEPHANT: Barbara asked me to write the review for **Elephant** since I seem to have stronger feelings about it than she does. The film is loosely based on the tragic events at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. I also wrote the review of an earlier film about Columbine: Michael Moores **Bowling for Columbine**. I liked that film and said it was funny, informative, thought provoking, and poignant. I hated **Elephant**. I think it was a strange combination of pretentious, and boring. I am, frankly, puzzled why it was given awards at Cannes Film Festival and was adored by some critics. At least 40% of the film is taken up with seemingly endless shots of students walking. The shots are almost always taken from the rear which I assume cuts down considerably on retakes. Then we cut to shots of the gathering clouds in the sky. Gee, do I detect esoteric symbolism? I went to this film because Ebert and Roeper loved it..I didn’t. **GRADE D-**(**Note from Barb:** The critics seem to think that Gus Van Sant (*Good Will Hunting, Finding Forester*) was brave to shoot a film with no plot and no point of view. He simply lets the camera follow students spending a normal day in High School until the violence erupts. I agree with Jami Bernard of the New York Daily News who said: *The problem, though, isn’t with the movie’s politics . . . but with its empty, experimental form.* I didn’t hate it as much as Gary did, but I wouldn’t grade it any higher than C-.)

THE ELEPHANT QUEEN: 2018 (Apple TV+) Gorgeously filmed over the course of four years, **The Elephant Queen** follows matriarch Athena and the herd she shepherds across the unforgiving terrain in search of food and water. We meet the elephant family and many other creatures encountered around the watering hole. Chiwetel Ejiofor narrates sparingly. The animals aren’t anthropomorphized in any way, which pleased Gary and me. They are left to tell their own stories. Even the lowly dung beetle’s story reminds us of how interconnected their lives are. We see the elephant family pause on their long trek to find food, to mourn one of their own. It tells a tale of love, loss and coming home. How can anyone poach these gentile giants? There is a call to action at the very end of the film, and I hope by sharing the story helps Queen Athena protect her herd. The running time of the film is 1 hour and 36 minutes and Gary and I watched it in 2 sittings. The documentary got a 91% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes, and audiences liked it almost as much. This audience liked it very much. **GRADE B+**

ELF: I suppose there may be some Grinch critics out there who will pan this movie, but they just don’t have that Christmas spirit--the spirit that gives power to Santa’s sleigh. **Elf** definitely gave us the Christmas spirit: It’s a funny and warm comedy starring Will Ferrel as Buddy, an oversized elf from Santa’s workshop. Actually, he’s a human, not a real elf, but as a foundling baby, he crawled into Santa’s bag one Christmas night and wound up at the North Pole. Papa Elf (Bob Newhart in an inspired bit of casting) adopted Buddy and raised him to work as one of Santa’s toymakers. By the way, Ed Asner is Santa--another bit of inspired casting! Finally realizing that he is really a human, Buddy sets off to New York to find his biological father, Walter. Would you believe James Caan? Although Walter believes Buddy has been "chemically altered," he takes him home to his wife, Mary Steenburgen, and son, Michael. Michael and Buddy actually bond over a snowball fight. Buddy even finds a girlfriend, the charming Zooey Deschanel. I know--it sounds impossibly corny, but it is really quite entertaining. We saw it with a theater full of kids and they seemed to enjoy it. Grandson Nathan laughed often and so did Gary and I. Jon Favreau (director) and David Berenbaum (writer) have combined to create an appealing Christmas comedy. The NY Times critic referred to the script as *witty*, and the Washington Post called **Elf** a *sweetly engaging comedy*. If your holiday spirit is lacking this year, see **ELF**. It will surely raise your Christmas cheer quotient. Gary and I give it a solid **B** and Nathan says **B+**. **GRADE: B/B+ -- Roger Ebert:** *This is one of those rare Christmas comedies that has a heart, a brain and a wicked sense of humor, and it charms the socks right off the mantelpiece.*

ELF: 2003/2023 (Hulu, also available on Max and as a rental on Prime) I read that early on the project, Jim Carrey and SNL’s Chris Farley were very real possibilities for Elf’s lead. It’s hard to imagine anyone but Wil Ferrell in the role. From the same article in TV Guide, I learned that the production spent just 13 days shooting in NYC. Then it was off to Vancouver, where a hockey rink into the North Pole and a mental institution sat in for Gimbel’s and other interiors. “One the buildings, I think, was still open and patients in it” director Jon Favreau told Rolling Stone. The article ended with this statement: Not since Rudolph and his nose bright has someone saved Christmas with such enduring appeal. We agree! I think I will let my review from 2003, back when I wrote better reviews, stand for 2023:

I will give it a **Grade A in 2023** because of its enduring appeal.
(Gary says B+, but he’s a little lacking in the spirit department.)

ELLE: (2016) At every window at the movie theatre this morning, people were buying tickets for *Elle*. I suspect that they saw the movie win Best Foreign Language Motion Picture and Isabelle Huppert win Best Actress last night on the Golden Globes and were curious to see what all the fuss was about. That's why Gary and I were there. The movie begins with a shocking scene—a violent rape. What follows, though, it not at all predictable. Michelle (Huppert) doesn't behave in expected ways. We soon realize that she is a complicated woman who has been shaped by a violent past. She has a son who is dating a woman she believes is a psychopath and an ex-husband whose career is faltering. She and her best friend run a company that creates violent video games, games that feature strong women in peril. Paul Verhoeven, who, in 1992 frightened all married men with *Basic Instinct*, directed this French film. The director is also famous for his extremely violent, yet intelligent, science fiction films, for example *RoboCop* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), and *Hollow Man* (2000). Accused of portraying excessive violence in his films, Verhoeven replies that he is only recording the violence of society. *Elle*, while occasionally violent, is really a penetrating look into a fascinating woman's life, and I can see why this unique story captivated the foreign press and audiences at film festivals around the world. Huppert is impressive in the role creating a character that is tough, vulnerable and unforgettable. **GRADE B+**

ELIZABETHTOWN: We loved Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous*, but this film, as Gary whispered to me about a half an hour into it, "is no *Almost Famous*." Jason Lee and Kate Hudson probably could have improved the movie, but I think the real problem is in the writing. Crowe appears to be going for "whimsical," but all we get is "cute." That's hard to sustain for an entire movie. I guess it's unfair to compare the two films, but I can't resist. For example, Crowe seems enamored of phone conversations and had several in this movie—one that was interminable—but none could match the wonderful phone conversation between Jason Lee and Francis McDormand in *Almost Famous*. The basic setup of *Elizabethtown* is this: Drew (Orlando Bloom) is a shoe designer whose latest effort has been, not merely a failure, but a monumental fiasco. He's ready to commit suicide when he learns that his father, while visiting relatives in Kentucky, has died of a heart attack. He must put his suicide on hold to go to Elizabethtown and bring his father back home to his mother (Susan Sarandon). On the way he meets Claire (Kirsten Dunst). It's supposed to be a "meet-cute," but in their first scene together I thought Claire was irritating. Actually, Crowe doesn't give Dunst much to work with. Any actress who spends an entire movie trying to be cute is bound to fail. I was steadfastly uncharmed by the love story. Once in Elizabethtown, Drew meets an assortment of his father's peculiar relatives and friends. With the exception of the Food Channel's Paula Dean, they also failed in the charming department. Gary and I agree that it is only the presence of Susan Sarandon, and her tribute at her husband's memorial service, that raised our grade to C-. **GRADE C-**

ELLING: (Norwegian--subtitled) This Norwegian film was nominated for an Academy Award last year, and with good reason. It is a lovely film--both funny and poignant--and it is beautifully written and acted. Elling is a 40-year-old man who has never lived apart from his mother. When she dies, Elling is taken to an institution because he cannot function on his own. After two years, he and his roommate, Kjell Bjarne, are released into an Oslo apartment under the watchful eye of a social worker. As these two challenged people try deal with everyday activities, we were both amused and touched. Elling is articulate but nearly immobilized by anxiety. Kjell Bjarne is a big man who sometimes erupts in rage when he is frustrated. He is almost incapable of carrying on a conversation with anyone. But the two men are friends and care for each other. The movie script was adapted from a novel, and I completely agree with Roger Ebert who wrote, "It's the kind of story that in the wrong hands would be cloying and cornball, but director Petter Naess has the right hands. He gives the movie edge and darkness, is unsentimental about mental illness, makes his heroes into men instead of pets, and still manages to find a happy ending." This movie is a gem and we hope that you are able to find it at a theater near you. If not, be sure to put it on your rental wish list. **GRADE A**

ELSA & FRED: As we left the theater, Barbara commented, "I don't think anyone under 60 will see this film." That is unfortunate. Romantic relationships among the over 70 set don't seem to attract younger viewers. We, on the other hand, were charmed. Alfredo (Fred) is a 78-year-old widower played by an 88-year-old actor and Elsa, who claims to be younger at 77 is still feisty and independent and played by an 82-year-old actress. We were impressed by their acting and quickly won over by their shared love in this "sweet" (I can't think of a better word) romantic comedy. Elsa and I share a fondness for a famous scene from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. It was the scene where beautiful Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni wade into the waters of the Trevi Fountain at dawn in Rome. Telling the truth is not one of Elsa's strong points, but we tend to believe her when she claims to have been an Anita Ekberg look-alike in her youth. If the idea of romantic love between super-seniors doesn't cool your ardor, we recommend *Elsa y Fred*. (The movie is in Spanish with English subtitles) **GRADE B+**

ELVIS: 2022 (Available in theaters and for streaming on Prime Video at \$20.00.) Enjoyment of this movie partially depends on one's interest in Elvis. If you were a Boomer hitting adolescence at the dawn of the 1970s, Elvis probably didn't mean squat to you. But Barb and I were Elvis fans. I will try to be objective in my review, but be warned that my bias may creep in. It's a long movie: 2h 39m. If you stream it, you may want to take a few breaks. We did. The film begins with an ageing and sickly Colonel Tom Parker looking back on his work with Elvis Presley, and the body of the film is essentially a lengthy flashback, seeing Presley's career through the filter of Parker's recollection. Col. Parker is played by an almost unrecognizable Tom Hanks with prosthetics and a fat suit. The Presley family lived in a primarily Black community in Mississippi where Elvis loved and absorbed a musical tradition that included Gospel singing in the neighborhood church, country blues in local bars and dance halls, and African-American folk music at casual gatherings. Parker, on hearing that the young recording artist was white, immediately grasped the promise – and the money-making potential of a white musician who could replicate blues and rock 'n' roll music, and therefore make records for all audiences. Parker was quick to take advantage of the opportunity Elvis Presley represented and signed on as the young man's manager. Playing Elvis is Autin Butler, a 30-year-old American actor. Butler's singing voice was used for Elvis' early career, with snippets of Elvis' blended in later on. Wonderful performances by Butler and Hanks are ultimately the reason to watch this film. Director and co-scriptwriter Baz Luhrmann, known for *Moulin Rouge* and *The Great Gatsby*, takes the film in interesting directions. He has managed to capture the essence of the legendary Elvis in the form of what might be called a tragic success story. Elvis died at 42. While this is primarily a biography of Elvis Presley, the man, it also gives attention to his exceptional impact on popular music. The movie follows the rise of Elvis from a young crooner in the 1950s to the best-selling solo artist in recording history. Central to the film's journey are some of the more significant people in Elvis's life, not the least of which was Priscilla Presley. Is the film without error? Few Hollywood biographies are and this

movie has numerous scenes that are fictional. In the words of Baz Luhrmann, "I did rely on historical accuracy but with a slightly elevated flair." I warned you that Barb and I may be slightly biased, but we liked the movie a lot. **GRADE A**

ELYSIUM: (2013) The story is set in 2054 in a world so polarized between the haves and the have-nots that they don't even live on the same planet. The few rich (the 1%?) have migrated to a space station where they can protect their privileged lifestyle against all who would immigrate. Each home in Elysium comes equipped with a machine that can diagnose and cure health problems, even those associated with normal aging. They have universal health care and an aggressive no immigration policy. Back in ruined Los Angeles, the impoverished many battle daily to just stay alive. Do you sense a metaphor here? It's not exactly subtle. But, as is typical with all Sci-fi shoot 'em ups, the story takes back seat to the mindless and almost constant destruction. Oh, they try to give hero Matt Damon a backstory that involves Alice Braga as a childhood friend with a dying child, but it's not enough to overcome the hi-tech space vehicles and weapons, not to mention the robot security forces. Damon is noble, but the villains are evil incarnate. Jodi Foster as the Dick Cheney of the future is a caricature, and Charlto Copley plays an undercover agent for Foster with malevolent gusto and an almost incomprehensible accent. The surprise for Gary was that he did not fall asleep more often. When we were kids, we both loved westerns. I'm sure most were equally devoid of real stories and focused on unrealistic gun play. I suppose kids today enjoy the unrealistic gun play of these futuristic shoot 'em ups, but we have probably seen our last. I doubt I could convince Gary to see another. For me, Matt Damon raised the grade for this movie from a D+ to a C-. **GRADE C-**

EMBRACE OF THE SERPENT: (2015/2016) It is sad to think how few of our readers will have the opportunity to see this remarkable film. It earned an impressive 99% on the Rotten Tomato Tomatometer and was one of five nominations for an Oscar in this past year's Best Foreign Language Film category. It was the first film ever nominated from Columbia. Shot in black and white, it is a historical drama telling two stories which unfold, in parallel, 30 years apart. The film is fictionalized, but based on the real-life journals of two explorers who traveled the Amazon in the early part of the 20th Century. I will fondly remember it as a travelogue of a trip I have always fantasized, but will never take. An aerial view of the Amazon resembles a snake waiting to devour anyone it wishes. The river starts high in the mountains of Peru and flows through thick jungle for around 4,000 miles in five South American countries before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean in Brazil. The story focuses on a shaman and how colonialism influenced him and his tribe. Shots of the river and jungle are gorgeous, but never let you forget the lurking danger. *Embrace of the Serpent* is slow paced, but I found it mesmerizing. Barbara read that during the filming of the movie it once rained hard for 50 consecutive hours. I'm rather glad that I can experience the Amazon from a dry vantage point in a theater. I grade the movie a little higher than Barb, but we both liked it. **GRADE B+/B**

EMILY: 2022 (Prime rental \$6) *Emily is a biopic that manages to feel true while taking entertaining creative liberties*, or so said the critical consensus on Rotten Tomatoes. Directed by Francis O'Connor (*A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, 2001), this biopic tells the story of Emily Bronte and her only published novel "Wuthering Heights." The movie would have you believe that Emily was a misfit and a rebel, haunted by the death of her mother, who wrote her novel after a ruined love affair with a curate in her father's church. We do know that the Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, put on plays, told stories, and created journals and magazines about the make-believe realm. We know that "Wuthering Heights" was published in 1847 under the masculine pseudonym Ellis Bell. We know that it was controversial. Critics praised the novel's originality and its narrative style, but viewed with suspicion because of its outrageous violence and immorality. The critics wrote that it was surely the work of a man with a depraved mind, but sales were nevertheless considerable for an unknown author of a novel that defied all conventions. We know that "Wuthering Heights" was published three months after Charlotte's "Jane Eyre," but we don't know what occasioned that novel of a tragic love affair between Cathy and Heathcliff. The biopic suggests an answer that seems right and true, but... The Brontës are the world's most famous literary family. Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë were the authors of some of the best-loved books in the English language. Emily died of tuberculosis, too soon, at age 30 a year after her famous novel was first published. The movie is dark both metaphorically and actually. Perhaps we should have seen it in a theater. **GRADE B**

EMILY THE CRIMINAL: 2022 (Available in theaters) This film is described as a tense and engaging thriller that looks and feels distinctively different. It is a gripping portrait of a woman always operating in survival mode. Effectively played by Aubrey Plaza, an American actress, comedian, and producer, Emily is not only saddled with student debt, but is locked out of the job market due to a minor criminal record. Emily is technically already a criminal when we meet her: She has an aggravated-assault conviction on her record that's made it hard for her to find steady work. Early on, she makes a phone call to the loan office to find out why a recent \$400.00 payment isn't reflected on her statement. Turns out it went entirely to the interest, not the principal on the \$70,000 she still owes on student loans. Like one in five Americans, she is buried in debt. The movie may be called *Emily the Criminal*, but it is also an indictment for the society that made her what she is. The film is shot on a low-budget over three weeks during the pandemic. The movie follows the title character, an art-school grad who turns to a life of crime to get by. The entire film hinges on the spectacular performance of Aubrey Plaza who appears in every scene of this movie. Desperate for income, she gets involved in a credit card scam that pulls her into the criminal underworld of Los Angeles. She takes a shady gig as a "dummy shopper," buying goods with stolen credit cards supplied by a handsome and charismatic middleman named Youcef (Theo Rossi). Plaza completely sells her character, making Emily's transformation from frazzled underdog into confident criminal totally believable. By its final scene, a plot twist upends a traditional conception of a happy ending. Just don't expect it to follow the laws of society or acceptable female behavior. Critics loved it with a 93% on the Tomatometer. We liked it too. **GRADE B+**

THE EMPEROR'S CLUB: Over thirty years of teaching will, no doubt, prevent me from being totally objective in my evaluation of this film. I rate it a bit higher than Barbara, who also liked it. I was absorbed in the story and emotionally touched at times when the writer and director wanted me to be. I was again reminded of what a splendid actor Kevin Kline is and delighted to see that he was surrounded by an excellent supporting cast. Kline plays William Hundert, an impassioned classics professor at an exclusive East Coast prep school. He loves history, especially Greek and Roman history, and he loves his role as a teacher. The story swirls around Sedgwick Bell (Emile Hirsch), the son of a West Virginia senator. The boy is lazy and insolent, but is also charismatic. As so often happens, the most disruptive students win the hearts of their peers. The story is based on a short story by Ethan Canin, *The Palace*

Thief. Rob Morrow plays James Ellerby, a colleague of Hundert's and Edward Herrman is the Headmaster. I give this film a B+, but must point out that it received mixed reviews from the critics. **GRADE B+**

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES: (We saw this 2001 film on video.) What if Napoleon Bonaparte didn't die on St. Helena? What if an imposter took his place on the island and Napoleon traveled back to claim his throne disguised as Eugene Lenormand, a common seaman? That would make quite a story. And it does make for a pretty good movie. Ian Holm is both Napoleon and the imposter Lenormand. The film moves at a leisurely pace but we were increasingly captivated by Napoleon's journey and his final appreciation of the joys of a simple life. Holm is excellent and so are the other actors. The film was inspired by Simon Leys' 1992 novel *The Death of Napoleon*. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

EMMA: (2020--In a theatre before they closed) I usually like a Jane Austin movie (I've seen every version of *Pride and Prejudice*) but I didn't care for this one at all. I had difficulty understanding what they were talking about, and eventually decided I didn't care. Gary felt the same way for the first 80% of the movie. It did end well, and that saved the way we graded it. Emma Wodehouse is a bit of a bitch, but I've always thought that was because of the era of snobbery in which she lived. I think the problem I had with this version is that Anya Taylor-Joy, who plays Emma, looks like a bitch and plays her like one. Bill Nighy was a kick as her father who was perpetually worried about drafts. Johnny Flynn, who played George Knightley, I recognized from the TV mini-series *Vanity Fair*. He was excellent except I couldn't understand why he was so in love with Emma. I am at odds with the critics who labeled the movie "delightful," and "funny." I'm afraid I left my funny bone at home, because, except for Nighy, who makes me laugh without doing anything, I didn't find the movie amusing at all. Gary, who turned to me half-way through the movie to whisper, "Are you as bored as I am?" agreed on the grade of C. **GRADE C**

EMPIRE FALLS: 2005 (HBO Max) Richard Russo writes great books, but they are often very long. That's why we decided to treat this two-episode mini-series as a movie. Gary and I watched it primarily because it starred Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman, having watched *The Last Movie Stars*. Ed Harris plays Miles Roby, the manager of the Empire Grill in a dying town called *Empire Falls*. A bearded Paul Newman plays Miles's father, Max Roby and Joanne Woodward plays Francine Whiting, the owner of the grill--in fact the "owner" of the whole town. The all-star cast includes, Robin Wright, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Helen Hunt, Aiden Quinn, Dennis Farina and Estelle Parsons. They all play characters significant in Miles Roby's life. The two-hour episodes would make a four-hour movie, and not since *Gone with the Wind*--with its intermission--has the movie-going audience been asked to sit for a movie that long. But the extra time was needed to set up all the characters and the action. After all, if you have a Pulitzer Prize-winner I think you would want to honor the book. (It is not surprising that the movie was close to the book, because Richard Russo wrote the screenplay.) Richard Roeper said in his review: "It's better on HBO where it can play over a couple of nights and you get a chance for the story. Because if you try to compress it into a hundred-minute movie, you'd lose all the rich textures at work here." After watching the movie, Gary said, "It was a good movie and I'll bet it was a good book." It was. Newman, who was listed as co-producer for *Empire Falls*, starred in another of Russo books, *Nobody's Fool*. In 1994. **GRADE A**

EMPIRE OF LIGHT: 2022 (Seen on HBO Max) Critics on Rotten Tomatoes weren't kind to this movie giving it only 45%. Audiences gave it 74%. We are with the audiences on this movie. Set in an English seaside town in the early 1980s, *Empire of Light* is a powerful and poignant story about human connection and the magic of cinema, from Academy Award-winning director Sam Mendes. One critic on RT wrote: "*The main location for the film was a real cinema that had fallen into disrepair and was restored to its former magnificence. It provides a vital center for this poignant, intelligent, handsome film.*" (He apparently liked it.) The cinema in question is the Margate Dreamland renamed The Empire for this film. Olivia Coleman plays Hilary, an employee of The Empire and occasional sex partner of the owner, Donald (Colin Firth). When Stephen (Micheal Ward), a black man, is hired to work at the movie theatre, he and Hilary form an instant bond, which eventually becomes sexual, sort of. Coleman and Ward give great performances and take us deep into an England during the early 1980's, which was a time of high unemployment, and great racial tensions and riots. The depiction of prejudice against immigrants, especially dark-skinned immigrants, feels like it came from today's headlines. Hilary has mental health issues and the prejudice toward that is handled with tenderness in the film. Toby Jones plays the projectionist with his usual excellence and the Empire Cinema, with its faded glory, seemed almost like another character. Gary and I found the movie poignant and quite wonderful. **GRADE B+**

EMPIRE OF THE SUN: (1987) For some reason Barbara and I never saw this Spielberg film in the theater when it was released some thirty-three years ago. I am so glad Barb's daughter, Martha, recommended it. The film received positive reviews but was not a box office success initially. It earned only a little over twenty-two million dollars at the US box office, but it eventually more than recouped its budget through revenues in other markets. Based on J.G. Ballard's autobiographical novel, *Empire of the Sun* stars Christian Bale as a spoiled young British boy, living with his wealthy family in pre-World War II Shanghai. Bale was only twelve years old when the movie was being filmed and he delivered a remarkable performance playing Jim. He has been receiving positive reviews throughout his now long Hollywood career. Early on in the story, Jim is separated from his parents and his life is upturned by the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1941. Playing a tough street smart survivor in a supporting role, and looking as young as he did when we first saw him in Chicago, is John Malkovich. During most of the film Jim is a prisoner of war in a Japanese internment camp. The movie is long at nearly 2 1/2 hours, but it uniquely views war through the eyes of a young boy. We liked it. **GRADE B+**

ENCHANTED: If you are a 10 or 11-year-old girl, you'll love this movie. If you know any 10 or 11-year-olds, take them to see it and you'll all enjoy it. But, don't take your husband. Gary couldn't find much to like about this blend of animated fairy-tale and reality, although I found several things to like. The story begins with typical Disney animation and a typical Disney love story about a beautiful girl, a handsome Prince and a wicked Stepmother, and some poison apples. When Queen Narissas (Susan Sarandon) pushes the animated Giselle (Amy Adams) down a well, she winds up in New York. And believe me, it doesn't look at all the fairytale land of Andelusia. What's more, Giselle has come to lovely real life and wanders around Times Square looking for her Prince. Did I mention she's wearing a wedding dress? Prince Edward (James Marsden) does eventually arrive in New York but not until after Giselle meets Patrick Dempsey and his young daughter. You can probably figure it out from there. Adams is adorable as Giselle, Marsden is in fine swashbuckling form as the handsome but dim-witted Prince, and Sarandon looks fabulous as Edward's wicked stepmother. I wasn't

crazy about the scene where rats and cockroaches help Giselle do some housekeeping, but the other musical numbers were charming. And the ending, with its homage to **King Kong**, was just frightening enough, although I would have been happy to see the story end with the ballroom scene. The lesson? A fairy-tale view of romance can't survive in the real world, but real-life romance can be pretty good. Especially if you happen to meet Patrick (McDreamy) Dempsey. For a Disney movie I'd have to give this a B. I won't even ask Gary to grade it. **GRADE B**

THE END OF THE AFFAIR: This is an exceedingly gloomy story set in England during and just after W.W.II. It rains in almost every scene and these people were always going out for walks! Ralph Finnes is Maurice, a writer, Stephen Rea is Henry, and Julianne Moore is Henry's wife, Sarah. All three characters are relentlessly serious--don't expect any laughs in this one. There are some hot lovemaking scenes but most of the film proceeds at a slow, measured pace. At first, I thought I might, like Sue Keenan, doze through this one, but it did manage to capture my attention. I grade it just a + more than Gary. Aside from the excellent acting, the best thing in the film is the literate dialogue. Since it is adapted from a Graham Greene novel I guess that's no surprise. My favorite line is this: "It is easy to write about pain. In pain, all people are drably unique. What can you say about happiness?" **GRADE: C+/C**

THE END OF THE TOUR: (2015) The movie begins in 2008 as writer David Lipsky learns of famed novelist David Foster Wallace's death by suicide. Twelve years earlier, after the publication of Wallace's groundbreaking epic novel, *Infinite Jest*, Lipsky was a reporter for *Rolling Stone*. He persuaded his boss to let him travel to Illinois to interview Wallace. Lipsky had kept his interview tapes since 1996, although he had never written the story for the magazine. The tapes provide the movie's device for flashing back to 1996 and the days that the interviewer spent with Wallace. Lipsky spent time with the author in his home in Bloomington, Illinois, his classroom at Illinois State University, and in Minneapolis where Wallace was ending the book tour for *Infinite Jest*. They talk about the burdens of fame, loneliness, depression, the comfort that owning dogs brings, the desire to get laid, and the bandana that Wallace always wore, and much more. Jason Segal, known mostly for his comedic roles, is remarkable as Wallace and Jesse Eisenberg is equally good as Lipsky. The two men struggle with whether their association is a "friendship," or simply an interviewer trying to pry information out of a writer who hesitates to reveal too much of himself. For Lipsky, the relationship is complicated by his having published his own novel which had met a lukewarm reception. Eisenberg is excellent at playing the conflict between hero worship and the terrible envy of an unsuccessful writer for a famous one. In April 2010, Lipsky published *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself*, about his five-day road trip with Wallace. Having never read or even heard of Wallace or his famous novel, we were unaware that some of the writer's fans were upset by the casting of Segal. I hope when they see the movie, they will be suitably impressed with his performance. Both Gary and I feel the performances of Segal and Eisenberg were outstanding, but this unusual movie will not be to everyone's taste. Gary has settled on a grade of B, but I think it is deserving of a B+. **GRADE B+/B**

END OF WATCH: Barbara and I see about a hundred movies per year and have become nearly immune to profanity in film. Still, we know many of our readers have not acquired that immunity. If the "F" word, the "S" word and the "M-F combination" were cut from the first twenty minutes of this film only about two minutes of dialogue would remain. David Ayers who wrote the screenplay for *Training Day* (2001) is both writer and director for this film. Jake Gyllenhaal and Michael Peña give us great chemistry in starring roles as young LA police officers in the dangerous streets of South Central Los Angeles. This is a riveting action thriller and Ayers pulls no punches when he shows us the danger and violence these men face. There are laughs, though not many, and plenty of "edge of your seat" tension. Even the almost constant use of the hand held camera which often irritates, seemed appropriate in this film. This 108 minute movie is not for the squeamish, but Barbara and I liked it. **GRADE B+**

ENEMY: (2013) The critics call it: moody, intriguing and mesmerizing. We call it: weird, incomprehensible and boring. *Enemy* is essentially a mood piece that, for us, failed to create any mood other than boredom. The movie is shot in an unnamed city perpetually shrouded in yellowish smog, with dark apartments where no one ever turns on the lights. Jake Gyllenhaal is a professor of history and is living a dismal life. One day, while watching a film on his laptop, he spots an actor in a minor role who appears to be his double. His reaction is not normal, but then, nobody in the entire movie behaves in anything close to a normal way. Consequently, nothing anyone does makes any logical sense, at least not to us. Spiders seem to be symbolic, but of what I couldn't begin to fathom. I really don't want to think about this movie anymore, so I'll stop writing about it. **GRADE D-**

ENEMY AT THE GATES: The opening battle scene, depicting the Germans and Russian battling over Stalingrad, rivals the opening scene in *Saving Private Ryan*. It is horrific: Soldiers being sent to certain death and a city that is totally bombed out. The scenes of the beleaguered city are a chilling reminder of the destruction suffered by many European cities during World War II. The color palette is that of mud and blood. The screenplay is original, although it is inspired by true events. I expect the love story was put in the movie to help it appeal to women viewers, but all it does is add hokey melodrama to an otherwise realistic war picture. Jude Law is the Russian soldier, Vassili, and Ed Harris is a German marksman named Konig. Both actors are excellent. Vassili has become a hero of the Russian People because of his amazing marksmanship and Konig has been sent from Germany to kill him. The two snipers play and cat and mouse game in the rubble that once was Stanlingrad. Rachel Weisz provides the love interest, Joseph Fiennes is Danilov, a Russian communications officer who publicizes Vassili's exploits and Bob Hoskins appears as Khrushchev. **GRADE B-**

ENEMY OF THE STATE: (We saw this 1998 film on video.) This one will keep you awake. There are enough car crashes, explosions, and gunfire to satisfy the most ardent action fan, and enough high tech bugging, tracking, and video devices to satisfy the most ardent computer geek. Will Smith plays a labor lawyer who unwittingly becomes a threat to a group of covert operatives within the National Security Agency—which is, I suppose, the movie's version of the C.I.A. Gene Hackman is a former operative who has gone underground. John Voight is the villain. Most of it is improbable, at least I hope so. There is a Tarentinoesque ending that made me laugh. Not a bad evening's entertainment. **THUMBS UP**

ENOLA HOLMES (2020 on Netflix) I first encountered Millie Bobby Brown in Netflix's *Stranger Things* in which she played a character called Eleven. I was intrigued by her look in the first couple of seasons, but she is grown up now and she looks very different. She is an enchanting actress, and stars in this movie as Enola Holmes, sister to Mycroft and Sherlock. She doesn't remember her two brothers, who were considerably older than she and left home when she was a toddler. She and her mother (Helena Bonham Carter) stay in the

family home and they are inseparable. Her mother, obviously a feminist, educates her daughter herself, including how to defend herself. Enola is adept at jujutsu. When Enola at the age of sixteen, discovers her mother missing, she sets off to find her, becoming a super-sleuth in her own right. She outwits her famous brother and unravels a dangerous conspiracy around a mysterious young Lord. Henry Cavill plays Sherlock and Sam Claflin plays his older and uptight brother, Mycroft. We enjoyed Enola Holmes greatly and, at the end of the film, we agreed that Netflix has found a new heroine in Millie Bobby Brown and Netflix has found a new franchise. We can expect more from Enola! Gary and I agree with the critic who said, "It's a light escape from a world that seems to be getting darker by the day."

GRADE B+

ENOUGH SAID: How much of our feelings about another person are shaped by what others think of that person? This is the situation Eva (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) finds herself in when she begins to fall for Albert (James Gandolfini). Eva is divorced with a college-bound daughter and makes her living as a masseuse. Albert seems an unlikely boyfriend for Eva, but they make each other laugh. Albert also has a daughter leaving for college, so they have that in common. They are both middle-aged, and Eva finds that "comfortable." However, she soon learns that a new client, with whom she has become friends, is Albert's ex-wife, Marianne (Catherine Keener). Marianne complains about her ex at every opportunity, detailing all his flaws. Soon Eva is beginning to react to Albert as seen through his ex-wife's eyes and that drives a wedge between them. This is a romantic comedy with an edge. The dialogue is sharp and witty and Louis-Dreyfus and Gandolfini are wonderful. They play characters that are flawed but likeable and you want them to find love. They are lucky to have a superior supporting cast. Toni Collette plays Eva's best friend and in several very funny scenes we are introduced to the intricacies of her marriage to Ben Falcone. The two daughters provide a look at divorced parent-child relationships in a touching and realistic way. Everything comes together to make for a delightful 93 minutes spent with people you come to care about. We liked everything about this movie, and I especially identified with Eva in the scene where she sees her daughter off to college. **GRADE A**

ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM: If you have a tendency toward low blood pressure, I think this film could move you toward normal. It gives the inside story of how a few top executives in America's 7th largest company were able to walk away with over a billion dollars while investors and employees lost everything. I have a son-in-law who believes former Enron CEO Kenneth Lay should be publicly executed and after seeing this film, I have a better understanding of his ire. There was a time that I was willing to believe that Enron was a good company gone bad. But this film effectively presents evidence that it was a con game from the very beginning. The documentary is based on the best-selling book of the same title, co-written by Fortune magazine's Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind. It is narrated by Peter Coyote and assembled out of a wealth of documentary and video footage, including testimony at congressional hearings and interviews with such figures as disillusioned Enron exec Mike Muckleroy and whistle-blower Sherron Watkins. Grade A- (From Barb: For me, it's only a B movie.) **GRADE A-/B**

EQUITY: (2016) This well-written film emerged from this year's Sundance Film Festival and explores the unwritten rules women have to follow if they want to succeed in high finance, especially on Wall Street. It was "directed by a woman, written by women as well as being produced and financed by women. In *Equity*, the women on Wall Street are ruthless and greedy, in other words as bad as the men. Traditionally films about Wall Street feature male traders, fund managers, and investors. If a woman shows up it is usually to gratify male fantasies. Only women could get away with writing a movie that portrays professional women so cynically. When senior investment banker Naomi Bishop is passed over for a promotion at her firm, she fights for the opportunity to take a start-up corporation public; hoping this promising IPO (initial public offering) will secure her a place at the firm's highest level. Naomi Bishop is played by veteran actor Anna Gunn who may be best known for her role as Skyler White in the AMC drama series *Breaking Bad*. Two important women in the cast, Sarah Megan Thomas and Alysia Reiner, are also writers. They bring a refreshing change of perspective to the financial thriller genre and an interesting peek behind the curtain of high finance. Women need to be tough as nails without ever puncturing the egos of their male clients and bosses. They have to be charming but not too feminine, and God help them if they wear the wrong dress. Hillary learned this in the world of politics. Barbara and I agreed that this is a better than average film made even better because of the feminine perspective. **GRADE B**

ERIN BROKOVICH: We think Roger Ebert is a superior movie reviewer and we often agree with him, but on this movie, we couldn't be farther apart. We were thoroughly entertained, engaged, and occasionally moved by Erin Brokovich. Ebert wrote in his review, The costume design sinks this movie. Roberts is a sensational-looking woman, and dressed so provocatively in every single scene, she upstages the material. It sounds like Ebert couldn't keep his eyes off Roberts cleavage. Grow up, Roger! Sure the costumes are provocative, but that was the way Brokovich dressed. After seeing the movie, her boss, Ed Masry, said, The only difference between Julia and Erin that that Erin wore her skirts shorter. We thought Roberts was terrific in both her funny and her serious moments. We could believe her clothes and the words coming out of her mouth. This is a whistle-blower plot similar to *Silkwood*, and *A Civil Action*, but this one is more personal, focusing on Brokovich and the victims. Watching Roberts and Albert Finney stick it to the Pacific Gas and Electric Company was very satisfying. Roger, you missed the boat. **GRADE: A-**

ESCAPE FIRE: THE FIGHT TO RESCUE AMERICAN HEALTHCARE: This is a sobering 98 minute documentary that tackles one of the most pressing issues of our time. Can we save our broken medical system which is designed for quick fixes rather than prevention. It is clearly profit driven rather than patient driven and there are powerful forces willing to spend millions to keep it that way. It is easy to buy that Americans pay for the world's most expensive medical care, but hard to swallow that we have some of the world's worst outcomes. For example, our life expectancy at birth is 50th among countries of the world. Most doctors work in a system where they are incentivized to provide quick and expensive interventions rather than more time consuming effective preventive advice. Even though the film's release is in the middle of a political campaign season, there is no mention of political parties. I only wish everyone could see this film, but I would like to make it mandatory viewing for all legislators. Barbara and I agree that the film is not depressing. The film is educational and there are enough statistics throughout to make you fully aware of it. One is just too good to leave out of the review: "*if prices for consumer goods matched the increasingly inflating health costs since 1945, we would be paying \$48 for a gallon of milk and \$112 for a dozen oranges.*" Though it is a hard-hitting film, you leave the theater feeling that answers are available and some progress is being made. See it if you can. **GRADE B+**

THE ETERNAL DAUGHTER: 2022 (Prime Rental \$5.99) The movie is moody in the extreme: a spooky house turned into a hotel, a disagreeable receptionist, foggy even in the daytime, even more so at night, and eerie music announcing that something strange is about to happen. And yet, it kept us glued to the TV because Tilda Swinton is so watchable. She plays both mother and daughter in this the latest feature by Joanna Hogg. The daughter, Julie, is a filmmaker and she wants to make a film about her mother, but she can't work because she is kept awake by disturbing noises at night. I read that Hogg weaves her "signature spaces haunted by the past, complex family dynamics, and traces of autobiography," in this movie. The original house is one of which the mother has many memories—some happy and some not—that evoke the remembrance of things past. Swinton gives a deeply moving and magnificent performance. Rotten Tomatoes critics liked the film, audiences were lukewarm. We can understand why audiences, steeped on explosions and constant action, were lukewarm, but we were fascinated by this unusual gothic ghost story and give it a solid B. (We were also interested to learn that Martin Scorsese was the executive producer.) **GRADE B**

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND: You have to admire the bizarre imagination of Charlie Kaufman. He wrote *Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation*, and *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, and he's currently working on a project with Spike Lee. We were intrigued by the concept of the film: A man chooses to have all memory of his recent girlfriend erased from his mind. Jim Carrey is Joel Barish, a quiet, shy man who fell in love with Clementine (Kate Winslet). They spent a year together and then Clementine got bored and, on a whim, had Joel erased from her memory. In retaliation, Joel visits Lacuna, Inc. to have all memories of her erased. Most of the film shows us the erasure process—a scientific procedure that can obliterate painful memories. It's done over night by a couple of technicians, and as they isolate each memory Joel relives them in his sleep. But he does so in a strange mixed-up way. We like Jim Carrey when he isn't mugging and he is fine here. Kate Winslet is quite wonderful. Tom Wilkinson is Dr. Mierzwiak, the head of Lacuna, Inc., Mark Ruffalo and Elijah Wood are two of Lacuna's technicians and Kirsten Dunst is the nurse/receptionist. Somehow, though, this very creative idea didn't quite work for us. At first, we were fascinated with the erasure process, but then it went on a bit too long, and we began to weary of it. Talking afterwards, we decided we would have liked to see some humor in Joel and Clementine's relationship. It was so deadly serious. The humor provided by the erasure technicians wasn't enough, and it wasn't very funny, either. I wouldn't hesitate to see another Kaufman movie though. His movies are different from any other movie, and that's a good thing. **GRADE C+**

EVERY LITTLE STEP: (2009/2020 an *Amazon Prime* rental.) In the last line of my 2009 review, I wrote, "I'm going to have to see this film again." Gary and I did, and we loved it, again! I wanted to see it again partly to dull the disappointment of watching the movie, **A Chorus Line**, and to remember the thrill of seeing the musical in New York. It accomplished both those things. The only thing I would do differently is give the movie an A+. Here is my original review:

EVERY LITTLE STEP: It was exhilarating to watch this terrific documentary. It reminded me of the thrill of seeing the original cast of *A Chorus Line* on Broadway in 1975. I was so stunned that when the last note sounded, I couldn't leave my seat. I thought that if I sat there long enough, they might come out and do it again. *Every Little Step* documents the casting process, starting in 2006, for a Broadway revival of *A Chorus Line*. It also contains some footage of the original cast and portions of an audio tape that Michael Bennet made of the confessions, dreams and fears of dancers he interviewed. He turned their reflections into a show that ran for 15 years and collected just about every prize there is. *A Chorus Line* was an international phenomenon, and the emotions that made it so special are present in this documentary. I am in awe of the dedication these dancers have to their dream of "making it" on Broadway, and their desperate need to be chosen. The documentary follows several of the dancers auditioning for parts. Some make it, some don't. Jason Tan's audition for the part of Paul, is breathtaking. No wonder they signed him up immediately. When we saw the original musical, Gary and I wondered if it would have as powerful an impact on people who had never auditioned for part in a show. Apparently, it did. The show has been running somewhere in the world every since it premiered. While most people don't share that same experience, everyone goes through an audition process when interviewing for a job, or getting up to speak in front of a group, or going on a first date. I think everyone can empathize with these dancers. I'm going to have to see this film again. We both give it high marks. **GRADE A**

EVERYBODY LOVES SOMEBODY—*Todos Queremos A Alguien*: (2017) Barbara and I are grateful to Diane and Lee, faithful readers from Cave Creek, AZ for alerting us to this charming bilingual rom-com. Just when you think you may be getting tired of the genre, a film catches you by surprise and comes up with something that feels fresh and appealing. The writing is never boring and the acting is always believable. The action vacillates between L.A. and Baja. When in Mexico, Spanish is spoken with English subtitles. The scenery is breathtaking, especially on the Baja side of the boarder. There are no recognizable actors in ***Everybody Loves Somebody***, but Karla Souza deserves special praise for her outstanding performance playing Clara who gives the movie just the spark it needs. I won't even try to go into the plot which needs to be seen and not described. Suffice it to say Barbara and I were both delighted with this 100 minute winner. **GRADE A-**

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME: (2016) This movie made me glad that I didn't go to college in the 1980s, but if you came of age in the early eighties, you will probably enjoy it. In an interview with Peter Travers, Writer/Director Richard Linklater said that it really happened: "I went off to college and there was an overcrowding in the dorm thing. And they put us in two houses they had donated. And we're all looking at each other like, 'Good Lord this is ***Animal House***.'" And the first half of the movie, which covers the weekend before classes begin, was like one long Toga Party. The movie opens with Jake (Blake Jenner) arriving at an unnamed college. He has been recruited for his baseball skills and the house in which he is to live looks lovely on the outside. The inside is another matter. He soon meets the other members of the baseball team and, before he's even unpacked, they take him partying. The only things on the minds of his teammates seem to be alcohol and women. They consume plenty of both. When Sunday's voluntary/compulsory baseball practice happened, we liked the movie better. I thought it was sweet when Jake and Beverly (Zoey Deutch) met. Beverly was a Performing Arts major, and the party she and her friends threw on Sunday evening was definitely preferable to those earlier parties. Linklater wrote and directed last year's Oscar winner, ***Boyhood***. That movie ended when Mason went off to college. But Jake is a very different guy than Mason was, so ***Everybody Wants Some*** is really not a sequel to ***Boyhood***. It is much more a "spiritual sequel" to ***Dazed and Confused***, Linklater's 1993 film. While we think ***Animal House*** was a much funnier movie, the 84% audience score for Linklater's movie on *Rotten Tomatoes* indicates that younger audiences enjoy ***Everybody Wants Some*** more than we did. Gary couldn't give the movie higher than a D, but I liked it enough to rate it at C. **GRADE C/D**

EVERYBODY'S FINE: A powerhouse cast including Robert De Niro, Drew Barrymore, Kate Beckinsale, and Sam Rockwell bring us this holiday story about a family in crisis that has received mixed reviews from the critics. Grades ranging from B to D make it clear that many professional critics were not impressed by the script or the acting. Barbara and I have to cast our vote with those who saw enough value in this heart warming story to recommend seeing it. A widower, De Niro, is planning a holiday reunion with his four grown children, but learns that none can make it and he will be alone. Rejecting air travel for medical reasons, he heads out by train and bus for a surprise visit to each of his children. A lifetime of family dynamics unfolds with the visits. We thought the acting was outstanding and we were won over by a film we thought was fine while others found it forgettable. **GRADE B**

EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT JAMIE: 2021 (Available for streaming on Amazon Prime Video) The movie opens by telling us, "THIS STORY REALLY HAPPENED. THEN WE ADDED THE SINGING AND DANCING." The film is based on a stage musical with the same name. It is a coming-of-age tale about a teen who dreams of becoming a drag queen. He doesn't want to be a woman. (That's transgender and would be a very different story.) He simply wants to dress up like one. Whether taken as a musical, a coming-of-age story, or an exploration of gender identity, it is an enjoyable film that sends a charming, feel-good message of self-acceptance. We follow Jamie as he discovers who he is and who he wants to be. He also wants to be loved by his macho homophobic father who doesn't want anything to do with him. The inspiration for the British stage musical was in turn inspired by a 2011 documentary, *Jamie: Drag Queen at 16*. The movie's secret weapon was a come-from-nowhere actor Max Harwood as Jamie, in literally his first screen role. The casting folks really nailed this one. Harwood was nothing short of terrific in the role. Fortunately, Jamie has a good support system. At the heart of the film is Jamie's relationship with his supportive mum beautifully played British actress Sarah Lancashire. Barbara and I first fell in love with her work in a powerful British TV series titled *Last Tango in Halifax*. An addition to the movie that did not come from the stage musical was a series of flashbacks showing what the gay community went through during the AIDS crisis: the death of Freddie Mercury, the street protests, cops arresting queer club goers and the radical moment when Princess Diana talked with AIDS patients. Barb and I can't give the film an A grade, but we liked it and found it well worth the 2-hour runtime. **GRADE B**

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE: 2022 (We streamed it on Showtime Anytime, but it's available to buy on Prime for \$20.) This is the Rotten Tomatoes movie info: *Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, collectively known as Daniels, the film is a hilarious and big-hearted sci-fi action adventure about an exhausted Chinese American woman, (Michelle Yeoh) who can't seem to finish her taxes. Apparently, Evelyn is depressed by her life in this universe, and she has a tense relationship with her daughter, Joy (Stephanie Hsu). Evelyn imagines she could have been a singer, or a chef, or a movie star in another life and the tax issue and her dissatisfaction with her life, triggers a crazy journey into any number of different universes for more than two hours. Two long hours!* *Everything Everywhere All At Once* theorizes that no matter which one you choose, in the end, it won't make much of a difference. To quote a critic, who, along with us, didn't care for the movie, "...the film becomes a formless splurge of Nothing Nowhere Over a Long Period of Time." We don't tend to like the Jackie Chan genre but wanted to watch it because it got so many laudatory reviews, but unfortunately not from us! We didn't like it all, but sat through it nevertheless. We hoped for something better, but we were disappointed. If *Everything Everywhere All At Once* suggests that what makes life meaningful is the recognition that because there is no inherent meaning, all things and moments are equally meaningful, this is Gary's take: A movie filled with bulls--t may be as profound as any movie ever made. He disagrees and gives the film an F. Some critics think it is the best movie ever made. See it, and let us know what you think. I'll close the review with the idea that maybe we enjoyed the movie in another universe! **GRADE D/F**

EVERYTHING MUST GO: Most people know Will Ferrell as an over-the-top comedian who will do almost anything for a laugh. The film advertisements did little to warn that Ferrell was taking a break from the adolescent humor that has become his trademark. About twenty minutes into the film, five disgruntled teenage boys ceremoniously marched out of the theater in obvious displeasure. Barbara and I had different expectations and were pleased by the film and especially by Will Ferrell's change of pace. The screenplay is adapted from a short story by Raymond Carver and is a dark comedy with a few smiles but no hearty laughs. Ferrell plays Nick, who has a drinking problem. In the first few minutes of the film, he loses his job as salesman, discovers his wife has just left him, changed all the house locks, piled all his stuff on the front lawn, frozen the bank accounts, cancelled his credit cards, and seen to it that his car was repossessed. BAD DAY! We never see the wife, but a few interesting relationships develop. One is with a very bright but shy latch-key kid played by Christopher Wallace. Then there is Samantha (Rebecca Hall) a lonely pregnant neighbor and Delilah (Laura Dern) a former high-school crush. Armed with a few six-packs and his old recliner, Ferrell starts his adjustment to his new life. He underplays it nicely and we think it deserves an above average grade. **GRADE B**

EVOLUTION: As movies about gooey slimy aliens go, this one is reasonably entertaining. Orlando Jones is a funny man, and David Duchovny has the requisite mixture of calm scientific know-how and wry sense of humor. Both men are teachers at the Glen Canyon Community College in northern Arizona and are the first scientists at the crash landing site of a meteor. They soon discover that the ooze coming from the strange rock is a living substance, and that it is evolving at a fantastic rate: millions of years of evolution are being condensed into a few hours. The military is soon involved and naturally they are at odds with the local scientists. (Ira Kane (Duchovny) used to work for the Pentagon and was fired for just cause five years earlier.) Harry Block (Orlando Jones) has most of the funny lines, the funniest of which is, "There's always time for lubricant." (That line will make more sense when you see the movie--or the trailer.) Julianne Moore, as a klutzy Government scientist provides some love interest for Duchovny, and the alien life forms are wildly creative. The whole thing is carried off with the tongue-in-cheek style you would expect from Ivan Reitman who also directed Ghostbusters. Dan Ackroyd, who was in that earlier movie, appears here as the governor of Arizona. We find it hard to put a high grade on a science fiction creepy alien picture. This one has some problems: Almost all the funny lines are in the trailer, and some of the scenes seem out-of-sync. Also, the energy of the actors and the pacing are a bit slow. We decided on a C+ for this one. It's not as good as Men In Black, which got a B+ from both of us. **GRADE C+**

EX MACHINA: (2015) This is a sci fi thriller that focuses on artificial intelligence (AI). Let me start with a prediction: People who love science fiction and are fascinated with AI will love this film and grade it in the "A" range; People who tend to avoid most science fiction movies but are very interested in AI will like this film and grade it in the "B" range; People who dislike science fiction and are not much

interested in AI will grade it no higher than a "C" and more likely put it in the "D" range. Even though I tend to avoid most Sci Fi, I remember the thrill of seeing Boris Karloff play the monster in the 1931 *Frankenstein*. I also count **2001: A Space Odyssey**, and **Close Encounters of the Third Kind** among my favorite films. In addition, I follow with great interest breakthroughs in AI research. Barbara and I thought *Ex Machina* was an exceptionally engaging and thoughtful sci fi feature film. A talented young programmer in a giant tech company wins a competition to spend a week at the private mountain estate of the company's eccentric founder and reclusive CEO, played by Oscar Isaac (*A Most Violent Year*). The young programmer is selected to participate in a breakthrough experiment in artificial intelligence by evaluating the human qualities of an incredibly beautiful female humanoid robot. Some frightening questions are raised about where AI research may be headed. If you are looking for an intellectual adventure rather than explosions, *Ex Machina* may be for you. **GRADE B+**

EXPORTING RAYMOND: Directed by Phil Rosenthal, Produced by Phil Rosenthal, and Starring Phil Rosenthal. Who is Phil Rosenthal you might ask. He is the creator, producer and writer of one of the most popular television shows of all time: *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996-2005). First I must tell you that this is a documentary, but it is one of the funniest and most entertaining documentaries I have ever seen. It is a laugh-out-loud treatment of the struggles in trying to recreate an American comedy in a vastly different culture: Russia. Will the comedy material translate to a sometimes humorless country? This 1 hour 26 minute treatment will not only entertain you but give you a glimpse of how miraculous it is that any TV series gets made. Both Barbara and I were delighted with the film and if I were grading it within the documentary genre it would certainly earn an "A." Even among the stiffer competition of all films we give it a high mark. **GRADE B+**

THE EXPRESS: I am a sucker for a good sports movie, especially if it's about football. I'm happy to say that this is a very good football movie. Three things elevate *The Express* from good to very good: First, it's an uplifting true story about Ernie Davis, a running back for Syracuse University in the late 1950s who was the first African-American to win the Heisman trophy. Davis went to Syracuse in the shadow of the great Jim Brown, but proved himself to be every bit as good as Brown, leading Syracuse to its first ever National Championship. Davis's nickname was "The Elmira Express," hence the movie's title. Second, director Gary Fleder shot the football scenes in an exciting and realistic manner. You feel like you're on the field with the players. Third, the movie is concerned with important issues off as well as on the football field. The problems that Davis had on the field were mirrored by the growing Civil Rights movement in the country. After winning the Heisman, Davis was drafted by the Cleveland Browns but he never got to play in an NFL game. Tragically, he was diagnosed with leukemia and died at the age of 23. Rob Brown, whom we remember from *Finding Forester*, is excellent as the serious and determined Davis, plus he's big enough to look like a football player. Dennis Quaid plays the Syracuse coach, Ben Schwartzwalder, as a tough task-master and a good coach. He was, however, a product of his times. An African-American teammate says to Davis that the coach dislikes losing only slightly more than he dislikes "Negroes." Davis's refusal to play by the racist rules of that regrettable period had a lot to do with changing attitudes, especially those of his coach. If you enjoy an uplifting sports film, you'll definitely enjoy this one. **GRADE B+**

EXTRACT: This is an offbeat independent film set in a flavor extract plant. Not everybody will be as amused as Barbara and I were. Sometimes you are willing to cut a movie a little slack if you laugh enough....and I laughed louder and longer than with most of the comedies I have seen in the last few months. *Extract* is the work of Mike Judge who both wrote and directed it. Judge is best known as the creative force behind the long-running animated television series *King of the Hill* and its precursor, *Beavis and Butt-head*. Judge's specialty seems to be making stupidity funny, not unlike the characters of Al Capp's Li'l Abner cartoon. (O.K. I admit to loving that cartoon as a boy.) I loved all the actors in this film, but the one that made it all work was Jason Bateman. Bateman plays an understated decent guy whose calm intensifies the craziness surrounding him. Much of that craziness is heightened by the superb acting of Ben Affleck playing a character unlike any you have seen him play. The female leads deserve special mention: Mila Kunis, the raven-haired beauty in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* plays a raven-haired beauty with a criminal streak. Kristen Wiig, best known for her fine work on *Saturday Night Live*, plays Bateman's wife. The plot is thin, but adequate for a quirky comedy that you just might enjoy as much as we did. **GRADE B**

EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES: As we walked out of the theater, Gary said, "They took an extraordinary story and made a good, but not extraordinary, movie." I probably liked this movie better than Gary did because I'm a sucker for those disease-of-the-week films, especially when they're based on a true story. This one could have been a Hallmark movie, but the presence of Brendan Fraser and Harrison Ford apparently raised it to feature film level. (Roger Ebert said that the film reduced life to a Lifetime movie. A good line, I thought.) Frazer is John Crowley, a businessman who has two children suffering from Pompe disease, a rare and fatal form of muscular dystrophy. Children with Pompe disease rarely live past the age of eight, and there is no treatment. When Crowley learns of a researcher at the University of Nebraska who has a theoretical treatment, he decides he must do whatever it takes to turn that theory into a life-saving treatment. "Whatever" eventually means quitting his high-paying job and starting a bio tech company with the irascible scientist, Robert Stonehill (Ford). We thought that Ford played the scientist a bit more irascibly than was necessary, but for all we know, the real man is like that. The two men spend a lot of time talking about enzymes and how to produce them, which doesn't make for exciting film fare. The movie really is an examination of how medical research is conducted and financed, and, according to A.O. Scott, the reason this film "rises above some of its made-for-TV trappings." It would take a cold heart not to be moved by the two brave children and the race against time to help them. I admit to reaching for Kleenex a couple of times, and Gary was moved by the ending. Jared Harris, the son of Richard Harris, plays the cold-hearted businessman that every film like this needs. Gary feels he can't go above a C+, but I might venture a B-. **GRADE B-/C+**

EXTREMELY LOUD & INCREDIBLY CLOSE: (2011) We don't think this movie is Oscar-worthy, but if you happen to like tear-jerkers, this is a very good one. A year after Oskar's (Thomas Horn) father (Tom Hanks) dies in one of the World Trade Towers on 9/11, he summons the courage to look into his father's closet. Going through his father's things, he finds a key hidden in a blue vase and believes that his father has sent him on one last quest: to find what the key will open. The key is in an envelope with the word "black" printed on it, and Oskar thinks it is the name of a person. He is determined to visit every person named Black in the New York area until he learns what the key fits. Oskar is an unusual boy. He is very bright but his behavior indicates that he may have Asperger's Syndrome. Sandra Bullock plays Oskar's grieving mother, and Zoe Caldwell is his grandmother. Max von Sydow is a mysterious man who rents a

room in Oskar's grandmother's apartment. Although the elderly man doesn't speak, Oskar becomes convinced that Sydow is his grandfather. For me, the movie brought back the horror and sadness of 9/11. When Oskar showed some pictures he had printed from the internet--pictures of people jumping from the towers—and says that he thinks one of them might have been his father, I pretty much lost it. We both got quite emotional by the end of the film, and our grade reflects that emotional involvement. One critic thought that Oskar got a bit irritating, but we don't agree. We think Horn is another example of how good child actors are these days. **GRADE B+**

EYE IN THE SKY: (2015/2016) A film scoring 96% on Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer starring Helen Mirren and featuring Alan Rickman in his last movie before the English actor died early this year should do well at the box office. Strangely it opened in only one theater in greater Phoenix. Barbara and I have hope that the movie will open more widely when word spreads that it is a thoughtful modern wartime thriller about making life-or-death decisions with drone technology. This tense drone drama, which Barbara and I believe is the best movie we have seen this year, dramatically portrays the complicated moral decisions involved in modern warfare. Without picking sides *Eye In The Sky* focuses on the political effects of drone warfare, as well as the devastating psychological toll it takes on all associated with using drones to kill. Helen Mirren plays Colonel Katherine Powell, a tough UK-based military officer in command of a top secret drone operation in Kenya. Complex decision making and the actual operation of an unmanned drone covers multiple continents as the tense drama unfolds. A variety of high-tech devices, including a miniature camera hidden inside a realistic-looking hummingbird, and an even tinier camera disguised as a flying insect are used to gather intelligence. Some supporting roles are worthy of mention. You may recognize Aaron Paul from "*Breaking Bad*." He effectively plays the pilot of the unmanned drone. Barkhad Abdi, the Oscar-nominated actor who played the pirate leader in *Captain Phillips* is outstanding as a British mole in Kenya. Alan Rickman, who plays a Lt. General, delivers what I found in context to be the most powerful line in the film: "Never tell a soldier he doesn't know the cost of war." Rickman was a special talent and he will be missed. We hope you have an opportunity to see this gripping movie. **GRADE A**

THE EYES OF TAMMY FAYE: 2021 (We recorded the film from HBO, but it can be streamed for \$2.99 rental on Prime Video.) As the title would suggest, the film gives an intimate look at the extraordinary rise, fall and redemption of televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker. It also gives us a hard look at the "God loves you, so send us your money" movement." Tammy Faye and her husband, Jim Bakker, rose from humble beginnings to create the world's largest religious broadcasting network and theme park. *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* is based on the 2000 documentary of the same name. The Bakers were revered for their message of love and acceptance. Tammy was convinced that everyone would be welcomed into the afterlife. As a result, she openly defended gay rights and advocated support for AIDS sufferers, views that were unpopular among mainstream Evangelists. It wasn't long before financial improprieties, scheming rivals, and scandal toppled their carefully constructed empire. But it wasn't the story of Tammy Faye that drew Barbara and me to the film. It was the riveting starring performance of Jessica Chastain who played Tammy Faye. We already had known she was one of our favorites, but this film proves to us that Chastain is one of the best actors working in Hollywood today. If this movie lands Chastain her long-deserved Best Actress Oscar, we certainly wouldn't complain. Playing Tammy's televangelist husband, Jim Baker, is multiple award winning British-American actor Andrew Garfield. Chastain's and Garfield's performances made a film that was over two hours long reason enough to see. The film received only 69% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes, but nearly every critic praised the acting of Chastain and Garfield. Grading the movie is difficult. **GRADE B, but the acting gets and A.**