

## Movie Titles that begin with "N"

1917 \* 9500 Liberty \* 99 Homes \* The Names of Love \* The Namesake \* Napoleon Dynamite \* National Treasure \* Naturally Native \* Nebraska \* Network \* Never Let Me Go \* Never Look Away \* The New World \* News of the World \* Newsies \* The Next Best Thing \* Next Stop Wonderland \* The Next Three Days \* The Nice Guys \* Nicholas Nickleby \* Nicky's Family \* Night Moves \* Night Crawler \* Nightmare Alley \* Nine \* Nine Lives \* Nine Queens \* No Country For Old Men \* No End In Sight \* No Man's Land \* No Pay, Nudity \* No Place On Earth \* No Reservations \* No Sudden Move \* No Time to Die \* Nocturnal Animals \* Nomadland \* Non-Stop \* Nora's Will \* Norman: The Moderate Rise and Tragic Fall of a New York Fixer \* North Country \* The Notebook \* Notes On A Scandal \* The Notorious Bettie Page \* Nothing But The Truth \* Novocaine \* Now You See Me \* Now You See Me 2 \* Nowhere In Africa \* Nurse Betty \* The Nutcracker and the Four Realms \* Never Rarely Sometimes Always

**1917:** (2019) This is a riveting anti-war film directed and co-written by Sam Mendes, Oscar winner for directing *American Beauty* in 1999. Several critics credit **1917** with being one of the greatest war films ever made. At the height of the First World War, two young British soldiers are given a seemingly impossible mission. In a race against time, they must cross enemy territory and deliver a message that will save hundreds of lives if received in time—one of the soldier's own brother among them. The story, told in a linear narrative, follow our heroes in their race, through war-torn country, against the clock. To make matters even more urgent, the attack is to occur the following morning, and there's barely enough time to get there in optimal conditions, let alone in the thick of war through the dead of night. **1917** recently won the Golden Globe for Best Drama and picked up another award for director Sam Mendes and has also been nominated for Academy Awards in those categories. Barbara and I liked the film, but not quite as much as the critics who rank it as the best War Film in history. **GRADE B+**

**9500 LIBERTY:** It is hard to imagine a more timely film to open in Phoenix than **9500 LIBERTY**. Sadly, as a documentary, it will receive little attention even if it sheds light on a subject that has and will continue to receive voluminous media coverage. This film does not mention Arizona Governor Jan Brewer or the controversial immigration bill she signed into law which now divides our State as well as the Nation. If you believe history can sometimes provide lessons we can use in solving immediate problems, you might be interested in seeking out this film. In 2007, Prince William County in Virginia enacted a policy requiring police officers to question anyone they had probable cause to believe was in the country illegally. Sound familiar? Emotions ran high, as they are in Arizona now. The filmmakers clearly show the genuine mistrust and anger on both sides. They also clearly show the ferocious fight and the devastating consequences. The young documentary filmmakers started their project with YouTube postings and the final product isn't much more sophisticated than that. But Barbara and I felt the impact was powerful and we can only hope that it will receive some attention. It has already opened in three theaters in greater Phoenix, which is unusual for documentaries. **GRADE B**

**99 HOMES:** (2015) Set in 2010 during a period of rampant home foreclosures, this timely dramatic thriller focuses on the tragedy of a housing market catastrophe. The story is fictional, but thousands have been victims of the mortgage crisis which had people asking if owing money was being treated as a worse crime than the greedy behavior of banks and other lending institutions as well as shady real estate predators. Powerful acting makes this an at times gripping movie that was given 90% by critics on the *Tomatometer*. The best known actors in the film are Michael Shannon (*Boardwalk Empire*), Andrew Garfield (*The Amazing Spider-man*), and Laura Dern (*Wild*). This film did quite well in the several Film Festivals it entered and is now being tested with a wider release in major theaters. I noticed the film is dedicated to the late film critic Roger Ebert. Garfield plays Dennis Nash, a hard working single father who lives in his family home with his widowed mother. After losing his construction job due to bankruptcy of his employer and finding it impossible to find another job, Nash became one of the thousands of homeowners in the United States who were evicted from their homes after the real estate crash. Rick Carver (Shannon) is a shark of the Florida real estate world who executed the eviction. Rick's specialty is seizing properties occupied by foreclosed owners and forcibly removing them. With court orders, a pair of backup policemen, and a moving crew he gives his distressed victims a few minutes to collect valuables and vacate their homes before his crew empties the houses stacking everything in the front yard. Later, a moral dilemma is posed when Nash is offered a chance to earn much needed cash for working for the man who evicted him. This "deal-with-the-devil" provided security for his family, but Nash fell deeper into Carver's web. Barbara and I were at times properly outraged and sometimes heartbroken, but weak points in the screenplay distracted us with puzzling questions that were never answered. **GRADE B**

**THE NAMES OF LOVE:** This is an engaging French comedy with subtitles. As we left the theater, Barbara observed, "If Hollywood tries a remake of this film they will really screw it up." One of the best things about this film is the disarming enthusiastic charm of the free-spirited Bahia, played by Sara Forestier. She makes the most of a simple philosophy, make love, not war. For her, men fall into two categories, liberals and fascists. Fascists are political enemies and, in order to convert them to her cause, she "sleeps with the enemy." But it is all done with innocent and lighthearted good humor. Forestier won France's Oscar equivalent, the Cesar, for this role. The male lead, Jacques Gamblin, is delightful in the role of a serious and stuffy middle-aged government veterinarian who tracks signs of the spread of bird flu. In addition to sex and politics, the offbeat script skillfully juggles a variety of topics: race, guilt, religion, genocide, family, and bigotry to mention only a few. Occasionally the script brushes against seriousness, but quickly returns to the business of being a whimsical screwball comedy. One critic wrote, "If you don't enjoy this one, you don't like fun." Barbara and I agree. **GRADE B+**

**THE NAMESAKE:** I am a sucker for family sagas that span several generations, so I loved this movie. It tells the story of two generations of a Bengali family. Ashoke Ganguli is an East Indian man, who after several years of living in New York, travels back to Calcutta to let his parents find a wife for him. The beautiful Ashima agree to marry him because "he is the best of a bad lot." She leaves her home and her family to start a new life in America. (Tabu, who plays Ashima, is one of India's most esteemed actresses.) The clash of cultures and the displacement that newcomers to America feel is beautifully represented in *The Namesake*. Ashoke and Ashima's first child is a boy whom they "temporarily" name Gogol after the Russian author. As Gogol struggles to be a "real" American, he rejects much of his parent's culture. He even dates Maxine (Jacinda Barrett) a blonde from a wealthy and very "waspy" Manhattan family. His relationship with Maxine is a form of rebellion against his parent's Bengali values. Kal Penn (Harold and Kumar) gives a star performance as Gogol. This loving family portrait is told with humor and pathos, and we were totally involved in the story. All the actors

fit their roles beautifully. It was directed by Mira Nair whose previous films include *Monsoon Wedding* in 2001 and *Vanity Fair* in 2004. She has a sympathetic collaborator in Sooni Taraporevala, the Indian screenwriter who also wrote her first two features, *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) and *Mississippi Masala* (1991). Kal Penn said in an interview that seeing *Mississippi Marsala* convinced him that people who looked like him could be in the movies. Some critics may feel that the film borders on melodrama, but we think it borders on "wonderful." **GRADE A-**

**NAPOLEON DYNAMITE:** Napoleon is the ultimate nerd. He even makes nerds look good. His pathetic attempts to be cool are the basis for the humor in this rather slim film. Napoleon (Jon Heder) lives with his grandma and his 31-year-old brother (who cruises chat rooms for ladies) and works to help his best friend, Pedro (Efrén Ramirez), win the Student Body President election. I confess to laughing several times, but Gary claims he only laughed once. The problem I had with the film was that Napoleon, Pedro, and their friend, Deb (Tina Majorino), all talk in boring monotone voices with completely deadpan faces. Except for Napoleon's uncle Rico (Jon Gries) the film is devoid of energy. It wears you out after a while. Some scenes were totally out of context and appeared to be thrown in on the chance that they'd get a laugh. Most didn't. However, there were quite a few young people in our audience and they laughed frequently. Also, Movieviewers Diane and Lee U. thought it was mildly amusing. We saw it later on the same day we saw *Before Sunset*, so I'm afraid *Napoleon Dynamite* suffered by comparison. Gary says D; I say C-. **GRADE C-/D**

**NATIONAL TREASURE:** I think reader Peg C., Los Angeles, CA said it all. She wrote: Lots of stuff to criticize like dumb dialog and things that don't mesh, but on the whole a fun film--good puzzle with nice acting. I enjoyed it even with my feelings of Wha? You expect me to believe that? That's pretty much how we both felt. The action kept us involved even when the events strained our credulity. It's not as good as the Indiana Jones movies, but it is definitely in that genre. Nick Cage is Benjamin Gates, the youngest member of a family who has been chasing after a mysterious treasure which dates back to the Knights Templar and may, or may not, be hidden somewhere in the United States. Jon Voight is Benjamin's father, a man who feels his life has been wasted looking for the fabled treasure. We liked Diane Kruger who plays Abigail Chase, a National Archives specialist. In the film they identified her as German-born to explain an ever-so-slight accent. Kruger was, indeed, born in Germany. Harvey Keitel appears as a most unusual-looking FBI agent. No use trying to explain the plot because like all plots in this adventure genre, it's rather silly. Gary says B-, but I can't go higher than C+. **GRADE B-/C+**

**NATURALLY NATIVE:** There is no doubt this film is well intentioned, and we wanted it to be good. It wasn't. It is the story of three sisters who were adopted away from the Reservation when they were young. Now grown, they decide to start a cosmetic company using native recipes. In the process, their differing attitudes toward their native heritage cause conflicts between them. Eventually they all make peace with their roots. The last ten minutes were moving, but the rest of the film was pretty bad. We're not sure which was worse, the script or the acting. Both were amateurish and just plain awful. Too bad, because we need more films that give us a realistic picture of the native American culture. **GRADE: D**

**NEBRASKA:** This is an independent film shot in black-and-white and brilliantly directed by Alexander Payne who brought us a trio of award winning movies: *About Schmidt*, *Sideways*, and *The Descendants*. In what arguably could be his best role ever, Bruce Dern plays Woody, a wild haired grumpy but likable old codger who gullibly believes a letter telling him he has won a million dollars in a magazine sweepstakes. Will Forte, a former *Saturday Night Live* cast member, playing Woody's son tries to get through Woody's stubbornness and alcoholic dementia to convince him the letter is a scam to trick people into subscribing to magazines. June Squibb, a veteran actress, nearly steals the show with her portrayal of Woody's fed up but loving wife. This is the kind of film that wins awards at film festivals, pleases critics and film buffs, but has limited box-office success unless it gets a second wind with a few Oscar awards. It may do for Nebraska what *Fargo* did for North Dakota. The movie is slow-moving and sad at times, but also surprisingly funny. It captures an authentic small-town flavor. Barbara and I liked it and think many of our readers will too, especially if you enjoy off-beat independent films. **GRADE B+**

**NETWORK:** (1972 movie reviewed in 2011) We recently watched this terrific 1976 movie on Turner Classic Movies. It is a blistering indictment of what happens to TV news when it becomes manipulated by corporate business interests. It was Peter Finch's last appearance on screen and he is great as Howard Beale, a veteran anchorman who is being fired because his ratings are dropping. On his last program, he decides that people deserve the truth about what's happening to the country, and encourages everyone to go to their windows and shout, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." And they do--in droves. When Beale's honesty becomes a TV sensation, the network decides to feature him on a special show. On that show, he tells the audience that "The only truth you know is what you get over this tube. . .and when the 12th largest company in the world controls the most awesome goddamn propaganda force in the whole godless world, who knows what shit will be pedaled for truth on this network." (Does that sound like any network you know?) The cast is outstanding. In addition to Finch, Robert Duvall plays a network hatchet man, William Holden is the head of the network news, and Faye Dunaway is the ambitious head of programming for the network. Ned Beatty is the CEO of the huge corporation that owns the fictional USB network. In one scene, he convinces Beale that the world is a business saying, "The world is a college of corporations inexorably determined by the immutable bylaws of business." How could it not be a great movie with Paddy Chayefsky writing the script and Sidney Lumet directing? The movie won several Academy Awards, including those for Peter Finch, awarded posthumously as best actor; Chayevsky for his screenplay; Beatrice Straight, as best supporting actress; and Faye Dunaway, as best actress. We were impressed with *Network* when we saw it in 1972, and the years haven't lessened its impact. We encourage everyone to see this outstanding, relevant and prophetic film. **GRADE A**

**NEVER LET ME GO:** (2010/2014-1) Carey Mulligan and Keira Knightly star in this movie based on a 2005 dystopian science fiction novel by Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro. (He won the Booker Award in 1989 for *Remains of the Day*.) It is the story of three young people, raised from birth in a very special school. They were bred for a very special, and not a happy, purpose. It's science fiction combined with a coming-of-age story. The tone is subdued and mournful, but we found it strangely moving. We were once again impressed with Carey Mulligan. Andrew Garfield (2012's *Spider Man*) and Keira Knightly were excellent. I liked how *Houston Chronicle's* reviewer described *Never Let Me Go*. She called it "a melancholy meditation of the finality of life and the choices we make as our time shortens." That doesn't sound like much fun, does it? Nevertheless, we thought it was interesting and give it a B. **GRADE B**

**NEVER LOOK AWAY:** (2018) With a runtime of a little over three hours, this sweeping romantic historical drama is loosely modeled on the life of one of the 20th century's most admired visual artists: Gerhard Richter. It did win a Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film and was nominated for two awards at the 91st Oscar ceremony: Best Foreign Language Film and Best Cinematography. It earned a respectable 77% from critics and 88% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes with 72 reviews counted. Barbara and I loved this absorbing movie and we both felt the three hours spent with this film seemed shorter than many that run two hours or less. The story follows Kurt from his childhood in Nazi Germany through thirty years of experiences that shaped his life and career as a successful contemporary artist. The film's title came from advice given by his favorite aunt, Elizabeth and was kept close to his heart the rest of his life. Slightly paraphrased the advice was to never look away because everything that is true holds beauty in it. Because she was suspected to be schizophrenic, his aunt was first sterilized and later euthanized under Hitler's eugenics laws. Kurt later meets the love of his life and begins to create paintings that ultimately made his name in the exciting new contemporary art movement. Don't let the run time frighten you. The story is delightful, the acting is outstanding, and it is beautiful to watch. **GRADE A**

(**Barb's Note:** We saw this wonderful film with my sister, Judy, and we all agreed with Gary's review and grade.)

**THE NEW WORLD:** Watching this film for 2 hours and 15 minutes is like watching maize grow, only slower. Barbara and I had high expectations for this film. Many critics gave it high marks and the trailers made it look interesting. Sadly, I didn't find it so. Colin Ferrell plays Capt. John Smith and 14-year-old O'orianka Kilcher makes an impressive debut playing the young Indian princess we have come to know as Pocahontas. This version is not much closer to historical truth than the romanticized version we were all exposed to in grade school. In reality Capt. John Smith was 27 years old at the time and Pocahontas was 11. Ferrell and Kilcher have very little dialogue, but a great deal of screen time. Actually, I found no fault with leads and supporting actors. It was directed by the reclusive Terrance Malik who has directed only four films in over thirty years. If you want to see this film on the big screen, you had better act fast. I predict it will quickly move to DVD and VHS. **GRADE C.** -- Barb's Comments: I had much the same reaction as did Gary, although I might grade the film as high as C+, primarily because of the gorgeous photography. I also liked Christian Bale as John Rolfe, the Englishman who married Pocahontas and eventually took her to England. Terrance Malik, who wrote and directed this film is a rather interesting character. In 1978, he wrote and directed the exquisite *Days of Heaven*. There wasn't a lot of dialogue in that one either. After *Days of Heaven* it was a full 20 years before he directed his next film, *The Thin Red Line*. In his contract for the 1998 film Malik stated that no current pictures of him could be published or shown anywhere. **GRADE C/C+**

**NEWS OF THE WORLD:** 2020/2021 (Prime Video) This film is a 2020 American Western drama based on a 2016 novel of the same name by Paulette Jiles and starring Tom Hanks. It might shock you to learn *that News of the World* is Tom Hanks's very first western and it was named one of the ten best films of 2020 by the National Board of Review. It also earned 88% on the *Tomatometer* from 249 professional critics. Set in 1870 Hanks plays Captain Kidd, a former member of the Confederate Army who makes a living traveling from town to town reading newspaper stories to local crowds for ten cents per person. Barb and I remember listening to the audio novel in the car years before the movie was released. It is a great story of an older man (Hanks) who crosses paths with a 10-year-old girl, Johanna, who had been captured by the Kiowa Indians when she was 5 years old. Johanna is masterfully played by Helena Zengel, a talented young German actress who, for her performance, received nominations for a Golden Globe Award and Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Hanks and Zengel are both natural actors and are so effortlessly good that you're in danger of not fully appreciating their acting skill. Captain Kidd agrees to deliver the child where the law says she belongs. They travel hundreds of miles across the Wild West facing grave dangers in a hostile environment, but quickly learn to rely on each other to survive. It is a thrilling story with a touching ending. Barbara and I liked it. **GRADE B+**

**NEWSIES:** 2017 (Barb and I streamed this filmed musical on *Disney*.) It is based on the 1992 musical film, *Newsies*, which in turn was inspired by the real-life Newsboys Strike of 1899 in New York City. It made its Broadway debut in 2012, where it played for more than 1,000 performances before touring. It is a high energy show that was filmed on stage and has more dancing than any other musical we have ever seen. *Newsies* is the rousing tale of Jack Kelly, a charismatic newsboy and leader of a band of teenaged "newsies." It tells the story of a courageous group of newsboys in a classic musical style. When young newspaper sellers are exploited beyond reason by their bosses they set out to enact change. They strike against the unfair conditions and "fight for what's right". Of course they are met by the ruthlessness of big business. It doesn't have the impact of *A Chorus Line*, but it's a heart-warming show and perfect for family viewing. **GRADE B**

**THE NEXT BEST THING:** Rupert Everett is the only thing that keeps this movie from a grade of D. He is charming and likeable. Madonna is not. We found it difficult to handle all the references to how beautiful her character is when we both think she is rather plain and unappealing. We also think her acting ability is limited. The set up of the film is OK: A gay man (Everett) consoles his best friend (Madonna) on her recent breakup, and, after way too many martinis, winds up in bed with her. When the woman gets pregnant, the two decide to live together as best friends and as parents to their child. Problems occur when the little boy is six and Madonna falls in love with Benjamin Bratt (looking rather splendid). From this point on the plot is implausible and trite and the motivations are impossible to believe. The courtroom stuff is ludicrous. I was hoping for better. **GRADE: D+**

**NEXT STOP WONDERLAND:** (We saw this 1998 film on video in 2004) Erin (Hope Davis) is a nurse and her longtime boyfriend (Philip Seymour Hoffman) has dumped her. Her mother (Holland Taylor) places a personal ad for Erin, and the scene of her listening to messages from suitors is very funny. Meanwhile, the film follows the life of Alan (Alan Gelfant), an employee at a local aquarium who dreams of becoming a marine biologist. Of course you know their paths will cross, but it's thoroughly delightful to watch Erin meeting a lot of frogs before she finds her prince. Yes, it's a standard plot, but Erin and Alan are likeable and smart people who don't seem a bit stereotypical. The New York Times critic said: It creates and sustains an intelligent, seriocomic mood better than any recent film about the urban single life. If you, too, are a Hope Davis fan you'll especially enjoy this one.

**THE NEXT THREE DAYS:** (2010) Reader Seth W., FL recommended this movie and we thank him. It's the story of how a couple's life is turned upside down when the wife (Elizabeth Banks) is convicted of a murder. Her husband (Russell Crowe) does his best to care for their son, but when all hope of an appeal seems lost, he devises a daring plan to break her out of jail. We aren't Russell Crowe fans,

but he is quite believable in this movie. We are fans of Elizabeth Banks, who does a fine acting job here. The director/writer is Paul Haggis, who, in 2006, became the first screenwriter to write two Best Film Oscars back-to-back; *Million Dollar Baby* and *Crash*, which he also directed. Haggis builds the tension nicely and the actual escape is a bona fide nail-biter. Liam Neeson appears in a cameo, and it was nice to see Brian Dennehy as Crowe's father. We are avid watchers of the TV show *Chicago PD*, and we enjoyed seeing Jason Beghe as a detective. Some critics thought it was absurd to believe that Crowe, a high school teacher, would roam the mean streets of Pittsburgh so easily, but we didn't have much trouble suspending our disbelief. It's sort of an old fashioned movie, with an everyman taking impossible risks to save his family. Perhaps our reaction would have been different if we had seen it in a theatre, but on DVD, we agree with the critic who said, "It's the kind of edge of your seat thriller that leaves you in constant suspense of how the situation will resolve." **GRADE B**

**THE NICE GUYS:** (2016) I've never cared much for Russell Crowe. I definitely never saw him as the "hunk" that some women did. But I quite liked him as the chubby unshaven tough-guy-for-hire he plays in *The Nice Guys*. Ryan Gosling, the other nice guy, plays a private detective and single dad who drinks too much and is an accident waiting to happen. The actor proves, once again, that he can do everything and do it well. Gosling and Crowe make an odd and amusing pair of buddies as they search for a girl in 1977's smoggy Los Angeles. They meet "cute" when Crowe is hired to beat up Gosling to stop him from looking for Amelia. But, when Crowe realizes that there are some very bad guys looking to kill Amelia, he hires Gosling to help him find her. The story is complicated. Let's just say that the Detroit auto companies don't come out looking good. There were a few too many fisticuffs, car crashes and gunplay for our taste, but I did enjoy the interplay between the two nice guys. Gary thought that Angourie Rice, who played Gosling's daughter, was the best thing in the movie. I agree that she was delightful and added a lot of interest and a bit of tenderness to the altercations. I think Gary might not have heard some of the droll interplay between Gosling and Crowe, therefore, he grades it lower than I do. **GRADE B/C+**

**NICHOLAS NICKLEBY:** I've never seen a Dickens movie that I didn't like. This one is no exception. All the classic Dickens characters are here: the handsome and good hero who must undergo many vicissitudes before the happy ending, the beautiful young heroine, the evil uncle (or in some cases stepfather), the kindly comic characters, the cruel schoolmaster, etc. All are beautifully played. Christopher Plummer is Ralph Nickleby, the uncle that Nicholas and his mother and sister are forced to turn to for help. With relatives like him, who needs enemies. He sends Nicholas to work at a private school run by Wackford Squeers. It is a horrible place where the young boys are cruelly treated by Squeers and his wife. According to Roger Ebert, "The sadistic boarding school proprietor, Wackford Squeers, was a portrait taken so much from life that it resulted in laws being passed to reform the private education industry." Nicholas leaves Squeers School along with a young crippled boy named Smike, played by Jamie Bell of *Billy Elliot* fame. Nathan Lane is most amusing as Vincent Crummles, a thespian who gives Nicholas a job in the theater as he and Smike make their way back to London. Dame Edna plays Mrs. Crummles. A theater version of *Nicholas Nickleby* lasted nine hours--the movie version lasts just under two hours. Charlie Hunnam is appropriately handsome and upright as Nicholas, and Anne Hathaway is the sweet and lovely heroine, Madeline. I think this is a B+ movie, but Gary, who is not quite the Dickens fan that I am, says B. **GRADE B+/B**

**NICKY'S FAMILY:** (2011) This is one of the most powerful and touching documentaries we have ever seen. It tells the story of Nicholas Winton, the British man who organized what became known as Kindertransport. His efforts rescued 669 mostly Jewish children from German-occupied Czechoslovakia on the eve of the Second World War. Winton was just 29 when, in 1938, he witnessed first-hand the desperate efforts that Czech parents were making to get their children out of the country. When most other countries refused to expand their immigrant quotas to save the children, he was able to get families in England to welcome the refugees into their homes.\* Winton had a scrapbook that recorded the names and pictures of the children he rescued. It lay collecting dust in the attic until it was discovered by his wife in 1988. It was only then that his good deeds were finally made public. One of the rescued children, a Canadian journalist, narrates the documentary. Only about 250 of Winton's rescued children have been located, and some of them relate their memories along with period newsreel footage, archival photos and dramatic re-enactments. Sir Winton (he was knighted in 2002) was an usually active 99-year-old when the movie was filmed. He is a modest man but he is obviously overwhelmed by the effects of his rescue efforts. Those children and their progeny now number over 1500 and counting. They all are part of his family. The documentary ends by showing the ripple effect of Kindertransport. Winton's courageous act has inspired young people all over England to find ways to help others. We hope you all get a chance to see this remarkable story. If you do, be sure to bring some Kleenex. You'll need it. **GRADE A**

**Note:** \*According to the Kindertransport Association website, England welcomed over 10,000 refugee children in Kindertransports from Vienna, Berlin, and other major cities. Their efforts ended with the outbreak of WWII in Europe in September 1939

**NIGHT MOVES:** (2014) This is a slow moving independent film that first gained attention at the Venice International Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival. It will be shown in a number of Art Film Theaters, but is unlikely to see wide release. Aply filling the leading roles are Jesse Eisenberg, Dakota Fanning, and Peter Sarsgaard. The movie reminded me of the shortened quote, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." But if that is the frequent outcome of the best laid plans, you can well imagine the fate of poorly thought through plans. Acclaimed filmmaker Kelly Reichardt brings us a compelling drama of three well-meaning environmentalists coming together. Their idealism and strongly held convictions lead them to extreme protest, the destruction of a hydroelectric dam which they feel is contributing to an environmental disaster. Once their ill-conceived plan is set in motion, a tragic outcome seems inevitable. Reichardt who co-authored and directed the film is far more focused on the visual than the verbal. Her camera angles and slow panning shots are part of her style, but will be interpreted by many as too slow and boring. Barbara and I remember the style from her 2011 film, *Meeks Cutoff* (See Movie Views Archives). If you have favorable memories of that film, you may want to seek out *Night Moves*. **GRADE C+**

**NIGHTCRAWLER:** Jake Gyllenhaal is mesmerizing as Lou Bloom, a man who will do anything to get ahead in life. In the opening scene, we see him trying to talk his way into a job with a man who has just bought Lou's stolen goods. Lou has the gift of gab, and sounds like a bright young man. We learn that most of his knowledge has come from internet courses. We also discover that he is an ethically-challenged man who, in the words of his associate (Rick Garcia), "has a seriously weird-ass way of looking at shit." Lou stumbles upon a highway accident and discovers that there are people who make a living videotaping accidents and crime scenes for TV news shows. He has found his calling and he pursues it with reckless abandon and a chilling lack of moral responsibility. He sells

his news footage to Renee Russo as the news director for a fictional LA network. Russo personifies the TV news business with its insatiable need for exclusive footage to insure good ratings. No matter that the footage is grisly and bloody—the bloodier the better for terrifying viewers. Dan Gilroy is the director and writer of *Nightcrawler*. Although he has nine writing credits, this is his directorial debut, and it is a stunner. This story of the underbelly of Los Angeles is tightly drawn and beautifully filmed. Gyllenhaal, whose first film credit was in 1991 for *City Slickers* has grown into one of our finest actors. His gaunt appearance and intense gaze are riveting. This is a taut thriller with an effective commentary on media exploitation. Rick Garcia, Renee Russo and Bill Paxton, as the stringer who inspires Lou, are all excellent. Gary and I give this disturbing but excellent film high marks. **GRADE A-**

**NIGHTMARE ALLEY:** 2021 (On HBO Max) The movie was nominated for an Oscar for best picture at the Academy Awards show on March 27, 2022. But that isn't why I wanted to watch it. Ty Burr, formerly the critic for the Boston Globe, and now a freelance movie critic, said about the nominations: "But the nominee that has lingered in my mind, to my surprise, is *Nightmare Alley*. Guillermo del Toro's cynical noir fantasy is pure cinema: enveloping, evocative, epic but intimate, with a great, career-best performance by its nominated producer Bradley Cooper." That was enough for me and I convinced Gary to watch with me. The movie opens with Stanton (Bradley Cooper) dragging a body and setting fire to a farmhouse. (We ultimately learn what the scene is about.) Stan finds his way to a strange carnival, and Clem (Willem DaFoe), the manager, hires Cooper on. There he meets the Zeena the Seer (Toni Collette) and her assistant, Pete (David Strathairn), and Molly (Rooney Mara) who has an act using electricity. He eventually convinces Molly to run away with him to star in an act that "will take them to the top." Stan has developed into a talented grifter and he and Molly have created a classy mind-reading act when they meet a mysterious psychiatrist (Cate Blanchett). Dr. Lilith Ritter proves to be Stan's downfall. The film is moody and the setting, which is the early '40s, is, as Burr says, evocative. Cooper is brilliant and is surrounded by A-list actors. Guillermo del Toro is known for making weird movies (*The Shape of Water* and *Pan's Labyrinth*). I loved those two films, but Gary and I can only give this one a B. (But, Gary gives the ending an A+. He believes it ties everything together with great style.) Maybe if we had seen this film in a theater on a big screen we'd have loved it. **GRADE B**

**NINE:** This musical was inspired by Federico Fellini's *8½*, which won an Oscar for best Foreign Film in 1963. Director Rob Marshall put together a spectacular star-studded cast which included Daniel Day-Lewis, Marion Cotillard, Penelope Cruz, Nicole Kidman, Judi Dench, Stacy 'Fergie' Ferguson, Kate Hudson, Nicole Kidman, and Sophia Loren. Rob Marshall is without doubt an inspired choreographer. His first directing effort was the musical Chicago, which won an Oscar for Best Picture in 2002, and he may spend the rest of his professional career striving to equal that effort. Here are a few thoughts Barb had after seeing the movie: Sophia Loren's beauty is ageless; Marion Cotillard is exquisite and a standout here; Judy Dench was wonderful in the most entertaining musical number; Kate Hudson is adorable and a terrific dancer; Daniel Day Lewis is a great actor but he doesn't project the warmth and charm necessary to make so many women fall in love with him; The set upon which most of the musical numbers took place was rather dark and forbidding. We both thought that the ending was the best part of the movie. Professional critics range from cool to cold in their reviews of this film, but we found enough to like to give it a generous B-. **GRADE B-**

**NINE LIVES:** (2005 film seen on video) Nine women and nine separate stories each shot in one continuous take, make for a remarkable film. The women's stories are unrelated, although there is some overlap of characters. Writer/director Rodrigo Garcia says that the unifying theme is connections between people—the relationships, past and present, that hold us captive. The cast is outstanding and each story is beautifully written. Run, do not walk, to your local Blockbuster to rent this one! **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

**NINE QUEENS:** (2005 Film seen on video) Two con men meet in unusual circumstances and decide to become partners for the day. They stumble into a chance to pull off a profitable scam by selling some fake stamps to a collector. There are nine stamps called the Nine Queens. All the way through this film you know that someone is getting taken, but you're never sure just who is scamming whom. This film won a screenplay competition in Argentina, and its director was given the funds to film this South American answer to *The Sting*. While it's not as good as that great Newman/Redford film, it is fast paced and fun to watch. It is subtitled and some of the dialogue is quite fast, so you have to read quickly. The two stars are very good and the ending is satisfying. Entertainment Weekly gave the film an A, Ebert gave it three stars, and we give it a **GRADE B**

**NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN:** Josh Brolin is having a banner year. He was excellent as a corrupt cop in *An American Gangster*, and he is outstanding in this latest film that the Coen brothers adapted from the Cormac McCarthy novel. Brolin is a hunter who stumbles upon some dead bodies, a stash of heroin and more than \$2 million in cash. He decides to keep the money. It's a bad decision. It leads to untold mayhem. Brolin and the money are tracked by a sociopathic killer named Anton Chigurh, chillingly played by Javier Bardem. You won't soon forget his dead eyes and his deadly smile. Critics have compared this film to *Fargo* (1996), but, because it didn't have the humor of *Fargo*, it reminded us of the brothers' first effort, *Blood Simple* (1984). It is a taut tale of evil. The tension is palpable, relieved occasionally by the wry philosophical musings of Tommy Lee Jones, as the local sheriff. Jones, who never fails to impress, is the moral center of the film—a third-generation sheriff who is confounded by the evil sweeping the world. The well-known British actress, Kelly Macdonald, affects a spot-on Texas accent as Brolin's wife. The ending doesn't answer all the questions, and it may leave you wondering, but I don't think that's a bad thing. With its stark beauty and flawless filming technique, *No Country For Old Men* will rank as one of the Coen brothers' best. However, several implausible events kept Gary from giving it an A. He says B+. I have to say A-. **GRADE A-/B+**

**NO END IN SIGHT:** This extraordinary film should be seen by every adult who took an interest in the Iraq War, including anyone who was even tangentially affected by it. Of the ten professional critics who reviewed the film for "Yahoo! Movies," seven gave it an "A" and the other three reviewers gave it "B+," "B+," and "B-." The film is narrated by Campbell Scott and both Barbara and I think it is one of the saddest, but most worthwhile viewing of the year. My sadness is exacerbated by the depressing realization that almost no one will see it. *No End In Sight* is an examination of mistakes made after the initial military "victory." It adeptly avoids the controversy of why the U.S. invaded Iraq and focuses on subsequent mistakes made in the planning and execution of the Iraq regime change. Charles Ferguson, a political scientist with a doctorate from MIT, wrote, directed and produced this historical overview that relies mainly on interviews with people who were either inside the Bush administration or on the ground in Iraq. The film chronicles how actions taken in

the early days of the occupation inevitably led to far longer, bloodier, and costlier conditions than needed to be. Barbara gives the film a "B+", but I have to give it an "A." **GRADE B+/A**

**NO MAN'S LAND:** This Academy Award nominated Foreign film also won the Best Screenplay award at Cannes and a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film. It is a seriocomic look at the Bosnian war and the idiocy of war in general. Two soldiers, one Bosnian and one Croatian, find themselves trapped in a trench between enemy lines. They are being fired upon by both sides. To add to their predicament, another soldier is lying on a land mine that will explode if his weight is removed from it. A UN peacekeeping team tries to rescue them, and the international media jumps all over the human-interest story. The actors are excellent and the suspense kept us completely engaged. The comic and tragic aspects of the story are equally well handled. The situation the three soldiers find themselves in is analogous to the Bosnian war. Roger Ebert believes the director's (Danis Tanovic) position " is that the conflict has escalated into the arena of the absurd: There are so many grievances on both sides that revenge and redress are impossible, and the land mine symbolizes the unhappy situation Bosnia finds itself in." No Man's Land is in Bosnian with English subtitles. We both liked the film and if we had a vote, would give it our nod at the Oscars. **GRADE B+**

**NO PAY, NUDITY:** (2016) This film is a delightful, but often poignant, portrait of aging stage actors who spend most of their days offstage. The strange title refers to how a casting ad might read in a theater trade paper. It is appropriate in the context of the film, but not a title that will draw people to see it. The movie has special significance to Barbara and me who have spent most of our lives on the thespian fringe of the showbiz subculture. There is not a bad acting moment in this character driven film and if you have ever wondered what it might feel like hanging out with a colorful group of devoted actors who have spent a lifetime loving a business that doesn't necessarily love them back, then **No Pay, Nudity** may be a film worth seeking out. Nathan Lane and Gabriel Byrne lead a strong cast in this sometimes humorous look at over-the-hill actors adjusting to diminishing prospects and the torturous question of whether to let go of a dream that's not paying off. Rotten Tomatoes gives the movie 86% but that is based on only 6 reviews, so you can see the film is not receiving the attention we think it deserves. Just as **A Chorus Line** had wider appeal than to professional dancers, we hope **No Pay, Nudity** will find a larger audience... but fear it will not. Hanging out with a cast of interesting actors for 90 minutes was a real treat for us. Gabriel Byrne plays Lester, an actor whose life and career have never been the same since his soap opera character was killed off years ago. He now spends his days resenting the fortunes of younger actors and trying to land the roles he thinks he deserves. Nathan Lane plays Herschel who spends most of his days hanging out in the Actors Equity lounge. He also narrates when needed. This independent film may not be for everyone, but Barb and I found it especially appealing. **GRADE B+**

**NO PLACE ON EARTH:** (2013) There have been so many films, including documentaries, detailing the horrors of the Holocaust that Barb and I are always uneasy about seeing another one. Could there possibly be anything new to see? The short answer is yes. **No Place On Earth** features four living survivors of an amazing and inspiring true story. Running time is only 1hr. 21 min. I wouldn't have wanted it to be longer, but I am glad we spent time with this amazing story. Perhaps one of the most interesting things about this story is that it would never have been revealed had it not been for an American spelunker, Chris Nicola, who literally stumbled across a few modern relics while exploring a cave complex in the Ukraine in the 1990s. Probing further, he slowly uncovered the astonishing account of how 38 Ukrainian Jews survived the killing efforts of Nazis for 18 months in the depths of a cave while Jews above ground were being systematically executed. Using interviews with survivors and extensive, well-produced dramatizations, this documentary is a tribute to the power and spirit of family and preserves what could have been a forgotten piece of WWII history. These strong-willed survivors vividly describe the hunger and isolation in their long fight to stay alive, most of the time in the claustrophobic feel of total darkness. It is gratifying to know that their story is not lost in postwar disbelief, apathy, and continuing anti-Semitism. The film ends with a photo montage of the five involved families as it has expanded since WWII. I hope there wasn't a dry eye in the house, I know mine weren't. **GRADE B**

**NO RESERVATIONS:** In 2002 we reviewed a German film titled, **Mostly Martha**. No Reservations is based on that film. In our 2002 review, I wrote Gary enjoyed the movie, but the cooking scenes didn't do much for him. He gives the film a B, but I think it deserves an A-. The same could be said for No Reservations: Gary would give it a B, but in this case, I would agree. I thought the German film did a better job of establishing the characters. Hollywood didn't change the story much. It's still about a chef, named Kate in this version, who has no life outside her job. Her life is well-ordered until two things happen. First, her sister dies in a car accident and Kate must take over the care of her young niece. Second, her boss hires a sous-chef who cooks Italian dishes, sings opera while he cooks and totally disrupts Kate's kitchen. As with Mostly Martha, the ending is predictable, but getting there is fun. Catherine Zeta-Jones is her usual charming self as the uptight chef, and Aaron Eckhart is equally charming as the ebullient sous-chef. Abigail Breslin, so wonderful in Little Miss Sunshine, is delightful here as Kate's niece. In this film, the writers added a therapist, played by the always interesting Bob Balaban. When Kate says that she wishes she had a recipe for life, her therapist replies, "As a chef, you know that the best recipes are those you create yourself." Once again, I loved the cooking scenes, Gary, not so much. **GRADE B**

**NO SUDDEN MOVE:** 2021 (Now streaming on HBO Max) This is a crime thriller with great acting that illustrates Director Steven Soderbergh's mastery of the genre. It received positive reviews from critics with praise for Soderbergh's direction and the performances of the cast. Set in 1954 Detroit, **No Sudden Move** centers on a group of small-time criminals who are hired to steal what they think is a simple document. When their plan goes horribly wrong, their search for who hired them weaves through a race-torn, rapidly changing city. It is a powerful cast with many familiar names and faces: Don Cheadle, Benicio del Toro, Jon Hamm, Ray Liotta, Brendan Fraser, and Matt Damon in an uncredited cameo role. It covers a clash between the criminal gangs and the American auto industry during the vast freeway expansion boom of the post-World War II years. It even touches on a possible illicit history of the catalytic converter. Crosses are doubled, tripled and quadrupled until you're not quite sure whether the characters themselves know who they're betraying. Everyone in this movie is playing a game with what little power they have. There's a lot going on but Soderbergh manages to thread the needle deftly and it's always energetic. Barb and I agree, the movie is a pleasure to watch even though it's difficult to keep tabs on where the hell it's all going. **GRADE B+**

**NO TIME TO DIE:** 2021 (Gary and I saw it in a movie theatre) How many things can be blown up? How many car chases can there be? And how many bad guys with automatic weapons can miss killing Bond—James Bond? I guess the number is unlimited. And they all

are in this 2 hour and 43 minute movie. It's Daniel Craig's last turn at playing Bond and they gave him a good story: Bond is retired and living a peaceful life. His peace is short-lived when Felix Leiter (Jeffrey Wright), an old friend from the CIA, turns up asking for help. The "help" leads Bond onto the trail of a mysterious villain armed with dangerous new technology. I don't quite understand it, but it appears to be weaponized biological virus combined with DNA from everybody on Earth, so Lyutsifer Safin (Rami Malek) can target individual people. Malek makes a creepy villain. Lashana Lynch played Nomi, a strong, hard-driving MI6 agent, who has taken on Bond's iconic 007 code number in his absence. (She is destined to be the new 007, and she will be a good one.) Gary didn't care much for the movie, but in spite of the length, and in deference to Craig (the 2nd best Bond—Sean Connery is 1st) I rate it a B. Gary's grade would be a bit lower. **GRADE B**

**NOCTURNAL ANIMALS:** (2016) This movie won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2016 Venice International Film Festival, and Tom Ford got two Golden Globe nominations: one for his direction and another for writing the screenplay. I can see why, because the movie is seductive, beautifully shot and stars two actors the camera loves—Amy Adams and Jake Gyllenhaal. It begins when Edward (Gyllenhaal) sends his ex-wife Susan (Adams) an advance copy of his new novel. It has been 19 years since they divorced, but we see some of their courtship through flashbacks. We also see Edward's novel acted out as Susan reads it. (She imagines herself in the story as she reads it and this is confusing. At first, you think it might be a flashback.) This movie within the movie is interspersed with scenes of the emptiness of Susan's current life. That emptiness is reinforced by the gorgeous but cold house in which she lives. Even her gorgeous but cold husband, the man for whom she left Edward, echoes the emptiness. The always excellent Adams and Gyllenhaal are supported by Michael Shannon. Laura Linney, practically unrecognizable, plays Susan's mother. In last month's **Movie Views**, Art S., IN, called the movie "a double dose of revenge," and we agree with him. It is not a pleasant movie. This fact is foreshadowed by the disturbing images of the opening credits. In the words of James Kendrick of the Q Network Film Desk, **Nocturnal Animals** is "A bleak, but fascinating, rumination on relationships, betrayal, loss, and vengeance. It is, indeed, but I for one am glad that Gary and I saw it. **GRADE B**

**NOMADLAND:** (2021 Available for streaming on Hulu) After winning awards at both the Venice and Toronto Film Festivals it received a five star review from Bill Goodykoontz in the Arizona Republic. Frances McDormand delivers a powerhouse performance in what many critics are labeling one of the best films of the year. It is a leisurely-paced but compelling movie. McDormand plays Fern, a woman who embarks on a journey through the American West in a van after losing her job and husband during a long and difficult economic recession. She finds a new life away from what society usually dictates. Fern becomes a nomad with a life on the road that may not end. The movie is based on a 2017 book by Jessica Bruder with the same title. Ultimately there is not much of a plot, yet the movie remains compelling thanks to the performances of McDormand, David Strathairn in a supporting role, and a cast almost entirely comprised of nomads found on the fly. Breathtaking majestic landscapes and gorgeous watercolor sunsets help as well, although I'm sure they are not as majestic as they would have been on a big screen. **Nomadland** beautifully captures the restlessness many people feel when their life seems meaningless. Barbara and I liked the movie a lot but as she commented, it wouldn't be everyone's cup of tea. It is a difficult film to evaluate. **GRADE B+**

**NON-STOP:** (2014) When it comes to entertainment you can't beat a Liam Neeson movie! Even when you struggle to suspend your disbelief over the situation, Neeson always seems authentic and real. And we liked this one. Neeson is an alcoholic ex-cop air marshal on a trans-Atlantic flight when he gets a text on his secured-network cell phone. The text tells him that someone on the plane will be killed in twenty minutes unless 150 million dollars is transferred to a numbered account. And, before the 20 minutes is up, a passenger has been killed. Soon we learn that the numbered account is in the air marshal's name, and that authorities believe Neeson may be the terrorist. But we in the audience know that Liam Neeson could never be the bad guy. He is the quintessential good guy, even when he does bad things. In **Non-Stop**, the fisticuffs always seem justified, the tension is maintained throughout, and, since it all takes place at 30,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean, there are, thankfully, no car or foot chases. It's probably not a movie that you should see on an airplane, but on the ground it is rousing entertainment. Neeson is aided by Julianne Moore, Michelle Dockery (*Downton Abbey*), and an assortment of good character actors. Lupita Nyong'o (**12 Years a Slave**) appears in brief scenes as one of the flight attendants. The critics may have been lukewarm, but we give it a B. **GRADE B**

**NORA'S WILL:** (2008 release in Mexico) Nora may be dead, but she certainly isn't gone. Neither figuratively nor literally gone. In the five days between her suicide and her burial, Nora's presence is felt by her nearest and dearest: her ex husband, her son, her rabbi, her psychiatrist, and her housekeeper. Nora was a master manipulator who managed to control not only her death, but the time leading up to her funeral. She timed her suicide so that, because of the Passover holidays, she cannot be buried for several days. Instead, she lies in her bedroom, packed in dry ice to preserve her body for the delayed funeral. This woman even planned an elaborate Passover Seder for her family to share. She loaded her refrigerator with Tupperware and each piece has a post-it giving cooking instructions. During the five days, her survivors struggle with religious and relationship issues. The film's original Mexican title, and a title we prefer, is Five Days Without Nora. The film was a great success in Mexico, winning seven Ariels, the Mexican Oscar, including best film, original screenplay and a pair of acting awards. We both thought the acting, directing and the story were outstanding. Fernando Luján, as Nora's ex-husband is quite wonderful. You may have trouble finding Nora's Will in the theatre, but we suggest you put it on your Netflix list. **GRADE B+**

**NORMAN: THE MODERATE RISE AND TRAGIC FALL OF A NEW YORK FIXER:** (2017) It's the role of a lifetime for Richard Gere. Unfortunately, it was not the movie of a lifetime for us. Watching it alternated between frustrating and boring. Gere was excellent at playing Norman Oppenheimer--a guy who wanted to be a player on the New York scene, but only succeeded occasionally in putting a deal together. The people he knows, or pretends to know are his stock in trade. When he manages to meet a low-level Israeli politician, he is so anxious to impress him that he goes to extremes buying the politician a pair of the most expensive shoes in New York. When, three years later, that politician becomes the prime minister Norman is thrilled. He is even more thrilled when the prime minister treats him as a valued friend. Ultimately that friendship is Norman's downfall, hence the "tragic fall." In **Norman**, Gere brings sympathy to a character that would be insufferable in real life. But, in spite of the creative filming of a movie that consists mostly of phone conversations, and a top-notch supporting cast, we thought insufferable better describes the movie. Gary thinks the author was trying to say that most business and political dealings are bullshit, and I think he has a point. The movie got at surprising 87% critical rating on

*Rotten Tomatoes* and an even more surprising 70% from audiences. Apparently Gary and I are in the minority, so I recorded some favorable comments from critics after this review. **GRADE C-**

*Norman may be a mere wannabe, but "Norman" is a small gem.*

Galvin Wilson *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

*Much like its lead character, Norman is touching, funny, smart and memorable. Audiences should seek him out.*

Jeff Reed, *Columbus Alive*

*Cedar [writer/director Joseph Cedar] has crafted a bright and modest movie about ordinary people running up against their limitations.* Philip Martin, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*

**NORTH COUNTRY:** Usually Barbara and I are extraordinarily close in our evaluation of films. Since we differ more than usual on this one, we will each write separate short reviews. North Country states in the opening credits that it is "inspired by true events." The screenplay is a fictionalized version of events surrounding a 1989 class action lawsuit for sexual harassment. It features powerful performances by Charlize Theron, Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson, and Richard Jenkins and is set in the Mesabi Iron Range in Northern Minnesota. I am perhaps more easily enraged by injustice than most so it was no surprise that I was deeply moved and enraged by this film. All the critics I read liked the first half of the film better than the second half. They feel the courtroom scenes sacrifice realism for dramatic or melodramatic effect. I liked the first half better too, but I was not as offended by it and I feel quite comfortable rating North Country B+. (Barb's comments) I agree with the critics who liked the first half of the film better. In a few of the second half dramatic moments I thought the manipulation was too obvious. Also, I thought some of the courtroom theatrics lacked credibility. The final courtroom scene, designed to pack an emotional punch, was, for me, more of a light jab—mostly because it was too melodramatic. I have no quarrel with any of the actors, nor with the cinematography. The iron mine was dark, dirty and dismal. What an awful place to work! I am a fan of Theron, McDormand, and Spacek, so any film with the three of them is eminently watchable. Richard Jenkins (*Six Feet Under*) was also impressive, but I can't give the film more than a B-. **GRADE B+/B-**

**THE NOTEBOOK:** This film is an old-fashioned love story and it is unabashedly romantic. Many critics have an aversion to movies this sweet and sentimental, but Gary and I loved it. Noah Calhoun (Ryan Gosling) and Allie Nelson (Rachel McAdams) are two young people who fall madly in love one summer. The problem? She is from a rich family and he is, as her snooty mother (Joan Allen) points out, simply "trash." Allie goes off to college and Noah goes off to fight in WWII. Will they meet again? Will first love be triumphant? What do you think? Yes, it is schmaltzy, but it's well-written schmaltz. McAdams (Mean Girls) is luminous--she lights up the screen. Gosling is also appealing as a regular guy. Be warned that this is a tear-jerker but, as Roger Ebert says, it's a good one. James Garner reads the young lovers' story to Gena Rowlands, and the scenes between these two legendary actors will require more than one Kleenex. The screenplay is taken from a novel by Nicholas Sparks whose books inspired the films *Message in a Bottle* (1999) and *A Walk to Remember* (2002). Gena Rowland's son, Nicholas Cassavetes directed. **GRADE B+** (On reflection, Barb would give it an A.)

**NOTES ON A SCANDAL:** We are bound together by the secrets we share. That isn't the tag line for this film, but it should have been. Barbara (Judi Dench) is a bitter spinster school teacher almost ready to retire. She reveals in her diary that she has contempt for her students and most of her colleagues. Sheba (Cate Blanchett) is a first year art teacher. She is blond, lovely, and sensual. Barbara wants desperately to be Sheba's friend, and, with time perhaps more than a just a friend. When she discovers that Sheba has been having an affair with a 15-year-old student, she realizes that her silence will buy Sheba's friendship. As you might expect, things do not go well. (Critic Richard Roeper calls Dench's Barbara "one of the most menacing spinsters this side of Kathy Bates in *Misery*, but without the hobbling.") It takes an actress of Dench's ability to play such an unpleasant woman and yet reveal enough humanity to engender some sympathy. Blanchett is also successful at making Sheba sympathetic, in spite of her criminal behavior. Her husband is played brilliantly by Bill Nighy. There's a bit of hope at the end that Sheba may have learned something positive from the experience. Barbara, on the other hand, is completely unrepentant. The screenplay is based on a novel by Zoe Heller titled, *What Was She Thinking: Notes On A Scandal*. Some critics disliked the Phillip Glass background music, but we thought it fit the story quite well. **GRADE A-**

**NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH:** (2008 film seen on video) This film was obviously inspired by the case of Judith Miller, a New York Times reporter who served 85 days in prison for refusing to name her source in the Valerie Plame affair. In the film, Kate Beckinsale is the reporter and Vera Farmiga is the ousted C.I.A. agent. Both are excellent. Writer/director Rob Lurie focuses on the underlying question: Which is more important, the principle of confidentiality, or national security? Matt Dillon plays the federal prosecutor who does his utmost to get the reporter to reveal her source, and David Schwimmer plays her husband. Alan Alda is the reporter's attorney, and Noah Wyle also appears. **THUMBS UP**

**THE NOTORIOUS BETTIE PAGE:** This is a made-for-TV (HBO) film that chronicles the life of Bettie Page, a 1950's icon of the early porn business in the sexually repressed 1950's. By today's standards the photos of Bettie Page would not even be considered pornography. It is a film worth viewing for its historical treatment of a heavy-handed government trying to exercise control in an area they feared, but knew little about. Gretchen Mol, David Strathairn & Chris Bauer. **MARGINAL THUMBS UP**

**NOVOCAINE:** (2001 film seen on Video) In *The Little Shop of Horrors*, Steve Martin was a sadistic dentist. In this movie, he is a stupid dentist. When an alluring woman patient seduces him in order to steal the narcotics he keeps in his office, he lies to the DEA to protect her. Why? Because he is smitten. Also, because they had sex in his dental chair and he doesn't want his fiancée/hygienist to find out. What follows is occasionally funny, but mostly weird. Martin soon finds himself implicated in charges involving drugs, perjury and murder. At first, I thought it was a really dumb movie, but I found myself watching it to the end. If you like Steve Martin, and the sight of blood doesn't upset you, you might enjoy it. Laura Dern is the fiancée, and Helena Bonham Carter is the drug-addicted femme fatale. Kevin Bacon has a funny bit part as an actor doing research for a movie in which he will be playing a detective. Elias Koteas plays Martin's derelict brother. The New York Times reviewer said, "Nothing is particularly believable here, but there are still a few moments of silly, sinister fun." We give it a very **Marginal Thumbs Up**.

**NOW YOU SEE ME:** (2013) This is a magic-themed heist thriller with just a touch of Robin Hood as some of the stolen profits of corrupt business leaders are transferred to people we assume to be more deserving: the audience. I am a sucker for a good magic show and I have to say the first half of this movie was everything I hoped for. OK, the plot gets a little far-fetched and the cops 'n' robbers car chase scenes in the second half, which seem to have become obligatory in Hollywood, tend to lose me. Still, as long as you are willing to suspend disbelief here and there, and if you are willing to ignore the mixed reviews of critics, Barbara and I think it is a film you might enjoy. The cast is excellent. Actors you may recognize are Mark Ruffalo, Woody Harrelson, Jesse Eisenberg, Morgan Freeman, and Michael Caine. There are comedic overtones and Woody Harrelson was especially entertaining. Morgan Freeman never disappoints and here he plays a media personality and lifetime debunker of magic fakery, who handsomely profits by selling DVDs of the tricks used by the performers. The story unfolds like a complex puzzle as the FBI and Interpol get involved so I advise you to pay close attention while remembering that "the more you look, the less you see." Have fun with it. We did. **GRADE B**

**NOW YOU SEE ME 2:** (2016) The Four Horsemen are back to their old tricks, i.e. using magic to pull off incredible heists. In this second outing, they must protect everyone from having their privacy compromised. To do this, they must steal a microchip and expose the evil tech genius who would use the chip to manipulate everything and everyone in the world. Their Robin Hood complex is fully realized in this sequel. Once again, Marc Ruffalo is the leader of the group, and Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson and Dave Franco return. Lizzie Caplan plays the newcomer to the group in a role that is quite a departure from her portrayal of Virginia Johnson in TV's *Masters of Sex*. Daniel Radcliffe plays the evil tech genius supported by his father, Arthur Tressler, once again played by Michael Caine. And, rest assured, you will also see Morgan Freeman back to his old tricks. The setting switches from New York to Macao and to London for the final reveal. Along the way, we are treated to plenty of slight-of-hand tricks and illusions, although one critic complained that there was an overuse of CGI trickery. One chase scene, the kind that usually bores us, was enlivened by magic, and the chase scene involving motorcycles was so dark and confusing it almost seemed like magic. Critics are lukewarm about this sequel, mostly because they see it as style without substance. Our local critic, however, gave it 4 out of 5 stars, and audiences on *Rotten Tomatoes* rank it considerably higher than do the critics. We gave the original movie a B, and Gary wrote the review. Barb is writing this one, and we both agree it is as entertaining as the first one. To be fair, though, this is the kind of movie you can't remember much about after a few months. **GRADE B**

**NOWHERE IN AFRICA:** (2001 Film seen on video) We rented this video because my sister recommended it. Here's what she had to say: I found *Nowhere In Africa* quite compelling. It is about a Jewish family of three who leave Germany in 1938 for Kenya. The story focuses on the relationship of the husband, who was a lawyer in Germany, and his wife, who was a pampered, beloved wife, daughter, sister and daughter-in-law. The family is not religious at all. The young daughter is also an interesting character as she develops from a frightened child to a self-confident teenager. There are no clichés or pat answers in the movie. We agree that the story is complicated and never predictable. The film won five German film awards and got an Oscar in 2002 for Best Foreign Film. *Nowhere In Africa* was written and directed by Caroline Link who based the screenplay on a best-selling German novel. The film is in German, the native language of Kenya, and occasionally in English. Most of it is subtitled. We give it an **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

**NURSE BETTY:** This movie didn't work for us. Director Neal LaBute was trying to make a quirky, violent comedy in the manner of the Coen brothers with touches of Tarentino, but he didn't. First, lets take the two hit men, who have those now obligatory inane conversations as they track the stolen drugs: Morgan Freeman is simply too wise and kind and sweet to be believed as a hired killer, and Chris Rock is not funny! I think LaBute told him not to smile, and that was a mistake. Without the smile he's just nasty. (And the scene where Betty's husband (Aaron Eckhardt) gets whacked is horribly violent.) Then there's Renee Zellweger: her puffy face and squinty eyes have never appealed to either one of us, although I must admit she was quite good in her role as a coffee shop waitress in love with a soap opera doctor. Greg Kinnear is the soap opera medico and we liked him a lot. No one can play a charming jerk better than Kinnear. Alison Janey (*American Beauty* and TV's *West Wing*) is also very good as the producer of the soap opera. In fact, the movie picked up considerably when Betty finally got to Los Angeles and began to interact with Kinnear. We also thought the ending was the best part of the movie. The good parts kept Nurse Betty from a grade of D. **GRADE: C-**

**THE NUTCRACKER AND THE FOUR REALMS:** (2018) Misty Copeland dances a ballet about how the four realms were discovered, but it is much too short. I would have preferred more dancing. The Nutcracker music plays throughout, although the story bears little resemblance to the story of the Nutcracker that I remember, except for the name of the girl who discovers the toys that come alive-- Clara Stahlbaum. I won't go into the story because, for me, it was forgettable. Keira Knightly makes a lovely sugar plum fairy until her sweetness turns bitter. Helen Mirren is a villain whose goodness eventually shines through. Morgan Freeman is Clara's godfather and Matthew Macfadyen is her father. The mouse king from the ballet is a monster made out of squirming mice. I found the mice rather creepy and thought they would frighten young children. And there is a nutcracker named Phillip who befriends and protects Clara as she explores the four realms. My son, John, was here for Thanksgiving along with Laura and her two daughters Brianna and Amanda, 11 and 9 respectively. Bri loved the movie and gives it an A-; her mom says B+; Mandy, who liked it but was frightened a couple of times, says C. I'm with Mandy but for different reasons. Laura and I liked the fact that Clara is talented at mechanical things and that makes her a good role model for the girls. She is also fearless and doesn't give up, and Mackenzie Foy does Clara proud. The movie is very imaginative and the special effects are spectacular, but I thought it was too long. Perhaps any Disney movie would be too long for me to enjoy. If that makes me sound ancient, so be it. **GRADE C/A-/B+**

**NEVER RARELY SOMETIMES ALWAYS:** 2020 (*Amazon rental \$5*) This film will appeal mostly to people who like well-written, well-acted independent films and are concerned about reproductive rights. It received an impressive 99% from critics on *Rotten Tomatoes*. The four word title refers to possible interview replies to sensitive questions about the frequency of various sexual experiences. The story is about Autumn, a 17-year-old girl who is unintentionally pregnant and has traveled from her rural home in Pennsylvania to New York City where adult permission for an abortion isn't required. Autumn is played by Sidney Flanigan in her first role on the big screen. She is nothing short of terrific. I think this movie needed a woman's touch and it got it from Eliza Hittman who wrote and directed the film. It is subtle, but along Autumn's journey we see a network of women dedicated to helping other women and providing much needed understanding. Both Barbara and I liked the movie and were especially moved by Flanigan's debut. **GRADE B**

